

Now you can learn quickly and easily

- Who is God
- What is Christianity
- How to have a relationship with God
- Living a life of love and hope
- True Spirituality
- Overcoming guilt and finding forgiveness
- Building great relationships
- Love, sex and marriage that really work
- Mastering your emotions and making them work for you
- The key to finding total peace
- And much more

CHRISTIANITY PURE & SIMPLE

The Perfect Journey is an easy-to-read, easy-to-use book designed to ground the new or growing believer in the essential truths of Christianity.

Presented in bite-size chunks, every compelling page is jam-packed with reliable nuggets of truth that go right to the heart of Christianity.

Timeless truths are presented with colorful charts, illustrations and infographics that make learning and applying God's Word in your daily life simple yet meaningful.

More than just a book *The Perfect Journey* is a life-changing journey into Biblical Christianity. In addition to providing insight and clarity, it is designed to let you experience God's unwavering love, and to use it as the basic building block for a life that truly "works."

Whether you're a brand new Christian or a longtime believer, this handy book offers an efficient way to learn, review and apply essential truths of the Bible.

After reading *The Perfect Journey*, you will not only have your feet firmly planted in Christianity, but you will also be empowered to live a life of freedom, confidence and joy.

... Most importantly, you'll know Christ in a difference-making way...

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A Life-Changing Journey Into Biblical Christianity

THE PERFECT JOURNEY

THE PERFECT JOURNEY

PURE  SIMPLE MINISTRIES

Loving Insights Into
God's Plan For Your Life

PURE  SIMPLE
MINISTRIES

This book has been lovingly
produced to honor the Lord
and to introduce you to
Biblical Christianity.

It explains God's simple path
to a relationship with Him
through the love of Jesus Christ.

Then it opens the door to a
profound knowledge of
His plan for your life.

*Peace to you,
From your friends at
Pure & Simple Ministries*



Royal Poinsettia tree in Tel Aviv. Poinsettia trees are common in Israel.



Banias Waterfall, near Caesarea Philippi where Jesus renamed Simon, "Peter," which means rock in Greek.



Ein Gedi, an oasis located west of the Dead Sea, near Masada where David hid when he was being pursued by King Saul.



The valley of Megiddo where the last battle in human history will be fought—the Battle of Armageddon.

The Perfect Journey

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About This Book

Projects such as this rely on the efforts of many contributors. The contributing writers and editors are from different backgrounds and denominations, but they all have one thing in common; they are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. We gratefully acknowledge their contributions and give our sincerest thanks to them. There are also many who have inspired ideas and contributed to this book in many ways. We are grateful to all for their contributions and vision in completing this book. The Lord knows who these people are and will richly reward them in eternity.

Ministry Outreaches

CHURCHES, EVANGELISTS, MISSIONARY ORGANIZATIONS and other Christian organizations, businesses and individuals who would like to obtain bulk quantities of *The Perfect Journey* are encouraged to contact Pure & Simple Ministries for special alliance or partnership opportunities. We can also assist organizations that want to use *The Perfect Journey* for special events or outreaches. Please contact us via pureandsimpleministries.org or Pure & Simple Ministries, P.O. Box 6771, Houston, TX 77265-6771.

GOD.

He is sovereign. He is eternal, without beginning or end. He is the creator and righteous sustainer of all things. His works are perfect, and all His ways are just. He is always faithful and never does wrong. He is upright and trustworthy.

God's love is perfect and His compassions never fail. He knows all things and all His judgments are perfect. He reveals Himself through His Word, the Bible. He loves you deeply as a father loves his child.

When you place your faith in Jesus Christ you become one of His children. He then holds you in His mighty grip and pours out His plan for you with limitless love, patience, understanding, grace, mercy and compassion.

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A new way of looking at life

You are about to embark on the most exciting—and most important journey you will ever take. It is an adventure that starts in time and advances into eternity—and then continues forever and ever. It leads from an often confusing and unsure struggle to incredible peace and joy in every aspect of your life.

“I would rather live my life as if there is a God and die to find out there isn't, than live my life as if there isn't and die to find out there is.”

Albert Camus

Welcome to the Greatest Adventure You Will Ever Take

Finding perfect peace in an imperfect world

We live in a hostile world. The modern world is a confusing labyrinth of twists and turns, at best challenging, at worst, downright threatening. Life is composed of many moving parts—relationships, with family and others, health issues, jobs, money problems, stress, anxiety, fears and more. Life can get pretty messy at times.

A World of Confusion

If you've been trying to live your life based on your own rules, desires, habits, ideas, actions and direction and have found out that it simply isn't working, what do you do? Where do you go to get your life on track? How do you find real answers to life's problems? Don't despair. There are real answers—time-tested answers—answers that work and will never let you down.

Renovating Your Life

Anyone who has no concern for their eternal future, who is focused only on the here and now, has set himself against the design of the universe.

If you have a faulty view of God, you'll have a faulty view of life. We often hear vague advice or comments about “living life to the fullest.” Yet without an understanding of who God is, we won't be able to enjoy the full extent of the peace, power and joy that He intends and actually brings to us.

A Balancing Act

Life is a process of balancing all the ins and outs, ups and downs, side to sides, and back and forth of day-to-day living. Sometimes these things can become difficult or even take on a life of their own. It's easy to lose one-

self when living in such a demanding, ever-changing environment.

Finding Self

We all seek a sense of who we are. We have a need for acceptance and approval. We need fulfillment and a sense of accomplishment. We all have a deep need for identity. The problem actually is, apart from God, we don't know who we really are. And without Jesus Christ we are literally “apart from God.”

Defining Self

Our world loves labels! We say he's a plumber, doctor, hard worker, hero, an addict, a loser and the list goes on and on. But you are far more than is encompassed within the confines of any temporal “label” with which the world seeks to brand you.

Regardless of who or what you allow to define you, your quest for self-knowledge and identity will not be satisfied. Neither parents nor family, friends, enemies, possessions, social status or even your own feelings about yourself can accurately define you. Deep down, where you are when you're alone with your thoughts, there lies a seemingly unquenchable desire to know who you are. God, and only God can quench that thirst and provide your true identity.

God's Perfect Definition

Dear reader, we invite you to let God define you. His is the only definition that really truly counts—and satisfies.

He is the Creator of all things and He created you. He is the Author of love itself and the beginning and end of all understanding. He knows you better than you know yourself and He cares for you deeply. You are

What every person seeks

Man's Desire	Man's Quest	God's Answer
Love	Love is the most basic of all human needs and desires. We are born with this desire to love and be loved. Love is the key to peace, happiness and all successful relationships.	I pray that you ... grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge. Eph 3:16-19
Peace	We all seek peace in our souls. We seek contentment; a quiet sense of well being without fear, anxiety or worry.	I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. John 16:33
Truth	We all seek truth. Why am I here? Is there a God? Where do I fit into His plan? Can I really know truth with confidence?	Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6
Significance	We all want to feel we are needed and appreciated. We want to be admired and to play a significant role in the lives of others. Our desire is to leave a positive legacy.	But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. 1 Pet 2:9
Fulfillment	We all have a desire to live a life of achievement. We want to attain our goals and to be fulfilled with our accomplishments.	He (the LORD) will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure. Isa 33:6
Knowledge	Knowledge is the key that unlocks the unknown and gives us the ability to discover new and exciting things. It is the basis of all of our achievements.	Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Prov 8:10-11
No Fear	We all have fears both real and imagined that keep us from attaining a calm and tranquil life.	So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” Heb 13:6
No Shame	We have all done grievous things in our past, and we bear a burden of shame. We want to know how to overcome the shame of things we have done.	As Scripture says, “Everyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” Rom 10:11
No Guilt	We all seek to live a guilt-free life, but all too often guilt takes over our heart and soul, and we are destined for a miserable life.	Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Heb 10:22

We all look for a sense of who we are. God has perfect answers to these and many other unknowns.

significant in His eyes and He wants you to have an intimate relationship with Him. Allowing God to define you is the beginning of a lifetime journey that stretches far beyond this life here on earth. God's rich blessings will impact every aspect of your life.

Unfolding God's Plan

This book is all about God's truth and how His truth sets us free. You will learn how God removed every barrier between you and Him. How His love, grace and forgiveness take away our guilt and shame. How His

Son Jesus set us free from judgment and death and has given to us the gift of everlasting life. How Jesus has restored our relationship with the Father. How we have a new identity as the sons and daughters of God.

In the Beginning, God ...

Look around you at the earth; mountains, rivers, oceans, trees and flowers; so much beauty, we can only stand in awe. Now look at the sky; sun, moon and stars without number. Now try to imagine a power so great that everything you see was spoken

into existence from nothing.

Nothing in our frame of reference prepares us for this awesome display of power from an all-mighty God. We have a finite mind and will never comprehend the power of an infinite God.

The same power that created the heavens and the earth, that sustained the humanity of Jesus Christ during His life here on earth and raised Him from the dead, created you!

God and You

God created you and designed a plan for you. He has given you the means



Designing a life that soars

You only have one shot at life—so make it count. You mustn't let your past define who you are. And you can't let your past define your future. It isn't that important how you start. What really counts is how you finish. This book helps you focus on the future and find God's freedom in an often difficult world.

“... those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

Isaiah 40:31

to experience and enjoy a life that is beyond your imagination.

There is a perfect plan for your entire life. Every detail has been worked out specifically for you. God's plan for your life will move you from the darkness and unpredictability of an ordinary life to the peace and joy of walking in His marvelous light.

From Chaos to Confidence

Thankfully the Lord has provided us His Word, the Bible, to guide us through the tempest of daily living. He does so with the desire that we realize the full measure of His love and the bounty of His provision.

The Bible contains everything you need to live a life of joy, peace and freedom in this chaotic world.

This doesn't mean that you will no longer face adversity. In fact, it may even become greater. But the One who created you is sovereign, all-powerful, all-knowing and His love for you is infinite. He hasn't promised you a smooth journey, but He has promised, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

God's Recovery Program

He has promised to make the journey with you. When you stumble, He will pick you up, dust you off and send you back on your way. When you reach the point where you don't think you can take another step, He will carry you. And when your journey on earth has ended, your Savior, Jesus Christ, will be waiting with open arms to hold, embrace and welcome you to heaven.

An Awesome Journey

You are on an awesome journey designed by a perfect God who holds you forever in His mighty grip.

The Bible is your ultimate source of guidance. This book is simply a guidebook and an introduction to Christianity. It is designed to help you start your Christian journey and to build a strong foundation on biblical truth. It will also help you avoid

some of the pitfalls encountered by growing believers. If you will take God's hand, He will lead you on the perfect journey to the perfect destination, and you will live in God's presence forever.

Reading Guide

The information in this book is embraced by many pastors, ministers, priests and theologians. Though denominations may differ on various points of doctrine, our goal is to focus on the major themes and major doctrines upon which most agree.

This book is inclusive of everyone—men, women, children, all races and nationalities. When we use the word “man” or “mankind” or “he” it includes everyone. It is used simply as a convenience and for smoother writing.

Page Elements

Most pages include text, sidebars, infographics, instant insights, Bible verses and various quotes. Each is designed to help you understand the truths of the Bible more fully and to bring you closer to God.

Take the time to scan each page and then observe and read each element on the page. As you read various elements, think about them and ask yourself how they might affect you and how you can apply them to your life.

There is no greater privilege than being a member of God's family and enjoying all the blessings and riches He has stored up for you.

This book helps you learn and live the reality of Christ, adopting His values and His plan that will drive you to a life of peace, meaning, purpose and definition.

Like your life—this book has no ending. It is meant to be implemented. The content is much too important to be read once and simply put down. You should read it over and over and study it with a relaxed and confident passion. It will pay huge dividends.

The nuts and bolts of basics

The fundamental principles underlying any course of study are simply called “the basics.”

The basics are the ABCs, the nuts and bolts. They are the essentials, the things we must master before we can become proficient in any particular field.

But the basics are also the things to which we must return when we lose our bearings. They are the bedrock, apart from which we have no hope.

As new believers, we learn the basic principles: the incredible, all powerful love of God, the destructiveness of sin, the sufficiency and

authority of the Bible, the amazing gift of grace and ... salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. As we grow in the Lord we begin to apply what we learn and live the Christian life.

As we mature, we come to realize that living the Christian life is not a matter of moving beyond the basics, but is a matter of delving more deeply into them. Our growth intensifies these truths.

And even though we learn more promises, more principles, more truth every day, we will never perceive the full depths of God's Word.

The more we grow in the grace and knowledge of God, the more

we will be drawn to the Lord Jesus Christ, “... in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3).

There are no quick fixes, magic wands or secrets in the Christian way of life. Success in Christian living is simply learning, absorbing and applying fundamental truths of God's Word as Christians have been doing for millennia.

Remember, this book is an introduction to the many topics presented. The information here is the starting point for your further exploration and Bible study.

Getting the most from this book

We have worked hard to keep the information readable and enjoyable. Timeless truths are presented in bite-size chunks to help you grasp life-changing concepts easily. You can study them anywhere, anytime. And you can put them to work right away.

We get to the point, make the point and then move on. The wisdom and knowledge contained here have value that will last a lifetime—and an eternity.

How this book works

What's the best way to read this book? Slowly. We have taken great pains to eliminate fluff and non-essentials. What you'll find in here is all solid meat, potatoes and vegetables.

The book contains sidebars and infographics that help explain and expand information you need.

As you face real-world living you will find God's answers for every problem you will encounter.

As you implement God's truth and grow in His Word, your life will begin to take off. As you mature in your Christian walk, your life will develop new meaning and purpose.

Step-by-step

1. Read each page. Then read it again. Then study it until you understand the ideas and concepts.

2. Think about how each biblical truth or thought applies to you. How you live, how you think, how you act, how you react and how you apply this knowledge moment by moment.

3. Keep a notebook close by and write down those things that particularly stand out to you or impact your life. Occasionally review your notes to see if you are on track and growing in the Lord.

4. Study and implement God's principles. One of the aspects to becoming mature is to apply and implement what you learn as you learn it. Reading it is worthless unless you apply it.

5. The sooner you apply what you have learned, the faster it will become part of your own life and soul.

6. Don't worry if things don't appear to work right away. Growing in the Lord is a life-long process and His Word will *never* fail. His Word works everywhere and every time. Now—let's get started!

Your greatest barrier

Life's biggest secret (and the biggest obstacle) to your success—is you. The path is here for you. But there's a big difference in knowing what to do and doing it.

You must be willing to submit to the authority of God. You must take responsibility for your actions and decisions. Don't blame others. Just start at the beginning and go one step at a time.

Stick with it until you prevail. Ignore those who make fun of you or hold you back in achieving your Christian life and serving God.

It All Starts with God

The first decision you must make

Either there is a God or there isn't a God

Every person must eventually answer this question, "Is there a God?" We might ask, what is the meaning of life? How did man get here? How did the universe come into being? Why is there so much suffering? Who decides what is good and what is evil? Why is there war? What happens to us after we die? And why is the thought of eternity implanted in our hearts?

Either God Exists or He Doesn't

There is no "in-between." Either there is a God or there isn't. If there is a God (1) He created the world the way He created it. He didn't create it one way for one religion and another way for a different religion. (2) If God chooses to reveal Himself to man, He reveals Himself the way He chooses to reveal Himself—not the way man might choose. (3) If He wants to have a relationship with man, He chooses the way, not man.

If God really did create us, we will have to answer to Him someday. We need to learn

why He bothered to create us and what it is He expects of us.

God is not some nebulous force in the universe or something we create in our own mind. We can find plenty of signs of the existence of God all around us: in nature, in science or just in the complexity of things in general.

Cause and Effect

Every effect is preceded by a cause. If there is a watch, there must be a watchmaker. If there is a loaf of bread, there must be a baker. If you have an electrical device, someone had to design it and build it. If you exist you must have parents. Other than God Himself, nothing exists without a cause. And that applies to everything in creation, including the universe. That means that a transcendent God created everything.

Unfolding God's Plan

We must know that God exists before there can be any chance for a right and healthy relation-



There is a God over everything—whether you choose to see Him or not.

ship with Him. An unshakable belief in the existence of God improves our lives here on earth in countless, immeasurable ways.

When we have such a relationship and make Him the focus of our lives, we learn to turn to God for answers in all matters. We rely on His strength and guidance to pull us through the trials, tribulations and crises, both major and minor, real and imagined, that we encounter throughout every day of our lives. Our relationships are better; our decisions are better; the world becomes a brighter place. God provides us power, hope and help. God becomes real to us, and we know Him in a way that makes a difference in our lives.

Evidence for God

So where does the evidence lead us? The Bible tells us that God has left His fingerprints on His creation. Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; ..." and Romans 1:20 tells us we can know of God from what He has made.

Yet Skeptics Abound

As humans, we're gifted by God with a finely honed intellect. But that

same intellect can fail us miserably when it comes to probing the depths of our souls. No matter how great our genius, we cannot fathom God.

God's existence transcends the universe. He shows Himself to us. It's not a mystical thing; it's a rational thing. We do need biblical revelation to be conscious of the Trinity, but we do not need it to understand that an eternal God exists. For this reason, if we are to know God, He must reveal Himself to us. God always gives proof before He asks for faith. Christians believe that this necessary revelation comes to us in the Bible and in the life and work of Jesus Christ.

Without Excuse

None of us have any excuse for rejecting the existence of God. Yet the statement, "Prove to me there is a God," continues to be a rallying cry for some no matter what argument or confirming evidence the Bible provides. Skeptics will deny the clear evidence for God and concoct their own theories.

In reality we can absolutely reason our way to the God of the Bible. God is revealed in nature and even more importantly, God reveals Himself in our consciences—we "just know" that there is a God—infinite greater than we are.

Everything that we know, whether it is theological, philosophical, scientific, economic or whatever, we know by means of rational thought. For a person truly seeking the truth about God, He is waiting to reveal Himself.

Only God's Way Works

There's only one way to God, and that is His way. God designed our souls in such a way that there is a God-shaped hole in our heart—that only He can fill. God has a positive, life-changing and eternity-altering plan for us.

He promised "If you look for Me you will find Me."

The Bible Says

■ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Rom 1:20

■ O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.

Ps 8:1

■ The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Ps 19:1

■ Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands.

Ps 119:73

■ My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber ...

Ps 121:2-3

■ Indeed, when Gentiles (non-Jews), who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

Rom 2:14-15

■ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.

Acts 17:23

■ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Jer 29:13

God or no God—You must decide		
Category	If God Exists	If There is No God
Truth	Absolute	Relative
Morality	Determined by God	Determined by man
Origin of Life	Created by God	Happened by chance
Evil/Sin	Rebellion against God	Relative, defined by man
"Scientific Laws"	God is the Author	"Mother nature"
Who am I	Created in the image of God	Product of chance
Why am I Here	Relationship with God	No particular purpose
What is My Eternal Destiny	An eternity with God or apart from God—you choose	There is nothing after you die

The choices we make with our personal belief system determine our eternal future.

If there is a God, we had better start with Him—and avoid leapfrogging over the truth

"There is no greater discovery than seeing God as the author of your destiny."

Ravi Zacharias

Friend, We Have a Problem

When Adam fell, we all fell

Man's relationship with God severed

God created the first two people, Adam and Eve, in physical and spiritual perfection. They lived in a perfect environment. There was no sin in the world, no evil, no death, because God made His original creation perfect.

Man's Choice

God gave Adam and Eve free will. They were free to choose to obey God and live honestly before Him or to choose their own way. God was in charge, and He gave the man and woman everything they needed or could desire.

There was just one thing He withheld from them; God said "You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ... or you will surely die." Up until then they had never known or experienced sin or evil.

Satan's Temptation

Satan—the serpent—was very crafty. And he tempted the woman by questioning God's instructions regarding eating from the tree. The woman answered, misquoting God, saying "You must not touch it, or you will die." This opened the door further for Satan to distort God's Word and entice her to eat of the forbidden fruit and to also give some to her husband, and they both ate it.

A Great Barrier

Because they disobeyed God they were now condemned and lost their intimate relation-



What is this thing called Sin?

REMEMBER, IT IS God who defines sin—not man. So we need to see how God views it.

Sin is any word, thought or deed that violates God's holy character. When we sin it causes a breach between us and God.

Sin is not just murder, rape or robbery—things we see on TV or in newspapers. It is much more inclusive and includes mental attitude sins and sins of the tongue. Sin can be failing to do what we should as well as doing what we should not, like withholding help or compassion.

While sin and evil run rampant in the world, God has provided an answer to the sin problem. And a perfect solution.

ship with Him. We are born into the same predicament. We are born condemned, separated from God with the nature, or tendency to sin, which everyone inherits from Adam. There is nothing we can do that can bring us into a right relationship with God.

We have no hope of restoring this relationship by ourselves; our imperfect righteousness and condemnation have separated us from Him. There is nothing we can do—no amount of good works or denying ourselves will make us good enough to get back to God on our own. Romans 3:23 tells us: "... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." And again, "For the wages of sin is death, ..." (Romans 6:23).

God is perfect righteousness and has existed eternally. He is infinitely higher than us. We simply cannot overcome this breach by anything or any action we can take ourselves.

There is Hope

But God still loved Adam and Eve and He wanted to restore the relationship that they had broken. To do this He had to provide a means of rescue for them since they could not do it themselves.

There is an impenetrable barrier between God and man and only God can bridge the chasm in our relationship with Him, and in His grace and mercy He has

Q If God is so great, why is the world so messed up?

A It is pretty evident that the world is full of evil: wars, revolutions, murder, divorce, family and medical problems and the list goes on and on. How do we reconcile a perfect God with such a messed up world?

The simplest answer is that the problem isn't God ... it's us. Since the fall of Adam, Satan and his army of fallen angels have waged war against God and that includes control of mankind. But the Bible tells us how this story ends: we win!

The Battle Rages on

Satan is the master of deception and clearly has done a masterful job of disguising and counterfeiting the very nature of God and His plan. He blames the evil in the world on God when Satan himself is to blame, with a little help (OK, a lot of help) from us! Knowing that evil exists and will continue to exist, why should we believe in a supposedly omnipotent God who allows it?

God is in Control

God is not only the Creator of the universe, but also the Sustainer. He controls every single atom of every single thing on earth. And more than that, the entire universe that is under His control.

There are no accidents in God's plan. He either causes or He allows all things to happen. While many things that we see don't seem to make sense, from God's eternal point of view He is using every one to further His plan.

Man's Decisions

God created man with free will so that he could make his own choices and decisions in this world. It is very plain to see, that many of man's choices are very wrong, very wicked and very devastating.

God's Timetable

Can't God just come down now and make everything right? He can and He will, but in His perfect time. Though we yearn for instant solutions in an unjust world, the timing of God's judgment rests entirely with Him. We should heed the message of Ecclesiastes 3:17, "... God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed." Patience is indeed a virtue.

We Have Great Hope

Even though the world is filled with despair, tragedies and is often depressing, there is a bright and wonderful future. Trust God to deal with evil in His own time.

The Bible Says

■ So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Gen 3:23–24

■ This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ...

Rom 3:22–23

■ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

John 3:18

■ Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—

Rom 5:12

■ ... remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

Eph 2:12

■ For the wages of sin is death ...

Rom 6:23a

■ But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

Isa 59:2

■ All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

Isa 64:6

"The recognition of sin is the beginning of salvation."

Martin Luther

Why Jesus

If you have a faulty view of Jesus Christ, you will have a faulty view of God—absolutely

The God-Man

Without question, the life of Jesus Christ literally changed the world. He lived among humanity for only thirty-three years, and He ministered publicly for only three years—but in that brief time Jesus lived and taught a message of love, hope, grace, peace, mercy and much more. Moreover, He claimed to be the Son of God who had come to pay the price for our sins, and He promised eternal life to all who would believe in Him.

Setting People Free

His message upset and irritated the stern religious leaders of His day. (It still ruffles feathers today!) But His message also set people free. Free from what? Free from the bondage of sin. Free from a meaningless manner of life. Free to have a marvelous relationship with God.

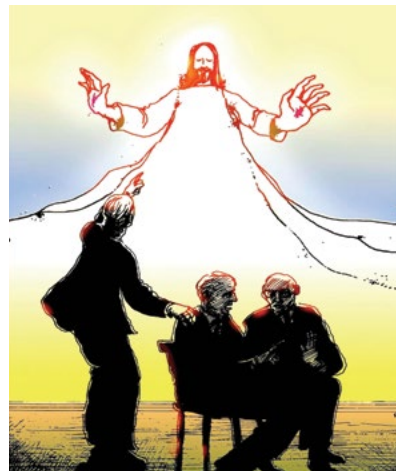
Only One Way

Jesus taught that the only way to God, is by believing in Him: "... I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). As this message spread throughout the land, the sick were healed, the hopeless found hope and lives were changed forever.

Eternity in View

We all know that life on earth is only a brief moment when compared to eternity. According to the Bible we can be assured of eternity with God only if we believe or trust in Jesus. "... to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of

God ... God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not



Jesus is much more than just a man—He is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

perish but have eternal life" (John 1:12, John 3:16).

The Greatest Decision Ever

So the question every human being must decide is, Who is Jesus to me? Was He, as atheists and skeptics contend, just a decent man and a good teacher who lived briefly and then died? But the question then arises how could a "good man" be such a liar? "Good men" do not tell lies about themselves and claim to be God. Then perhaps He is who He said He was: the Son of God, the Messiah whom the Old Testament foretold.

He Fulfilled a Promise

When Jesus Christ arrived on the scene in Bethlehem, it was no

surprise. He was expected. His coming had been prophesied for hundreds of years before it happened by prophets, some who knew nothing of the others, nor knew of their prophecies. Ancient Scripture was very specific as to who He would be, that He would be born in the line of King David, where He'd be born, and that He would be born of a virgin. One can barely fathom the astronomical odds that just one person could fulfill the numerous prophecies written about Him. Consider what Jesus said about Himself; His life and death; and the incredible evidences supporting His resurrection from the dead.

Only One Honest Answer

Every genuine seeker of Christ's identity has concluded that, when it comes to "Who is Jesus?" There is only one reasonable and viable option: Jesus Christ was—and is—who He said He was. He was—and is—God. "I and the Father are one ... Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 10:30, John 14:9b).

Total Trust and Confidence

The path to God is through God's Son, Jesus Christ, the visible Member of the Godhead. He died on the cross to pay for our sins so that our relationship with God might be restored so that we can enter into everlasting life. It is trusting that Jesus is who He said He is and that He did what He said He did that saves us. All we have to do to enter God's eternal Kingdom (heaven) is to "... Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved ..." (Acts 16:31).

Who is Jesus Christ?

<i>Jesus said of Himself</i>	<i>He fulfilled prophecy</i>	<i>He performed miracles</i>
I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6).	Born in Bethlehem OT (Mic 5:2-3) — NT (Matt 2:1-6)	He turned water into wine at a wedding feast (John 2:1-11).
I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die (John 11:25-26).	Born of a virgin OT (Isa 7:13-14) — NT (Luke 1:26-35)	He healed a man who was an invalid for 38 years (John 5:1-9).
I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one (John 10:11; 28-29).	Fled to, called from Egypt OT (Hos 11:1) — NT (Matt 2:13-21)	He healed a man's shriveled hand (Matt 12:9-13; Mark 3:1-5; Luke 6:6-10).
I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (John 8:12).	Declared to be the Son of God OT (Ps 2:7) — NT (Matt 3:16-17)	He stilled a raging storm (Matt 8:18, 23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25).
"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:58).	Betrayed for 30 pieces of silver OT (Zech 11:12-13) — NT (Matt 26:15)	He raised people from the dead (Luke 7:11-15; Matt 9:18-26; Mark 5:22-24, 35-43; Luke 8:41-42, 49-56; John 11:17-44).
	Hung on a tree OT (Deut 21:23) — NT (Gal 3:13)	He fed 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish (Matt 14:14-21; Mark 6:34-44; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:5-13).
	Hands and feet pierced OT (Ps 22:16) — NT (John 19:37)	He walked on water (Matt 14:25-33; Mark 6:45-52; John 6:16-21).
	Raised from the dead OT (Ps 16:8-11) — NT (Mark 16:6-7)	

There can be only 3 options

<i>Liar?</i>	<i>Lunatic?</i>	<i>Or Lord?</i>
Jesus was a good liar who fooled thousands (and subsequently hundreds of millions) of people. But who would submit to the excruciating suffering and death that He did ... for a lie?	Jesus was insane, a deluded lunatic who only thought He was God's Son. Very few people who have studied the life and teachings of Jesus would lend support to this assertion.	Jesus was who He said He was—the Son of God. "I and the Father are one." Jesus said as recorded in John 10:30. This then is our only reasonable, viable conclusion.

An irrefutable proof—Resurrection

OF ALL THE religions of the world, only one—Christianity—purports that its founder died for the sins of the world. He then rose from the dead, appeared to hundreds in evidence of His resurrection, then ascended to heaven to prepare a place for those who believe in Him. Indeed, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so unique, such an extraordinary historical event, that it serves as the ultimate proof of His deity.

We can now have fellowship with the living Christ. The risen Jesus is proof that the Father's plan was accomplished and is the freely given gift from God the Father to all who believe.

The mere fact that Jesus was raised from the dead assures us that all sin was put away in His death. When Jesus cried out on the Cross, "It is finished" He meant all of it—every requirement of the law fulfilled, every punishment for trespasses taken upon Himself. Now every person who believes is restored to a perfect, loving relationship with God.

And His message has continued to expand dramatically during the two thousand-plus years since He lived on earth. Penetrating every continent of the world, untold millions upon millions of people have placed their faith in Him for everlasting life.

God's Perfect Solution

The wonderful place of new beginnings

His incredible, infinite love

God in His infinite wisdom found a way to restore the intimate relationship Adam and Eve had with Him in the beginning. Without any compromise of His character, God's love found a solution to heal all of mankind. Christians call this "the gospel" (meaning the good news) or being "born again" or "salvation."

Enemy to Beloved

Furthermore, He demonstrated His love for us while we were His enemies. "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). This is a love so powerful that it is difficult for us to comprehend.

The Cross

The cross is a widely known symbol of Christianity. Nearly everyone who recognizes it knows what it stands for—the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. His death, burial and

resurrection provide the opportunity for salvation to the entire world, to save people from their sins and guarantee a place in heaven when they pass from this life.

One Perfect Man

How does one man carrying or bearing the weight of sin for all of mankind save anyone from anything? Why was the cross necessary?

First, the forgiveness of sin requires a sacrifice. "... without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin" (Hebrews 9:22). In the Old Testament, a sacrificial ritual called the Day of Atonement required animals to be killed on an altar and their blood to be sprinkled on the mercy seat in the holy place. Under the seat were three items representing the sins of the people, and the blood covered them. The idea was as God looked down from heaven, He did

not see the sins because they were covered by the sacrificial blood.

Second, Romans 3:21–26 calls Christ's death "a sacrifice of atonement" or a propitiation for our sins. That's a big theological word that simply means "an offering satisfying God's wrath toward sin." Only in the case of Christ, God provided the sacrifice Himself. "God made him

who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Third, the Bible calls Christ's crucifixion a "substitutionary atonement." The prophet Isaiah's prophecy of a coming Suffering Servant was fulfilled in the death of Christ. Isaiah 53:5–6 says, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 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."

There is no one who is so good he does not need a Savior. There is also no one who is so bad that the Lord will not save him. It is simply recognizing who and what we are and accepting God's provision for us.

Our Response to Perfect Love

Our commitment to the precious gift we have been given at salvation should be a response of obedience and love. Only when we embrace this concept of God's love can we enter into God's grace and fulfill His plan for us. When we do, we will enjoy an incredible and wonderful life-changing journey filled with enormous consequences—both in time and in eternity.



The Cross of Christ unlocks the shackles of sin that bind man.

Entering God's plan is radically simple

A renovation for all eternity

An amazing aspect of Christianity is that God does all the work when it comes to our salvation. The only thing we contribute to our relationship with God is faith. Nothing more. We're saved by grace through faith alone, in Christ alone. Then we live by faith alone.

Exercising Faith

So, what might be one way to exercise this simple faith? It might be a prayer or simply thinking something like "Heavenly Father, I don't understand it all, but right now I'm believing in Jesus Christ and the work He did for me at the Cross by taking my place and paying the penalty for my sins. I believe that He died, was buried and on the third day was resurrected." Dear friend, in this moment you have entered into an everlasting relationship with God.

Christianity Unique

Christianity is absolutely unique in all the world. Every other religion teaches you have to earn your way into God's favor. In Christianity, it's just the opposite; we bring nothing. God did it all through Jesus Christ, God in the flesh.

God's Love

Everything God has done throughout history speaks of His immeasurable love for us. He has designed it to the last detail. From creation itself to this very moment, God has orchestrated everything to heal our broken



An eternal and perfect gift—united with God forever.

relationship with Him from Adam's original sin, to our own individual sins.

Perfect Assurance

It's also vital to understand that while we did nothing to earn an eternal relationship with God, there is also nothing we can ever do to lose it! Romans 8:38–39 promises us that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Once we're His, we're His forever!

It is God Who Works

God has done all the heavy lifting. All we have to do is stop being "religious" by trying to do it ourselves, and just accept the way the Bible explains it. Obedience is a natural response to God's love. "If you love Me you will keep My commandments." God knows what is best for us and obedience to Him brings happiness and blessing.

The Bible Says

■ For 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

■ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Rom 5:8

■ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Cor 5:21

■ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Rom 5:9–10

■ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

2 Cor 5:17–19

■ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Rom 6:23

■ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

1 Cor 1:30

■ He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

1 John 2:2

One spring
day in
Jerusalem
the world
changed
forever...

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

Jim Elliot

Relationship Restored

Signed, sealed and delivered

A brand new life in Christ

*A forever
journey—a
celebration
like no other*

The Christian journey begins at the moment you place your faith in Jesus Christ and it lasts a lifetime. You are now in Christ! The term “in Christ” is one of the most significant in the entire Bible. It is a favorite of the Apostle Paul, especially in the book of Ephesians. It is complete identity with Jesus Christ and conveys fellowship and eternal glory with Him forever.

Beyond Our Grasp

You have received a gift so amazing that it is utterly impossible to comprehend. Your position is unique, and it is backed by an all-powerful, sovereign God who will never change.

This journey begins with a miracle. Jesus said, I tell you the truth “... unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). God the Father is responsible for this miracle. He has caused us to be born again through Jesus Christ. “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 ...” (1 Peter 1:3-5a).

The Journey Begins

The Father sets you apart (sanctifies you) for the spiritual journey ahead. You are “now alive in Christ.” You have His perfect pattern and example that is your guide to serving and glorifying God. “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And

God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:4-10).



All your sins—past, present and future—are washed away forever!

God is Working

Have you noticed that God is doing all the work, and you are the recipient of this great gift? That is one unique difference that separates Christianity from all other “religions.” They teach that you have to earn your place in heaven. Christianity teaches that faith alone in Christ alone is the only way to heaven.

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

A New Position

You are now a citizen of heaven and an ambassador for Christ! You are no longer living in darkness, but you now abide in Christ and in God’s marvelous light. Your new position gives you privilege, purpose and responsibility. As you travel along the new path God has designed for you, you are to represent Christ and His kingdom. “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

Growing in Grace

As you walk in God’s light, you are to grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. If you do

this consistently, you will arrive at your destination—being transformed into the image or likeness of Jesus Christ. “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son ...” (Romans 8:29a). He reveals to us the wisdom and the power to do this.

We are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds with the truths of the Bible. This is accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit who resides in us.

Abide in Christ

When we abide in Christ we reflect Him and represent Him to others. This is how the Christian brings glory to God. In fact, this is where the name Christian comes from. It was given by those who observed Christ’s followers because they were acting like Christ. So they called them Christians.

Jesus’ relationship with the Father reveals *our* relationship with the Father for they are now one and the same. In turn, the Father’s relationship with Jesus reveals the Father’s relationship with *us* for it is now the same.

A Living Relationship

We now have fellowship with the *living* Christ, not with the suffering

Christ. We are *in* Jesus who is *alive* seated at the right hand of the Father. The *risen* Jesus is proof that the Father’s plan was accomplished and *this* is the freely given gift from the Father to *all* who believe.

A New Identity

Your new identity in Christ changes your entire being—the new you with a new attitude. A new reason for living. A new perspective on what matters. As you grow and mature in your Christian walk, others will begin to take notice. Friends and family may even treat you differently. They may even start asking you what’s changed. What an opportunity! You now have a testimony or declaration of truth and love that you can share with them. Fellow Christians will rejoice with you. Those not yet saved just won’t understand.

Rejoice, Rejoice

Your relationship with God has been restored. You are now intimately united with Christ. Now live consistently with that identification.

Jesus prepared the way and then made the way and now is the way. What can you add to this?

The answer is ... nothing. Rejoice and follow Him.

When God deals with your sins He deals with them once—and forever

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. *Ps 103:11-12*

Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him. *Rom 4:7-8*

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord ... *Acts 3:19*

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. *Isa 1:18b*

To him (Jesus Christ) who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! *Rev 1:5b-6*

For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. *Heb 8:12*

Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more. *Heb 10:17*

Unleashing God’s Light Who I am in Christ



I am someone special, a new creation
1 Pet 1:3-9; 2 Cor 5:17; Ps 139:13-18

I am chosen by God
Eph 1:4a, 11; 1 Pet 2:9; 1 Thess 1:4

I am holy and blameless in His sight
Eph 1:4; 1 Cor 1:30; Eph 4:22-24

I am redeemed and forgiven
Eph 1:7-8a; 1 Pet 1:18-19; Rom 4:7; Col 1:13-14

I am sealed and indwelt by the Holy Spirit
Eph 1:13b; 2 Cor 1:21-22; Titus 3:5b-6; Rom 5:5; 1 Cor 6:19a

I am a loved son/daughter of God
Eph 1:5-6; John 1:12-13; Rom 8:15b-16; 1 John 3:1a

I am a joint heir with Jesus Christ
Rom 8:17; Gal 4:7; Titus 3:7

I am God’s trophy, His possession
Eph 1:13b-14; 1 Pet 2:9

I am God’s workmanship, His masterpiece
Eph 2:10

I am loved by God
Eph 2:4-5; Titus 3:4-5a; John 3:16

I am blessed and I have everything I need in Christ
Eph 1:3

I am being transformed into the likeness or image of Christ
2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:29

I am glorified with Christ
Rom 8:30; Col 1:27b

“Your life is short, your duties many, your assistance great, and your reward sure; therefore faint not and hold on and hold up, in ways of well-doing, and heaven shall make amends for all.”

Thomas Brooks

Beyond the Cross

Living in the middle of a miracle

Two halves to the Gospel

Upon trusting in Christ as your Savior, a new world filled with wonder and opportunity opens before you. You gain a new perspective on life. You have actually crossed over from spiritual death to spiritual life. Your relationship with God is restored, and you are now His very own child. God has forgiven your sins; your past is no longer an issue. He has given you a new future.

The Giver is the Gift

To fully realize the bountiful life that God has in store for you right here on earth, it's vital that you know and understand the full meaning of Christ's sacrifice. Salvation is really much more than the forgiveness of sins. The Bible says that the Cross is the solution to the issue of sin. But the solution to man's spiritual death is the resurrection. The work of Christ that reconciled man to God was not an end in itself. It was the means to an end: to give us spiritual life—and restore our relationship with God.

Saved from, saved to

You see, there are two halves to the gospel: (1) what you are saved *from* and (2) what you are saved *to*. To ignore the fact and the purpose of Christ's resurrection would be to lose an opportunity to understand what Jesus saved us *to*. And it is what Jesus saved us *to* that has a daily impact on the quality and value of our time spent here on earth.

Don't Look Back

Sadly, many Christians spend much of their lives looking back—back to what they have been saved from—rather than what they have been saved to. Rather than enjoying the free-

dom they have in Christ, they are still wallowing in their past. When God said through His Word in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “... the old has gone, the new has come!” He meant it! We need to learn to believe Him. A believer that is growing stronger in Christ each day won't waste time stumbling over past failures and sins. Celebrate the victory that is yours in Christ!



Onward and upward on the path to God and eternity.

Invisible Blessings

God has provided tremendous assets in order that you might live your new life as a follower of Jesus Christ. It is the full measure of His love and acceptance of you. Being completely accepted by the Father as a son or daughter under grace means there is nothing between you and Him. Know this: nothing will

ever cause the Father to take back His gift once you have accepted it.

Power in the Spirit

After we accept Jesus as our Savior, God the Holy Spirit is sent to indwell us and to reveal all things concerning the Father and Jesus. He also empowers us to fulfill our Christian lives. He does not draw attention to Himself, but rather always points us to Jesus and the Father.

No matter what your situation in life is now, as a believer in Jesus Christ you have perfect security. “... in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:37–39).

I am now in God's plan

AFTER SALVATION, YOU begin to live the plan God prepared for you in eternity past. “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10). In His grace, He supplies you with everything you need to accomplish His plan for your life. Now you can say I have His self-revelation, the Bible. I have a perfect pattern and example in the person of Jesus Christ. I have the benefit of other believers to commune with at my place of worship to encourage me, and me, them. I am indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the power source to accomplish His purpose.

God will reveal the plans and works He has set aside for me as I follow Him—plans that are immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20).

I now have a new position

AT SALVATION OUR old position in Adam is gone. I have become a new creation. Now I am forever united with Christ. I will surely be resurrected as He has been (Romans 6:4–7). “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17)!

As a new creation positionally placed in union with Christ, I share all that Christ has—His very own eternal life, His righteousness, His sonship, His destiny, His rulership, His priesthood and all else He has. In this new position in Christ, I can have fellowship with God. I can never lose this position in Christ; it is permanent and eternal. My new position becomes the basis for my experience of the Christian life—my daily walk with God.

I am now united with Christ

AT THE MOMENT of salvation the new Christian enters into a spiritual union with Christ that will continue for all eternity. The Holy Spirit instantaneously baptizes or identifies me with our Lord Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus is “one” with His Father, so am I “one” with Jesus and God the Father (John 17:21).

John chapter 15 teaches this truth, declaring that Jesus is the vine and believers are the branches. A branch can do nothing if it is cut off from the vine. Joined to the vine, the branch has all the nourishment it needs to grow and produce much fruit! Being in union with the vine (Christ) does not guarantee the believer will use the provision God supplies through the vine, or that He will produce fruit, but by grace I am in union with Christ so that I can. He laid down His life for me.

I am now indwelt by the Trinity

INDWELLING MEANS “to live in.” Each member of the Trinity lives within each believer. “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth ... you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you ... We will come to him and make our home with him” (John 14:16–20, 23b).

God the Father indwells us as the preparer of good works which He designed for us in eternity past. Jesus Christ indwells us helping us to grow spiritually that we may represent Him to the world.

The Holy Spirit indwells us to illuminate and empower us to do what God the Father has set aside for us to accomplish.

I have a rock-solid foundation

NOW THAT I have received salvation as a gift through the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross, He is my secure foundation. “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11). Jesus says my stability in the storms of life comes from hearing His words and acting on them (Luke 6:47–48). He is the Rock upon whom the wise man will build his house.

My Bible is His very mind, His thinking and my sure anchor in any problem I face. Many people try to find security in earthly things, like money, possessions, power, influence, wisdom and control—all in vain. I have the most trustworthy, faithful and powerful Savior in Jesus Christ! There is no more secure foundation than to give Him my life and let Him build it.

I am now complete in God

NOW THAT I have salvation, I have become complete. I now have the capacity for fellowship with the one true God! This completeness or perfection is related to our union with Christ. “... and you have been given fullness (made complete) in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority” (Colossians 2:10).

There is nothing more I can do or need to do to secure my position in Christ. It is a gift, and the work done by Christ on the cross is the basis for the completeness of the gift. Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30). He is waiting to show me just how full my life can be! No other religion even tries to imitate the tender care God has for those who belong to Him. He encourages you to cast all your anxieties on Him, for He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7).

The miracle of a moment

“... We are made alive with Christ. We are raised up with Christ. We are made to sit with Him. He has come to live in us, and He has joined Himself to us, and we are one person with Him. That is the most important fact upon which to build all the rest of Christian faith and experience—this great, tremendous statement that we are made alive with Jesus Christ”

Ray Stedman

I am now a saint

GOD HAS MADE me a saint (Romans 1:7; Jude 3)! “Saint” means “set apart” or “holy.” Saint is the position God has given me, and His desire is that my thoughts, words and deeds will reflect that position. I am a saint not because of anything I have done or not done, but simply because He declared me a saint upon salvation. No matter what I do, I cannot lose my sainthood; that is my eternally secured position in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:2, NAS).

Since I am “in Christ,” God sees me as set apart, declared holy and worthy to be used by Him for His glory. “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

I am now a priest

GOD HAS MADE each believer a priest. I now represent myself before God without an intermediary. As a priest I have direct access to God through prayer. I can develop a close personal relationship with my loving Heavenly Father.

I am a chosen person, a royal priest, a person belonging to God, that I may declare the praises of Him who called me out of darkness into His wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9).

My priestly privileges include worship, service to God and others and good works done thru the filling of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:1b).

My Great Priest is the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:21). He has given His life for me; now everything I am, have and do is rightfully His.

I am now justified

MANKIND IS BORN condemned because of Adam’s original sin in the Garden of Eden. At the moment of faith in Jesus Christ, all my sins are forgiven; God’s own righteousness is imputed to me, and the condemnation I was born under is removed. “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ...” (Romans 8:1).

When God the Father looks at me, He does not see the sins and failures He has sacrificed so much to forgive. Neither should I be consumed with my past failures. Instead I press on in the same grace which saved me, and now enables me to live a life that glorifies God alone. “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (Philippians 3:12).

I now have spiritual gifts

THE HOLY SPIRIT gives each believer at least one spiritual gift at the moment of salvation. Spiritual gifts are given for the building up of the Church, the Body of Christ. God’s intention is for believers to use these gifts to serve Him and each other. Believers have different gifts, and so they have different opportunities for service. Each is necessary and important, no matter how visible or invisible.

The body is only able to function effectively when every part is doing its job. Examples of these gifts include: pastor, evangelist, teacher, administration, helps and service. As you allow God the Holy Spirit to control and use you, your gift will function naturally. Certain gifts, like evangelist, pastor and teacher, require preparation to be used effectively. All require the filling ministry of the Holy Spirit and each functions within the body of believers.

I have been delivered from sin

THE MOMENT I placed my faith in Jesus Christ, God forgave all my sins—past, present and future. “... as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12). At the same time I am being saved, He freed me from the power sin has over me while I live on earth. Romans 6:14a tells us: “For sin shall not be your master, ...” And again: “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires” (Romans 6:12).

Without the indwelling Holy Spirit received at salvation I have no power of my own to resist temptations to sin. When we are controlled by the Holy Spirit, “it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Philippians 2:13). When I do fail, he has provided the way for me to recover from the disruption of my spiritual life and resume my walk with God.

I now have eternal life

AT THE MOMENT I believed in Jesus Christ I received eternal life. I will live in the presence of God forever. Heaven is my future eternal home. God, whose Word stands firm, has promised eternal life to me because I placed my faith in His Son. Nothing can cancel His Word. “I give them eternal life” (John 10:28a).

There is nothing I can do to earn eternal life; it is entirely the gracious gift of God. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9). I am now “in Christ” forever.

I am now eternally secure

MY SALVATION IS guaranteed forever. There is nothing, I can do that will cause God to take it from me and condemn me all over again. Trust what His Word says. “... and they will never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:28b).

God has given you salvation—not probation. The changes God made in you at the moment He saved you are not reversible. Nothing can separate you from the love He has for you now that you are in Christ Jesus. “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38–39).

I have been baptized

BY THE BAPTISM of the Holy Spirit I have been placed positionally in Christ, becoming a part of His body, the Church, forever. This gives me a new position spiritually. Before I believed, I was dead in Adam; now I am alive in Christ. I have been identified with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection and have been seated with Him in heaven (1 Corinthians 12:13; Romans 6:3–4).

Many people confuse the baptism of the Holy Spirit that occurs at the moment of faith in Christ with water baptism that occurs after salvation. Baptism with water is never a condition for salvation or necessary for salvation but is simply an outward sign of what has occurred inside the believer. It’s a joyous public declaration and an act of obedience.

I am now God’s child

SINCE I HAVE been baptized into union with Christ at the moment of salvation, I am now the child of God (John 1:12–13; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6; Philippians 2:15; 1 John 3:1–2, 5:19). I have done nothing to earn or deserve this position of honor and heirship. This new relationship should motivate me to learn about the privileges and the responsibilities this new position brings, so that I will represent my Father well and bring glory to Him.

Christ is the heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2), and in Him I have obtained my inheritance (Ephesians 1:11). I have the same eternal life that Christ has; I will reign with Him! I share His glory and honor, as well as all that He owns. This is the only lasting inheritance, the only inheritance that continues even after our death; it is for all eternity!

I am now empowered by God

GOD IS ALL powerful. There is nothing consistent with His perfection that He cannot do. I have access to this same power—the Holy Spirit, the power that sustained Jesus Christ in His humanity and raised Him from the dead. Acts 1:8a tells us: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, ...”

So why aren’t many believers using this power, and how do I tap into it? God’s power is to be used for His glory. When my soul is controlled by the Holy Spirit, His supernatural power is available to me. God is able to use me fully to accomplish His will and manifest Himself to the world. It is the extent to which I am successful in manifesting the character of God here on earth that pleases and glorifies Him the most.

The Bible Says

■ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

Eph 2:4–5

■ And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

1 John 5:11–12

■ 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 ...

1 Pet 1:3–4

■ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Gal 2:20

■ ... God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins ...

Col 2:13

■ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

2 Cor 5:17

■ You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Gal 3:26–27

■ It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Gal 5:1

Restored to Perfection

This is the other half of the Gospel

Your new position in Christ

The love and sacrifice of Christ has changed your life and eternal future forever

Your relationship with God has been restored, and now you are living your life as His child. Your focus is now on the “new you” and not the “old you.” That’s what the rest of this book is about.

A New Destiny

You are no longer simply the product of your past. You have an entirely new destiny—a new purpose. Your course has changed, and your destination is heaven. It’s actually more of a course correction orchestrated by God Himself since it’s what He intended all along.

Identity in Christ	
Satan’s Lie	God’s Truth
You are a sinner because you sin.	You are a saint who sometimes sins.
You get your identity from what you have done.	You get your identity from what God has done for you.
You get your identity from what people say about you.	You get your identity from what God says about you.
Your behavior tells you what to believe about yourself.	Your belief about yourself determines your behavior.

So Long, Old Self

You know all too well what your old life was like. It should feel like a burden has been lifted off your shoulders to know that you are no longer on your own and that the Creator of the universe has redeemed you to a new life. But what should that new life look like?

Before you were saved, your ideas about life were shaped by your world view, personality, experiences, family and friends, media, movies, school, etc. Now that you’re a Christian and the Holy Spirit lives within you, those perspectives will begin to change as you grow in Christ.

God Sees Me in Perfection

But you ask, “How can God see me in perfection when I still sin and fall short—even though I’m now a believer?” While in this fallen world, your sinful nature will continue to rise up and cause you to stumble.

God is the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), which means He alone defines our relationship with Him, not us. In His magnificent love, God placed you into union with Christ through a process theologians call

“sanctification.” This is a big word that means to be “set apart.”

Extreme Makeover: You Edition

Sanctification does not stop with salvation. It is both a position *and* a process. Sanctification has been described as an inward spiritual process by which God brings about holiness and begins the life-long process of conforming you into the image of Christ.

Three Aspects

(1) Positional Sanctification—instantaneous and forever. This is where the new believer is immediately placed at salvation. All the wonderful things this chapter tells you about are a part of “positional” sanctification. Your status in heaven is eternally secure and God has given you untold blessings and gifts—not based on anything you have done but upon what He has done. You now share all that He has.

(2) Progressive Sanctification—a life-long process. So between now and eternity, how are you to live? What is your responsibility? As new Christians we realize that there is a new battle raging in our souls between our old sin-led nature and our new Spirit-led nature. Here we begin to rely upon the Holy Spirit in our moment-by-moment living. It takes time as we grow in spirit, knowledge and truth. It’s a process of daily spiritual renewal. It’s not about trying to attain sinless perfection to earn God’s approval. It’s really for our own benefit to grow in Christ and serve Him more fully.

(3) Ultimate Sanctification—eternally with God. The third and final stage of sanctification occurs when God calls you home to heaven.

Sanctification takes a lifetime, and we will never be perfect this side of heaven. Simply seek to serve God in all you think, act and do.

John Newton

Three Golden Aspects of Sanctification



1 This is how God sees you now

Theologians call this Positional Sanctification—It is absolute and permanent

SANCTIFICATION SPEAKS TO being set apart from the world unto God. This is an immediate act of God’s saving grace, which takes place at the point of belief in Christ. At that very moment you receive everything that Christ has—you are sanctified—set apart unto God for His use—and for all eternity.

Complete in Christ Forever

You are now united with Christ forever and share all that He has. This is known as Positional Sanctification.

You are now free from the penalty of sin

2 This is how God watches you grow

Theologians call this Progressive or Experiential Sanctification—It is relative

A Daily Walk with Christ

You now have the opportunity to walk with the Lord day-by-day and moment-by-moment. But to do this you must find out what God wants you to do and to be.

You are now free from the power of sin

WHEREAS POSITIONAL SANCTIFICATION emphasizes God’s work, progressive sanctification emphasizes our work and obedience, yet this is not without God’s ongoing grace. Progressive sanctification is the process by which we become more and more like Christ, through spiritual growth. Here we learn to deal with sin in our lives and walking in grace as we live according to God’s plan for our lives.

3 This is when God brings you into His very presence

Theologians call this Ultimate Sanctification—It is absolute and permanent

ULTIMATE SANCTIFICATION IS positional sanctification fully realized. In other words, while you are positionally sanctified or holy in Christ, you do not yet experience the full realization of this sanctification. Why? Because you are still in your mortal, earthly body with all its earthly weaknesses. But when God promotes you to eternity, you experience the ultimate that God has prepared for you.

In the Presence of Christ Forever

When God determines that your time on earth is complete, He calls you home to heaven to be with Him. This is called Ultimate Sanctification.

You are now free from the very presence of sin

Discovering God's Plan for Your Life

Spiritual road signs

A compass for living

Before you know the will of God you must know the Word of God

God wants to have a close personal relationship with you, His child. God chose you, called you and drew you to Himself for this very purpose. He loves you and wants to pour out His blessing upon you.

Obedience First

God's future for you is one of eternal glory in His presence, but His plan for you in time now is obedience to His will. "Do your best (be diligent) to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Total Immersion

There is only one way to discover God's plan for your life; through daily, consistent, careful study of His Word, the Bible. The Bible is God's self revelation to mankind, revealing His holiness and redemptive plan for mankind.

Now that you've placed your trust in Christ, the next step is discovering God's plan and accomplishing His purpose. You now must learn to make moment-by-moment decisions to fulfill God's plan and purpose for your life.

Being Conformed to His Image

Romans 8:29 tells us that we are "to be conformed to the image of his Son." Other parts of the Bible share the same theme, but what does it mean? This is when it helps to have tools for Bible study at our disposal. The original Greek for "image" is *eikon*, which refers

to the moral likeness of a renewed person to God. It's talking about a change in our character. We're not called to look like Him physically but to act like Him. Imagine a block of stone being shaped to resemble a certain person. In our case, we are the stone, and God uses His Word to chip away at our old self and shape us to resemble the character of Jesus Christ.



Discovering the path from human viewpoint to God's viewpoint.

Really Knowing God

God, in grace, has supplied you with everything you need to accomplish His purpose. You have the Bible; you have a perfect pattern and example in the person of Jesus Christ; and you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the power source for the Christian.

The best way to understand God's plan for you is to know God. Don't just learn about God—get to know Him for Who He is. You will understand God's plan for you when you approach decisions with an eternal perspective.

Not Self-Improvement

God is not a genie to improve your life. You have been entrusted with the calling of His plan and invited to share in His joy as that plan is fulfilled through you. By choosing to live for God, you will share in His joy. God has been, is and always will be the main character of history ... and yet He offers you an active, joy-filled role in helping others experience joy in Him, too.

We all love to tell others about the amazing things we find. The kingdom of heaven is buried treasure, and once you truly behold its splendor, it will be a *delight* to invest all you have into it!

Trust the Spirit

The Christian life can be compared to a dance. We move in rhythm as the Holy Spirit takes the lead. If we have our own plan, we will resist when the Holy Spirit leads us and we will live a life of confusion and frustration. If we trust the Spirit as He guides, we will be living a life that honors God.

Trust is the most essential part of life with God. If you don't trust that God is good and always has your best interest at heart, then you need to better understand that part of His character.

Sometimes the Holy Spirit leads us where we don't want to go. Even Jesus was led into the desert to be tempted by Satan. And the ultimate sacrifice of the Cross—Jesus didn't want to go to the cross but said "... not my will but yours be done."

God's path for our lives is always perfect, even when it involves pain and suffering.

Living a Life of Balance

God longs to replace the lies of this world and heal you based on His truth and His love for you. He is your hope and your future, and He works out all things for the good of those who love Him. The best relationships grow stronger through trials; they don't break apart because of them.

When we live life God's way, not only do we enjoy sharing in God's victories but we also don't bear the overwhelming burden of trying to control the unforeseeable and uncertain future nor the out-of-control present! Although "our way" seems like there is more freedom, God's way allows us to rest in His control no matter what the circumstances may be.

The Perfect Measurement

We all start out with unsteady baby steps, but as we grow our steps become firmer, and eventually our Christian walk should become a way of life. No matter where you are or what you have done, as long as you are alive and breathing, God has a plan for you!

Growing in Christ

Instant Insights



■ God has a plan and a purpose for your life. He also has provisions and blessings for you.

■ Every moment you are living, you are preparing for eternity. This isn't a dress rehearsal—it's the real thing. Make the most of it.

■ God's plans are always better than our plans. If you are still breathing—keep moving. Ninety percent of the Christian battle is simply showing up for duty.

■ Prayer should always precede action.

■ God has boundaries that you should follow as you fulfill His plan for your life. This will keep you focused on doing what is right rather than taking the wrong road along the way.

■ God's will for your life demands sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Total contentment comes from total submission to God.

■ Does it make any sense to look to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation and then reject Him for the details of life?

■ God may lead you in directions you have never considered.

■ God wants you to share His joy and peace. He wants you to be thankful and content.

■ We are to be obedient and faithful.

■ We are to grow in grace, knowledge, truth and service. We receive God-given skills and talents to accomplish His plan.

■ We are to trust God and stay in fellowship with Him.

■ God knows we will fail, but He never wants us to give up. He doesn't demand perfection, but He does require consistency.

The Bible Says



■ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Eph 2:8–10

■ Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.

Phil 2:12–13

■ Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Rom 12:1–2

■ 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.

Rom 8:28–29

■ The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

Matt 13:44

■ 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.

John 15:5

"When individuals rebel against God, they don't achieve freedom. They fall into bondage, because rebellion is sin, and sin is a tyrant. On the other hand, when men and women submit to God, becoming his slaves, they become truly free. They achieve the ability fully to become the special, unique beings that God created them to be."

James Montgomery Boice

Dynamics of Christianity

A steady hand at the helm

Constancy amidst chaos

The dynamics of Christianity are totally unique in all the world. There is no power, no energy, no skill, talent or virtue that can even begin to compete with the power that propels Christian living.

It's one thing to have a basic understanding of Christianity. It's another to actually do it—to actually live it. This is where the applied dynamics of Christianity become real.

A Christian Life

Our challenge as we start our life walking with Christ is how to read God's road signs to stay with His plan. The plan of God is a perfect plan for imperfect man. Just as no man could keep the Mosaic Law, no man can accomplish God's plan for the Christian life apart from His power.

There is only one way to discover God's plan for your life: through daily, consistent, careful study of His Word. The Bible is God's self-revelation to mankind, revealing His holiness and redemptive plan for us. It is your guidebook for life. Obeying its instructions puts you on the path to uncovering God's plan.

As you learn about God, you'll get to know Him personally. You will understand God's plan better as you approach decisions seeking to please Him.

God wants to have a close personal relationship with you, His child. God called you and drew you to Himself. He loves you and wants to pour out His blessing upon you. He wants to use you to fulfill His plan. In grace God will prepare and equip you to reach others with the news of His grace and mercy.

The Focus

To know God's ways, God's will, God's nature, God's wisdom and God's love—you need to know Jesus. He is the ultimate embodiment of God.

Without understanding how God the Father sees us, it will be difficult to understand our true relationship with Him. The Father's relationship with Jesus reveals His relationship

with us for they are now the same. Remember, Jesus said of Himself, "... if you knew me, you would know my Father also" (John 8:19). And "I and the father are one" (John 10:30).

Jesus did nothing that wasn't the will of the Father. Everything the Father wants for us is revealed when we see what Jesus did, said and demonstrated while He was here on earth.

The Power

At the moment you place your faith in Jesus Christ, you are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit, the energy or power that sets in motion your new life in Christ. With the Holy Spirit as a source of power and strength, the Christian life is characterized by positive continuous change, resulting in growth. The Holy Spirit leads you, moment-by-moment, step-by-step, towards God's ultimate goal for your life.

The Execution

The life that God gave you in Christ began with faith, and faith must sustain you in your daily walk. We know where our focus is to be and where our power comes from. Now, how do we actually work it out? It's quite simple: Love others the way God loves them. If you act in love you will not lie to them, steal from them or harm them. You would show understanding, compassion and generosity. Remember, always do everything in love (Ephesians 4:15). How you say something is just as vital as what you say.

God at Work in You

Can you think of a more compelling life than one given to you by a sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient God who loves you with an infinite love? The Christian life is truly dynamic. You are energized by the Holy Spirit, a source of power that is limitless, changing you as you actively pursue God's Word, resulting in progress marked by a consistency and strength that could only come from a God with infinite power and understanding.

Three keys to successful Christian living

"Being a Christian is more than just an instantaneous conversion—it is a daily process whereby you grow to be more and more like Christ."

Billy Graham

FOCUS: The Lord Jesus Christ



WE ARE CALLED to keep our focus on the Lord Jesus Christ. In His 33 years on earth He lived the perfect life. Nobody else can claim that. Indeed, all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, as we're told in Romans 3:23. So, Jesus made the mold, and He cast the

perfect model of the Christian life. Everything God gave Jesus to equip Him for all He must do, He also gave us at salvation. The Holy Spirit is the conduit through which God's will flows through us. Hebrews 12:2 reminds us that we are to constantly be "fixing our eyes on Jesus,

the author and perfecter of our faith." With Christ as our target, our aim will remain true. Not because we're doing it under our own power, but because HE is the power that draws us to Him.

POWER: The Holy Spirit



JOHN 14:15–17 SAYS, "If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for

he lives with you and will be in you." When Christ left this earth, He didn't leave us helpless. He promised the Holy Spirit would be in us, and work through us. Acts 1:8a: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you." We are promised the very power we

need to live the Christian life by none other than Jesus Christ Himself! That's the biggest difference between mere religion and a relationship with Him. Religion attempts to go it alone; our relationship ensures we're never on our own.

EXECUTION: Love



READ 1 CORINTHIANS 13:4–8A and ask yourself if you are able to love this way under your own power. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does

not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails." How did you do? Can anyone love that way in their own flesh? If we could, we would have done it already. This kind of love can ONLY come from

God. The Bible says God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). Without the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit we are not capable of this unconditional love. The power for ultimate patience, kindness, unselfishness, and forgiveness is too much to handle without Him.

The Journey Begins

What God promises—He will deliver

Forging ahead as a Christian

**A powerful
beginning
builds a
strong
foundation**

Whether you are beginning your journey as a new Christian or you have been a Christian for many years, it is your responsibility to gain a thorough knowledge and understanding of God's plan so that you can apply it to your life. Although your ultimate destination is arriving at your heavenly home, there is much to do along the way.

There are lessons to learn, progress to make and people whose lives you can touch and change. This is what makes the journey of life so interesting and rewarding—moment-by-moment decisions that ensure you are making progress and fulfilling God's purpose for your life.

Perfect God, Perfect Journey

The Apostle Paul prays "... that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God ..." (Colossians 1:10). The word "live" describes how we progress in this life's journey and fulfill God's unique plan for our lives. God has a perfect plan for a perfect journey where every step we take is a part of His master plan.

An Impossible Task

The very thought of a master plan can be daunting. It's easy to wonder if every step is planned out already—What if I make the wrong decision? What if I take the wrong step? Immediately you are faced with a task that is humanly impossible, and it would be impossible ... if you attempted it on your own. But God, who is all knowing, has factored into your walk with Him every one of your failures and shortcomings.

God's Provision

He has provided you with the means to accomplish His perfect will. He has not left you on your own. As you forge ahead in the Christian life, you are not only "in Christ," but you are also "indwelt" with the promised Comforter, God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the ultimate power source to enable you to achieve God's plan for your journey.

The power of the Holy Spirit will assist you every step of the way and comfort you in times of difficulty. He will also teach you everything you need to know in order to please God as you follow Christ.

The Great Race

The Apostle Paul compares the Christian life to a race and tells us to "Run in such a way as to get the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:24b). Our mandate, no matter at what stage we are in this race, is to forge ahead with faith and courage so that we may finish strong when we cross the finish line. We all want to win our race and be able to say, like the Apostle Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). And when we do so, we are promised a crown of life and a great reward (James 1:12).

Discipline and Training

What do runners do to win? They train as they live a lifestyle of discipline and focus. Christians too must train in the knowledge of God's Word (2 Peter 3:18).

Athletes training for the Olympics don't show up when they feel like it. They train day in and day out. So too, we must be disciplined



A voyage of discovery—growing in your new life of Christianity.

to train on a consistent basis in order to succeed. We train our minds and spirits by reading God's Word regularly, connecting with Him in prayer and following His plan laid out in Scripture.

Athletes follow a strict diet and they don't engage in activities that weaken them. Likewise, the Bible warns us to "... throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us" (Hebrews 12:1b). Everyone has different weaknesses and faces unique distractions. Examine yourself to discover what yours are, so you can overcome them.

Personal Trainer

God provides the coach to teach and guide us. The Holy Spirit is your Counselor (John 14:16). You need not wander aimlessly through the endless maze of this world. He will teach you all the things you need to know in order to please God as you follow Christ. And He will help you remember all that you have learned.

Permanently on God's Team

The Holy Spirit is also the assurance that no matter how much you stumble, fall or fail you will never be kicked off the team. Your salvation is guaranteed, your position is eternally secure (Ephesians 1:13). God has promised never to leave you nor forsake you (Deuteronomy 31:6).

Power Play

You are indwelt by God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. There is no way to lose unless you intentionally "run out of bounds." If you do willfully step out of the "bounds" of the Christian life (called sin), God may lovingly discipline you to pull you back into the race. If you fall down, you need only turn back to the Lord, acknowledge your sin and He will lift you up.

Perfect Game Plan

God has a perfect plan just for you. Every obstacle you encounter, every problem you experience, each disappointment, trial or temptation that arises has already been taken into consideration by our all-knowing, all-wise, all-powerful, loving God. He has promised to deliver you through every circumstance that life sends your way. Nothing reaches you that hasn't been allowed by Him, and He will give you the victory. "... in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

Teammates

As you run the race, keep the company of other Christians who pursue their faith. Fellowship with them, and gather to worship, pray and encourage one another. Keep your "team spirit" strong! The Bible encourages us with these words: "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm" (Proverbs 13:20).

The Winning Team

You are on the winning team of life! You joined the team when you accepted Christ as your Savior by faith. Exercise that faith and grow by using all the power and assets provided to team members. Run so as to win the prize, and you will find joy, peace, rich blessing and enjoy inexhaustible rewards.

The Greatest Reward

You will spend all eternity in the presence of the Most High. Finish strong, and when you stand before Christ and He evaluates your life, you will hear the words all believers long to hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness" (Matthew 25:21).

7 things you must know

■ God has a wonderful plan for your life, and you have a responsibility to discover what that plan is and to fulfill God's purpose for your life.

■ Remember, God is in charge, and you must adapt to Him—He doesn't adapt to you.

■ Nothing, absolutely nothing, touches you which hasn't gone through God's hands first. He hasn't promised that you will not have problems, tribulations or suffering, but He has promised He will deliver you through them.

■ God's love for you never changes. God loves you with the same love He has for Christ, and it never grows or diminishes. It is perfect and forever.

■ All human beings sin—including Christians. Just because someone is a Christian doesn't mean he is perfect. (Actually, this side of heaven only Christ was perfect). Don't judge the motivation of others, whether they are believers or unbelievers.

■ Don't be surprised when you sin! You still have a sin nature, and it is there even after salvation. You will fail. Don't be shocked, it's part of being human. And don't think that your salvation "didn't take." Now you must learn how to deal with your sins and failures.

■ God is always just a prayer away. You have access to Him anytime of the day or night. He is always ready to hear from you. You are never alone as a Christian. All three Members of the Trinity indwell you.

"The Christian faith is meant to be lived moment by moment. It isn't some broad, general outline—it's a long walk with a real Person. Details count: passing thoughts, small sacrifices, a few encouraging words, little acts of kindness, brief victories over nagging sins."

Joni Eareckson
Tada

Total Christian Confidence

It's all in the knowing

Learn it, live it

**Pleasure
beyond
measure
when you
are walking
with
the Lord**

Life is all about the details. We face details on the job, at home, with family and friends—everywhere we go. Handling all the details and expectations of life can become frustrating and overwhelming, especially when we view them from our limited human perspective.

We will never control all the details we face, but we can gain control over how we handle them. When we turn our lives completely over to God, we will minimize worries and anxiety because we know He is in perfect control of our lives ... to every last detail.

Peace and contentment come from our relationship with God and our trust in Him—not in having control over everything in our life. A popular phrase that describes it well is, “Let go and let God.” When we let go and trust His plan for our life, we can relax. Only God fully understands the situation because He has all the facts. God knows the end from the beginning. There are no accidents in the life of a believer. God has a plan for *every* detail that enters your life.

The Best Perspective

Knowing the Scriptures gives us clear direction on how to solve problems we encounter. They tell us what God thinks. If we combine this knowledge with the Holy Spirit's guidance and power, we have the potential to view the world from God's perspective instead of our own and thus make wiser decisions. We'll

experience a greater sense of calm, patience and joy as we focus on what's truly important in the big scheme of things.

God's Priorities Now My Priorities

In light of our relationship with God, we must determine what areas of life are of utmost importance.

One thought that will guide us as we establish our personal priorities is, “Are my priorities coinciding or colliding with God's priorities?” When we decide to trust Him with our lives, we can't go wrong. As your priorities begin to coincide with God's mandates, you may discover many activities that you do not need cluttering up your life. If you put the things of God first and focus on Him, it is amazing how

confusion about life's many details diminishes. God can handle the details and we are free to focus on Him and what He would have us to do.

Resist the temptation to skip things that build and strengthen your relationship with God, such as attending church, praying and reading your Bible.

Jesus Never Frazzled

When it comes to mastering the details of life, Jesus Christ is our perfect role model. He had only twenty-four hours a day and He required sleep and rest just as we do. Think of all the things He needed to do and all the people clamoring for His attention. Yet He was never frazzled or overwhelmed. He understood that He needed to



**Knowing that you are doing things
God's way gives incredible confidence.**

“I am no longer anxious about anything, as I realize the Lord is able to carry out His will, and His will is mine. It makes no matter where He places me, or how. That is rather for Him to consider than for me; for in the easiest positions He must give me His grace, and in the most difficult, His grace is sufficient.”

Hudson Taylor

be about His Father's business (Luke 2:49) and was to do the will of His Father: “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me” (John 6:38).

Enjoying God's Peace

Jesus remained flexible, loving and calm even though throngs of people sought Him out with their physical and spiritual needs. The secret was that He stayed on mission and remained in constant touch with His Heavenly Father through prayer. And in three short years, He changed the world forever.

Jesus remained at peace and focused on His life's mission amid the world's chaos because His priorities were His Father's priorities and He viewed the world from His Father's perspective. We can enjoy God's peace in the midst of all the details if we do likewise.

We can also pray for wisdom to view our situation from His perspective, and when unsure of which way to go, it is okay to simply ask, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” When our hearts are truly open to His guidance, He will indeed show us the way to go.

God First

When we put God first, He will enable us to master the details of life. If we live according to the instructions God gives us in the Bible, it will simplify our lives. Trust God to provide solutions to problems as you commit your pressures and difficulties to Him through prayer. Your faith and confidence will grow as you leave the outcome to Him. He has your best in mind and He “... is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us ...” (Ephesians 3:20).

Growing in Christ

Instant Insights



■ Until you understand God's plan and power, you can never know the peace and joy He wants you to experience.

■ God's love is infinitely greater than anything you can imagine, and He is always fair. His love for you never changes.

■ Your security is in God's hands—not yours or anyone else.

■ Circumstances do not provide confidence—God provides confidence. There are no circumstances beyond God's control.

■ God only asks us to be faithful. Obedience is the most important characteristic of a believer. The Bible commands the believer to walk in faith and be obedient to God's Word.

■ If you are “in Christ,” you will never be judged for your sins, but you may be disciplined.

■ Tragically, very few believers have confidence in God simply because they don't have enough of God's truth in their soul. Confidence in God comes from daily study and application of His Word. The Holy Spirit uses what you learn to help you grow.

■ You can depend upon God, He does what He says He will do. He never does less than His infinite personal best.

■ You must convert words on the pages of the Bible into actionable truth in your soul. Are they simply words on a page or reality in your life? You must apply what you learn in order to fulfill God's plan for your life. What you learn doesn't glorify God; what you do does.

■ Nothing touches you which hasn't gone through God's hands first. Even when negative circumstances are involved, God turns them around to His noble purpose.

The Bible Says



■ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:6-7

■ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

John 10:28-29

■ He (God) will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.

1 Cor 1:8-9

■ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

Eph 1:4-6

■ 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.

1 Pet 1:3-5

Grace, Grace, Grace and More Grace

God's never ending grace

Heads you win, tails you win

One of the most important aspects of the Christian faith is the subject of grace. When you hear the word “grace,” you may think of it as elegance or beauty of form, manner, motion or action. You might even think of a prayer that people say before they are about to eat. Biblical grace is different and so much more. It is an earth-shattering, life-changing truth.

G-R-A-C-E

The New Testament meaning of the word “grace” comes from the Greek word, “charis”, which means, “favor, gracious care or help ... an act which one grants to another.” A powerful and accurate acrostic based on the word g-r-a-c-e defines it as “God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.”

Blameless

When you receive the incredible gift of grace, God sees you as He sees His Son—*BLAMELESS* and *PURE*. You have been forgiven and cleansed from every sin. God took all of your sins and imputed (gave) them to Jesus—never to be brought up again.

A Forever Gift

God’s grace for the believer is limitless and unending. Just as God is infinite in all His attributes, the grace He extends to you is infinite. You have been made to be at peace with God. He no longer considers you an enemy, and sin no longer divides you from Him. You are safe from His wrath; He will no longer deal with you in anger because of your sins—past, present or future. Christ took all of God’s anger towards your sin on Himself at the cross, and you are now hidden in Him in His righteousness.

Perfect Through Christ

You have been forgiven forever through His grace. “... we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all” (Hebrews 10:10). Then, 10:14 says “... by one sacrifice he (Jesus) has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.” In verse 10 notice the Bible says “have been,” not “will be.” This is a present status, you *are* perfect in God’s eyes, and will remain that way for all eternity. You have been made complete in Christ. You are forgiven, redeemed and made spiritually alive.

But that’s only half of the story—God also took all of Jesus’ righteousness and gave it to you!

Righteousness means “a right standing of total acceptability” before God. It is also important to know that God sees you this way right now, not just at some future time when you die and stand in His presence. Right now, as a believer, you are perfect in His eyes, blameless, with no work or effort on your part required to maintain this point of view.

God’s Unconditional Love

God will never love or accept you any more than He does right this minute. And God’s love for you will never change—ever. You have been made a citizen of heaven, and as a citizen, you no longer have any relation to the old country of sin you used to pledge your allegiance to.

Grace is the unconditional love of God towards the believer. In His sight, you are as righteous and acceptable as the Apostle Paul, and even Jesus Christ. Yes, that’s correct. Amazing, but true.



Two of God's Great Gifts

GRACE	MERCY
Getting blessings we don't deserve	Not getting punishment we do deserve

Grace is God's passion, His unmerited favor, to do all He can for you

“Grace is the limitless, unrestrained love of God for the lost, acting in full compliance with the exact and unchangeable demands of His own righteousness through the sacrificial death of Christ.”

Lewis Sperry
Chafer

Growing in Christ

Instant Insights



■ Grace is God’s plan to provide for man incredible assets that man never earns or pays for.

■ Grace is the work of God on behalf of man apart from man’s ability or merit. That means grace excludes any human good or human merit.

■ God always has you in His plan and His resources are infinite. Therefore, grace will be multiplied to you throughout all eternity as well as in time.

■ In God’s magnificent grace, our sins, disobedience and failures never frustrate His plan. He has already factored our transgressions into His master plan for our lives.

■ God never views you as the sum total of your failures—He views you through the grid of Christ and sees you as the sum total of who you are in Christ.

■ Neither you nor anyone else can remove you from the sphere of God’s grace.

■ God’s grace provides for every situation (failure, success, suffering, etc.) in which you may find yourself.

■ Blessing from God is based on His character, not on anything you do. We are blessed by God because we are in union with Christ.

■ Our freedom in Christ is not freedom to sin but freedom to serve apart from bondage to our sin nature.

■ Grace includes the freedom to recover from sin and to serve God no matter how many times we may fail Him.

■ The grace of God is infinite; it has no beginning, nor will it ever end. His grace is limitless.

The Bible Says



■ From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.

John 1:16

■ Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Acts 20:32

■ Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Rom 5:1–2

■ Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

2 Pet 1:2

■ Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Heb 4:16

■ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

2 Cor 9:8

■ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

2 Cor 12:9

■ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

2 Cor 8:9

Wonderful World of Worship

Worship is our response to God's revelation

Everything we do should be worship

*Savoring
God's joy
in every
aspect of
worship*

When we begin to understand how great our God is and all that He has done for us, the logical reaction is worship! True worship is our souls' response to coming into contact with the majesty and glory of God.

All is Worship

When walking in the filling of the Spirit, all that we do is a form of worship. As Christians, everything we do is meant to be done as service to God. When we are filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit, everything we do glorifies the Lord. But we should also take time to specifically worship and glorify God.

Kinds of Worship

Individual prayer, Bible study and meditation are meant to be times of worship when our appreciation of God and His grace and glory overflows from the depth of our soul and rises in praise to Him. The more we understand God and His holiness, the more we stand in awe of Him. The only proper response is worship!

We can also worship with other believers through fellowship, singing, praying, studying God's Word and partaking of communion. The caution for all of us is to make sure these times are true worship and not empty rituals.

God sees the attitude of our hearts. He knows whether worship is "real" or not. Worship should always be a time of mutual encouragement among believers. "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:23–25).

A Very Special Form of Worship

The Lord's Table (also known as Communion or the Lord's Supper) is a form of worship given to us directly from Jesus. As such, it serves as a model for worship. Jesus, during His Last Supper with His disciples, instructed us to partake of this to remember and honor Him:

"... The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:23b–26).



Worshipping in unity

The Bread and the Cup

As in all forms of worship, the Lord's Table is most meaningful when we understand its significance. The bread reminds us of the perfection of our Lord and how He chose to humble Himself on our behalf and be broken for our sakes. The cup reminds us of His work on the cross, the ultimate sacrifice and how it cleansed us and restored our relationship with God. If done as a mindless ritual, partaking of communion can be meaningless. But if done in appreciation for Christ's sacrifice, our hearts will overflow in worship.

Don't Judge Worship Styles

Believers should not judge other's worship styles. As long as we are agreed on the essentials we can look past the nonessentials. The instruments used and the songs are individual preferences. Other nonessentials and individual church traditions should not be a reason for conflict among believers. As long as worship portrays God accurately and glorifies Him, it is honoring to Him.

Saved—Now what?

Salvation is only the beginning of an exciting new life. Now with God's help you have the opportunity to grow and advance through the stages of spiritual growth on the path from Christ's Cross to the believer's crown.

The Babe (1 Peter 2:2). All believers enter the family of God as infants when they exercise faith in Christ. God's objective for the spiritual infant is growth.

Not much is expected of the child in his first years. Babies eat, sleep, cry and mess, but parents do not get upset about the fact that their babies cannot change their own diapers or fix their own meals. Spiritual infants are just as helpless and need a great deal of nurturing, encouragement and patient instructions.

The Adolescent (1 John 2:13–14). The Apostle John describes adolescent believers as the young, the strong, the eager. These are believers who have grown to the point at which they understand principles of truth and are beginning to apply them.

But, like many adolescents, they have growing pains of arrogance and rebellion against authority. They are sometimes too eager to act on their own, and this often gets them into trouble.

They have knowledge, which they mistake for wisdom, but they lack experience. They must be patiently trained and encouraged to channel their energies. No one

makes it to maturity without passing through adolescence.

The Mature (Hebrew 5:14, 6:1). The mature believer is able to take meat, the advanced doctrines and principles of the Word. A Christian who has reached spiritual maturity knows how to apply the Word of God to himself. He is not ready to take on everyone else's problems, but he can take control of his own life.

He understands that God has a plan for his life, and he becomes occupied with fulfilling that plan. He gives himself to training and discipline, exercising himself and building spiritual muscle.

The Hero of Faith (Isaiah 53:12; Hebrews 11). Heroes of faith are men and women who have reached maturity and have learned to fight the good fight. They have advanced beyond simply taking responsibility for their own lives to aid and assist in the lives of others.

They are always ready to pick up fallen comrades, to treat their wounds, to encourage them and supply their needs. Heroes of faith still make mistakes and they still fail, but they always stand back up and go back into battle.

Every believer has the potential and the assets necessary to reach this point, but very few Christians do.

It takes persistence and tenacity. The people who make it this far are the people who absolutely refuse to compromise or quit.

An Overflowing Heart

Let our worship be from hearts overflowing in appreciation for a holy and merciful God and for all that He has done in our lives! "All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They

fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: 'Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!'" (Revelation 7:11–12).

The Bible Says

■ The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God my Savior!
Ps 18:46

■ Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.
Ps 95:6–7

■ Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.
Ps 100:1–5

■ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire."
Heb 12:28–29

■ Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens.
Ps 68:19

■ Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord.
Ps 150:1–6

■ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"
Luke 4:8

"Worship is a believer's response to God's revelation of Himself. It is expressing wonder, awe, and gratitude for the worthiness, the greatness, and the goodness of our Lord. It is the appropriate response to God's person, His provision, His power, His promises, and His plan."

Nancy Leigh
DeMoss

God's Way vs. My Way

Free will unleashed

The art of "Lord-listening"

We all would be mindless robots without free will, but God's desire for us is a deep, meaningful relationship with Him. God gave us free will so that our obedience would come out of our love for Him, not obligation. Service and obedience to those we love and trust are natural responses, so why would it be any different with God.

Our obedience is a response to God's love and recognition of His authority over our lives. He has given us free will so we can make decisions that glorify Him. For us to grow spiritually our will must match His will. Jesus prayed, "... My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39b). We only view free will as negative if we lose hope that God is refining our will to match His.

True Freedom

The Holy Spirit already resides in each believer. We just need to trust His power by trusting Him in our daily walk. The sin nature uses lies and manipulation but the Holy Spirit provides purity and wisdom. The more we walk in the Spirit, the more we see the lies and manipulation of sin for what they are, and the more natural it becomes to rest in God's way, which is the only true freedom.

"My way" is actually the way of sin because it means disobeying the Spirit and allowing the world's way to influence our thoughts and desires. This draws us away from the close intimate relationship with the God who knows the best for our future.

From My Way to God's Way

As you walk in God's way, your way increasingly becomes His way. The desire to sin never dies completely. It is impossible, apart from the Holy Spirit, to live in fellowship with God.

We ourselves cannot nor should we try to "clean ourselves up." But as you humbly yield to the Holy Spirit you will begin to resist sin and walk according to God's will. Focus on the treasure of who God is, and sin becomes an afterthought.

Who is in Control

We really just want to live our way so that we remain "in control." This need to be "in control" has plagued humanity since the first sin. "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" (Genesis 3:6). She saw ... she concluded ... she ate.

She ignored God's simple instruction and chose her way over God's way.

And, no, Adam wasn't without blame. Adam, who had the responsibility to guide the woman, also failed to submit to God's will. Ever since the fall, man has attempted to choose his own will over the will of God the Father.

Sharing God's Victory

When we live life God's way, not only do we enjoy sharing in God's victories, we also don't bear the overwhelming burden of trying to control the unforeseeable and uncertain future, nor the out-of-control present.

No Cafeteria Christians!

YOU NEED ALL of what the Bible says—you simply cannot pick and choose what is convenient for you to live by.

Far too many Christians substitute their own personal values, prejudices and/or opinions for God's established values.

It is like going through a theological cafeteria and picking and choosing what Christian values to obey and rejecting those truths which may be inconvenient; "Sure, I'm not going to steal, but no sex outside of marriage, I don't think I'll buy any of that ..."

Make no mistake, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ..." says 2 Timothy 3:16. All means all! A holy God will not shrug His shoulders at your personal opinions and say, "close enough." Don't dig your heels in the sand and make God drag you to where He wants you to go. His way works every time.

In reality, God is always in control and any sense we have of control is only a mirage that disappears completely with our next failure or tragedy. Although our way seems to give us more freedom, God's way allows us to rest in confidence and peace because He is in control. No matter what the circumstances in our lives, God will lead us to victory in Christ.



Embracing the hand of God and seeking His guidance.

who He says He is, then we believe He's the God described in the Bible. Wouldn't the wise choice be to choose His way? Think about it. The Creator of the universe, Who spoke the world into existence and promises us an abundant life, has plans to bless us in ways we can't begin to imagine if we will only join Christ and proclaim, "yet not my will, but

yours be done" Luke 22:42. Seems like an obvious choice, doesn't it?

Our only wise choice is to choose His way and to rely on His power to accomplish His purpose.

God's Choice

Doesn't that sound better than anything we could come up with ourselves? If we believe God to be



Moment-by-Moment Choices

Occupied with Christ	Pre-occupied with self
Focus on God	Focus on self
Desire to serve God	Desire to serve self
Divine viewpoint	Human viewpoint
Divine power/Filling of the Holy Spirit	Human power/Flesh
Guided by the Word and the Holy Spirit	Guided by our emotions, conscience and the opinion of others
Motivated by faith in God	Motivated by pride and ego
Rely on God in all things	Rely on self and hope for the best

The choices you make moment by moment determine the direction and momentum of your Christian walk and how quickly you grow and serve God.

The Bible Says

■ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Eph 2:10

■ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

1 John 1:5-7

■ And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.

2 John 1:6

■ 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.

John 15:5

■ ... for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Phil 2:13

■ The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

Gal 5:19-21a

■ But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Gal 5:22-23a

■ The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Rom 13:12

Focused on Christ or focused on self

"For until men recognize that they owe everything to God, that they are nourished by His fatherly care, that He is the Author of their every good, that they should seek nothing beyond Him—they will never yield Him willing service. Nay, unless they establish their complete happiness in Him, they will never give themselves truly and sincerely to Him."

John Calvin

Finding a Christ-Centered Church

Not as easy as you might think

Bible teaching vs. human viewpoint

Often a strange surprise for the new believer is the abundance of very different churches and denominations, all of which profess to be Christian. If there is one true God and one Bible, why are there so many churches and so many denominations?

To God, His Church is one universal body of believers. This includes every person who has believed in Christ from Pentecost—when the Holy Spirit was first given and the church began—until the Rapture when all believers still on earth will be caught up to heaven. God's desire is for unity among His children and for all to obey Him by following His instructions in the Bible.

God commands us to meet together with other believers so we will be mutually built up and encouraged in our faith. Don't let the diversity of churches confuse or discourage you. Many Christians are at different stages in their spirituality, and as such have unique needs for that stage of growth or level of understanding.

Guidelines

Look for a church that is rooted in the entirety of God's Word and that manifests His love through the actions of its members. Choose a church that teaches from the Bible as the inspired, inerrant, authoritative Word of God. A church that only teaches "feel-good" messages or entertains lacks the challenging, unchanging truth of God.

It's All About Love

A church should manifest unity and love between all who attend. Fellowship between members should be sincere and driven by love for God and each other. There is power when believers come together in the Holy Spirit to

worship God. This includes Christ-centered preaching and Bible study, singing to God, reading God's Word, learning life application, or sharing testimonies of God working in our lives—it should all be for God's glory.

Avoid Compromises

When finding a church to call home, look at the church's doctrinal statement. Do they accept the entire Word of God as the inerrant Scripture that it is? If they do not teach a literal interpretation of the entire Bible, it will be difficult for you to grow in your Christian life.

Some examples of false teachings might be: compromising with evolution over the biblical account of creation, denying the Deity of Jesus Christ, denying the

Trinity of God or denying the truth of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone. Compromising with any sin that the Bible condemns is another red flag.

Other Questions You Can Ask

1. Is there an emphasis on rituals that must be performed without any teaching about their significance to your spiritual life?
2. Do you feel pressured to give money? Churches need funds to continue ministering, but an emphasis on asking for money might indicate a lack of understanding of the grace of God. Teachings that money will heal disease or cause financial prosperity conflict with God's grace and mercy in our lives.
3. Is the congregation giving glory to God or emphasizing a person or an agenda?
4. Is there a culture of entertainment rather than a focus on learning the Bible? Some think of church as a place to go to talk with friends and meet new people. Does the



Finding a church with the right focus is vital to spiritual growth.

music rely more on performance than the heart of praise poured out towards God? When church becomes a show, the members may engage in an event, but may not engage God. As Jesus said, "These people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Matthew 15:8).

5. Does the church outline a set of rules and regulations not explicitly stated in the Bible?
6. Does the church understand and use the powerful weapons of the Word, prayer and the filling of the Holy Spirit?

Learning and Living

The teaching you hear should help you understand God and the Bible. It should help you learn to live as God wants you to. The pastor may occasionally make applications to help you discern God's opinion of current events, but that should not be the main emphasis.

The Pastor/Minister

The pastor/minister should be a Christian with the spiritual gift of pastor-teacher and not a new believer. Ideally, he will teach in an organized way through the Bible. If only certain verses are picked out and others skipped, you might miss

the complete counsel of God. The pastor's life should reflect true Bible teaching. Of course, no one is perfect, even after salvation, but God holds pastors to a higher standard as they are shepherds of His flock.

Avoid false teachers who redefine God, redefine Christ, or redefine the gospel to their own ideas. Jesus warned of this in Matthew 24:24. Paul said in Galatians 1:8 that anyone who preaches a false gospel is to be condemned.

Sharing the Joy of Christ

A church should be a place you are excited about attending. The atmosphere should be friendly, with an abundance of praise and thanksgiving and the name of Jesus elevated above every other name.

The church should be a place where the passionate pursuit of Christ results in your spiritual growth. The motivation of each member should be love. The goal of the church should be the glorification of God. Such a church will be a blessing to your spiritual life and growth.

The results will be a greater love of God, an intimate personal relationship with Him, a peace that surpasses all understanding and a joy inexpressible.

Church doctrinal statements

WHEN YOU UNITE with a church family, you must know that its beliefs and practices are in alignment with God Himself. Only then can you be at peace knowing that the church will nurture your growth in Christ. Basic tenets of Christianity include:

The Bible is God's self-revelation: The Holy Scriptures are the inspired Word of God, authoritative, inerrant and God breathed.

There is one God eternally existing in three persons: The Father, Jesus Christ the Son (fully God and man) and the Holy Spirit. They are often called the Trinity.

Man was created in the image of God; and when Adam sinned, man inherited a sinful nature and was alienated from God.

Salvation is by grace alone through faith in Christ alone and His shed blood at the cross.

The Church is the body of Christ and points others to saving grace in Jesus Christ and provides spiritual growth and fellowship.

The believers' eternal security is assured.

Jesus Christ will return to Earth to rule and reign for one thousand years.

Instant Insights

■ The Bible is the focus and guide for all faith and practices.

■ The glory of God is the motivation of all the church's ministries and the focus is upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

■ All effective ministry is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

■ The church must be grace oriented.

■ Prayer should be a major component of the church.

■ On matters where the Bible is clear, the church must never compromise. Where the Bible is silent, a church should allow freedom for individual interpretation.

■ It is through God's Word that an individual, as well as a church, grows and flourishes. Music, programs, prayer and fellowship enrich that experience.

■ A balanced church teaches the whole realm of God's Word.

■ A church's statement of faith, as well as the body of teaching, should be clear and reflect what God's Word actually says.

■ The Bible is God's self revelation. It is flawless and stands firm in the heavens forever. It cannot be changed, but must be taught as authoritative and inerrant.

■ Jesus Christ should be preeminent and passionately pursued through fellowship, singing, giving and teaching.

■ A Christ-centered church should be a place where believers recognize they have been forgiven and restored and are no longer condemned.

■ A church should be a place where you are encouraged to grow spiritually through the teaching of God's Word, find meaningful fellowship with other believers and experience peace and joy in the presence of God.

Not all churches are focused on Christ

"A good church is a Bible-centered church. Nothing is as important as this—not a large congregation, a witty pastor, or tangible experiences of the Holy Spirit."

Alistair Begg

Nourishment for Your Soul

The well of the Word

Turmoil to tranquility

Because you are God's child, He desires the very best for you ... and only He knows what that really is. Growing in trust and obedience until His will becomes your will is the spiritual growth that matures each Christian.

God's Goal

The goal that God sets before every one of His children is to become Christ-like. Our greatest goal in this world should be for Christ to live in and through us (Colossians 1:27). Christ wants us to hunger for this awesome way of living, but many of us are indifferent to Christ's plans for our lives.

Before spiritual growth can become a reality, you must have the motivation for such growth. Seeking spiritual progress is a choice each person has to make for himself. Once you have made the decision to grow, you must do whatever is necessary to maintain that growth.

Body and Soul

What is true for our physical bodies is also true for our souls. Two things are necessary for growth. The first is spiritual food, the kind God provides in His Word to nourish our souls. There can be no growth without the "soul food" of His Word.

The second is exercise. Our spiritual life will not flourish with food alone: our new-found faith must be exercised. We must use the perspective of God that we learn from the Bible and apply it in our daily living.

Soul Growth

As we progress, we will be tested on what we have learned to assure that our spiritual muscles are developing. This testing can be painful, but God has promised to uphold us no matter what we face. Spiritual strength is not strength in ourselves but dependence on God.

As your soul grows in knowledge of God,

you will naturally desire to exercise faith toward Him by looking to Him for help with your problems and asking Him to lead you through whatever life brings you.

A Great Enemy

One of the greatest enemies of your spiritual life and growth is apathy. It is easy for a busy day to pass by without making time to come to God in a thoughtful and purposeful way. Fellowship with God each day should be your highest priority. The normal and necessary things of life (as well as the unexpected) will command all your time and

focus unless you are disciplined in coming to God regularly in prayer, praise and Bible study.

Your Choice

Strive to use your time wisely. Whether you realize it or not, you are always making the decision to strengthen your soul or to let it weaken. Are you filling it with the empty things of the world such as mindless entertainment or with the wonderful answers and deep truths of God's Word? Nourish your soul with God's Word and avoid the distractions of the world.

God has bought you at a great price. You have freedom of choice to do whatever you want, but you will not experience His joy and



The Bible is the mind of Christ and represents His thinking.

Soul food for the ages

"Without the message of the Scriptures we would have nothing with which to encourage one another. We would have no purpose for meeting together. Our knowledge of God would be so limited we would have no rational object for our faith, no doctrine on which to build our hope, and no way of even knowing the meaning of genuine love."

Gene Getz

fulfillment unless your decisions are according to His will. Happiness is our response to circumstances and is unreliable, while joy can only come from God and can be yours even under the most difficult circumstances. In the Gospels, Jesus told people to follow Him more often than He asked them to believe on Him.

God is Always with You

As you travel the inevitable bumpy roads in life, never forget that God is traveling with you. Many times He is carrying you through. He wants to lead you through everything life brings your way.

His greatest desire is for you to love and trust Him. Whatever comes into your life never catches God by surprise so you can trust Him in any, every and all circumstances. It is more important to be in God's will in an unpleasant circumstance than to be without Him in a pleasant circumstance.

Perfect Contentment

So many people in the world are chasing after happiness, trying to control circumstances and arrange situations to bring them satisfaction and success. In the end, as Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes, the world only offers us

emptiness. Only through connecting with God and trusting in Him will we find the contentment and fulfillment for which our souls thirst.

Sufficient in God

We will all face suffering and adversity, but our relationship with God will make everything an experience of blessing and growth if we learn to trust Him in every aspect of our lives. He has given us resources in His Word and in His holy presence to overcome anything we face. In the process of spiritual growth, we become evidence to the world of the sufficiency of God's grace and love.

God's Priorities

As you grow in your relationship with God and as you nourish your soul with His precious Word, you will find your thinking is changing. Your priorities will no longer be those that the world considers important. As you apply the perspective of God to the problems that come into your life, people around you will notice.

They will see your demeanor, your peace and your trusting attitude that does not panic under pressure. You will then become the gracious testimony God has designed you to be to those who do not yet know Him.

Intertwined paths to spiritual growth	
The Bible	Regular, personal daily reading and study
Church	Regular attendance at a Bible-believing church
Audio ministries	Many churches and groups have very fine audio ministries
Radio & TV	Solid Bible-teaching ministries are available in many places
Books	Carefully selected books can greatly aid spiritual growth
Meetings	Seminars and conferences with solid Bible teaching
Fellowship	Interaction with Christian friends can help with spiritual growth

Instant Insights

- The Word of God must become a priority in your life. Don't let things in life choke out time in the Word.
- God does not share His glory with any person or thing.
- Jesus Christ must not just be important in your life—He has to be preeminent.
- The Bible is the infallible Word of God.
- The Bible is the only rule of faith and practice.
- There is no additional revelation given to man beyond the Bible.
- No one has any spiritual knowledge apart from the Bible. Devote yourself to it.
- Scripture determines theology—nothing else—not our experiences, rationalizations or any other outside influences.
- Any theology contradictory to the Bible is wrong. You can stand very confidently upon the Bible and what it says.
- Often the world's priorities (unbiblical viewpoint) will keep you from God. A biblical viewpoint will draw you closer to God.
- God's truth is hiding in plain sight. It's all around you. All you have to do is embrace it and live it.
- You cannot come to God or serve Him on your own terms.
- You must dump the baggage in your life. Don't hold onto past sins, hurts, guilt. Forgive yourself and others. Do things God's way.
- Let the pure wisdom of the Word soothe your soul.
- Savor every moment God has given you every day.

The Bible—A Short History

Truths that leap into your life

God reveals Himself to us

The Bible is the greatest document ever written. It is unique among all other books in existence. And well it should be, for the words in the Bible are the very words of God. It is His self-revelation to the world that He created. The Bible tells us, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Inspired by God

We speak of “inspired by God” as the power by which God the Holy Spirit supervised and motivated the authors of Scripture so that they recorded exactly what God wanted to say through them. God’s inspiration extended to the very words of the original manuscripts written by those through whom God chose to speak.



The book that has changed more lives in history than any other.

written in different places: in the wilderness, in a dungeon, outdoors, in palaces, while traveling, in prison and while in exile. It was written in times of war and sacrifice and in times of peace and prosperity.

It was written from the heights of joy to the depths of sorrow and despair; during periods of certainty and conviction as well as during days of confusion and doubt. It was written on three different continents: Asia, Africa and Europe. The writers communicated in three main languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. They also utilized more than fourteen different literary styles. The Bible is an instruction manual addressing virtually every subject concerning day-to-day living. Miraculously, despite its different authors, time periods and styles of writing, the Bible is completely noncontradictory and absolutely consistent in its message.

Faith and History

Without the Bible, we cannot know the absolute standard of righteousness God outlined in the Old Testament nor the need for grace in our lives made clear throughout the New Testament. God chose to have His words written down so that His standards would be clear. The written Word is accepted by faith and proven by history. Man speaks to God through prayer. God primarily speaks to man through His written Word.

Original Languages

The great majority of people use translations of the Bible from the original languages of Scripture. Most of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew; however, some portions were

written in a sister language to Hebrew called Aramaic, which was the language spoken by most of the Jews at the time these books were written. The vast majority of the New Testament is written in Koine (common) Greek.

The chapter and verse breaks were added to the original manuscripts after initial inspiration to make it easier to find various passages. Thus, they are not inspired by God, but they do serve a valuable purpose in helping us to understand how these sections have been traditionally understood.

Miraculous Survival

The Bible has made it through persecution, criticism, attempts to completely do away with it and all sorts of natural disasters throughout the past 3,500 years. The Bible has survived intact and uncompromised. Not one solid piece of evidence has surfaced to discredit the theme or teachings and people of the Bible in 2,000 years. The only evidence of “error” has been in minor textual variants (spelling inconsistencies or something of the like, perhaps as a result of errors by scribes) but not one of these variants compromises a doctrinal foundation of Christianity.

Inspired Word of God

Every single part of the Bible is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16–17), and is thus profitable and, in fact, vital for our spiritual growth. Inspiration is more than human genius, illumination and revelation because it is divinely initiated. It is “God’s thinking” expressing itself through a human personality.

The Living Word of God

The Bible is the written revelation of the Living Word of God—our Lord Jesus Christ. “Revelation” means to give new information. The written Word is not the Living Word; it is the divine description of the Lord Jesus

Christ (Hebrews 4:12; John 5:39–47). “Illumination” occurs when the Holy Spirit, at work inside us, makes “revelation” understandable.

The paper and ink do not, in themselves, contain spiritual power. The power behind the paper and ink is the Spirit of God making an inestimable difference in people’s lives. To view the words as powerful in and of themselves, without seeing the Divine Author (Hebrews 12:2), would be to miss the point entirely.

Unique in its History

The number of Bibles sold reaches into the billions. More copies have been produced in its entirety, as well as portions of its text, than any other book in history. The Bible, or portions of it, has been translated into more than 2,200 languages, representing the primary vehicles of communication of well over 90 percent of the world’s population.

Unique in its Survival

Compared with other ancient writings, the Bible has more manuscript evidence to support it than any ten pieces of classic literature combined. In fact, the texts of Shakespeare are far more uncertain after 280 years than the Bible is after about 1,900 years. We have more than 5,600 original language manuscripts of the New Testament. Its closest competitor, Homer’s *Iliad*, has 643. We have only seven original manuscripts of *any* of Aristotle’s works.

Unique in its Influence

In one way or another, the Bible has influenced the entire world. We measure time based on the birth of Christ. The references to the Bible in secular texts are so extensive that even if every Bible on earth was destroyed, the Bible could be restored in all of its essential parts by those references alone.

Bible Facts

The Bible was written:

- Over a span of approximately 1,600 years
- By more than 40 authors
- In different times
- In different places
- Under different circumstances
- On three continents
- In three languages
- In a wide variety of literary styles
- The Bible addresses multitudes of controversial subjects
- In spite of its diversity, the Bible presents a single unfolding story: God’s glorification of Himself through His redemption of man
- Among all the people described in the Bible, the leading character is the one, true, living God

The Bible is unique:

- In its continuity
- In its circulation
- In its translation
- In its survival: through time, persecution and criticism
- In its teachings: prophecy, history, character and revelation
- In its influence on literature
- In its influence on civilization

The Bible contains:

- The mind of God/Christ
- The state of mankind
- The doom of the sinner
- The way of salvation
- The joy of the believer
- The instructions for living a godly life

The Bible is the Word of God written in such a way that when the Bible speaks, God speaks

“The Bible has proven to be more historically and archaeologically accurate than any other ancient book. It has been subjected to the minutest scientific textual analysis possible to humanity and has been proven to be authentic in every way.”

The Institute for Creation Research

How to Study the Bible

God's instruction manual

The mind of Christ revealed

There are three ways to read the Bible—for pleasure, encouragement and for spiritual growth. The Bible is an amazing book, full of truth, stories, prophecies and great advice. But more importantly, it's God's revelation of Himself. He wants you to know Him—personally and intimately. Keep that as your overarching goal in your study.

Daily Devotions

Your goal should not be to read the Bible as quickly as you can, but to read daily and discover the mind of Christ—so God's thinking will become your thinking. Spend time thinking how these words of God apply to your situation that day. You might read the same passage

on two different days and learn completely different lessons. This is how God is speaking to you in every situation where you find yourself. There is only one correct translation of any verse, but there may be many applications.

He gives us His words to encourage and draw us nearer to Him. If we do not give a high priority to Bible study each day, we lose out.

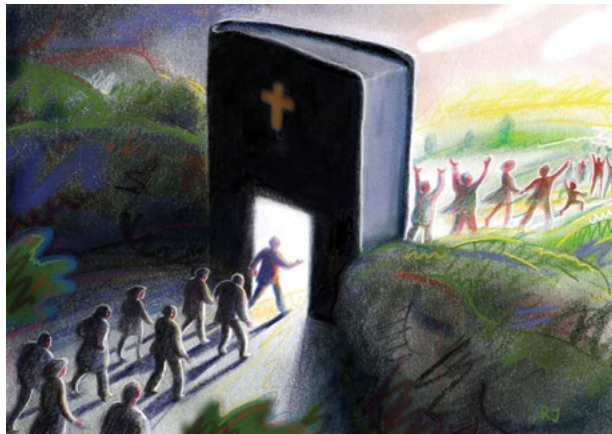
Bible Study is Vital

Studying the Word under a good Bible teacher or pastor is vital to the Christian walk. Studying the Scripture on your own daily is also vital to grow your relationship with God.

It's God's Time

Always approach God in prayer, with clean hands (all sins confessed) and a pure heart.

Clear your mind and set aside the distractions of daily living. Leave the world behind as you enter respectfully into a study of God's Word. Read the words of God in the Bible as you would a letter from a loved one that is far away. Take your time, reading and rereading, with the goal of understanding the meaning and intent. This is the inspired Word of God; seek out the message God has for you.



No one has any spiritual knowledge apart from the Bible. Scripture determines theology—not what we experience.

about it and ask God for wisdom in understanding as you delve deeper into the scriptures. He will make it clear to you in His time. God brings insight to your soul as you meditate on His Word and pray.

Keep a Journal

Underline important verses, memorize them or copy them into a journal. Or you can make a list of the commands God has given to all believers in the Epistles of the New Testament.

If you want to understand God better, look for what God is telling you about Himself, His purposes and His ways in every passage you read. After you read a section, ask: "What does this tell me about the character of God? What does it tell me about what God likes or dislikes? What does this tell me about how God works?"

The Power of the Spirit

The most important way to ensure you get the most out of your time in God's Word is to depend on the ministry of God the Holy Spirit to help you understand. When you come to a passage you don't understand, pray

Is there a direct command from God for me in this passage?"

Writing out verses is a great way to remember what God is teaching you. As you read, if you notice a promise that God has given to believers, write it down in a promise journal. According to one count there are over 7,000 promises in the Bible. They are there for you to claim before God. In a time of testing, discouragement or doubt, just taking out this notebook and reading it again will renew your spirit. We are finite creatures; we need constant reminders even when we think we already know God's Word.

Bible Prayers

If you notice a prayer that Jesus, Solomon, David or Paul prayed to God, write that down as well so you have examples of prayer. The Book of Psalms gives us wonderful examples for prayer and praise. The book

of Proverbs gives great insight and wisdom for everyday living.

A Book at a Time

In general the New Testament will seem easier to understand than the Old Testament at first. Choose an individual book to study. Each book is more easily understood if you know more about it. Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What is it about? What was going on at the time? Why was it written? Many people recommend starting with the Gospel of John and alternating with the Book of Psalms and the Book of Proverbs.

Meditate—and Thank

Take time to meditate on what you have learned after you study, and pray, thanking God for what He has taught you. Finally, encourage one another by sharing God's Word with each other.

Powerful study tools

Learn how to use Bible study tools! There are many reliable study Bibles and commentaries. A *Study Bible* will have extensive footnotes helping to explain and cross reference passages.

A *Commentary* will give you some background or historical context to a passage or a book, as well as an expert Bible teacher's interpretation of the passage.

A *Bible Dictionary* will provide expanded definitions for biblical words, names and places.

A *Concordance* will tell you where every word in the Bible is found, helping you build categorical concepts. For example, you could look up fear, or righteousness and see every place it's used in the Bible.

The Internet makes research quite easy. Some free sites include: soniclight.com, biblegateway.org, blueletterbible.org, biblehub.com and bible.org.

Step-by-step to growing in the Word

■ Prayer is essential before beginning any study of God's Word. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead and guide you before you open the Bible to study.

■ Be consistent. Set aside a regular time every day to study. Try to find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed so that you can concentrate on what you are reading.

■ The first step in Bible study is observation. Read the text. Carefully read, and re-read the text several times. Determine what the Holy Spirit through the human author of Scripture is trying to communicate to you.

■ Don't try to understand one verse of Scripture without reading the entire paragraph or the entire chapter. You may even need to read corresponding or parallel passages of Scripture

to gain more knowledge of what is being taught.

■ Ask questions.

Who is writing this Scripture?

To whom is it written?

What is happening?

What does it say?

What does it mean?

What is the author's intent?

What is the historical context?

What are the doctrines or principles being put forth?

Why is it important?

■ Keep in mind the Bible is an ancient document, so it's likely many of the customs may seem strange. This is where a concordance, Bible dictionaries, commentaries and Bible encyclopedias come in. These help

you dig into the culture and customs of the time. The customs are not what's being taught; it's about learning the lesson being presented.

■ The goal of Bible study is personal spiritual growth and the glorification of God. Be patient, don't try to do too much too quickly. Set small realistic goals with a view towards a greater goal. Highlight or underline passages of Scripture that speak to you. It can be especially helpful to keep a notebook for recording important passages such as God's promises.

■ Now comes application. How do you apply the Scripture to your life so that you may grow spiritually? The Holy Spirit may speak to your heart and bring to mind things that relate to what you're reading and show you what can apply to your life.

Growing in the Word helps you know God, yourself, others and the world

"We also need a regular systematic study of the Scriptures. We cannot maintain our spiritual life without it any more than we can maintain our physical bodies without proper nourishment."

G. Campbell Morgan

Who is God?

Fathoming the unfathomable

God's marvelous attributes

God wants us to know Him personally, to know His character (which theologians call attributes) and to live a life that reflects that knowledge. Our understanding of God from general revelation is limited. It takes the special revelation of both the Bible and Christ to know Him the way He wants to be known.

With our finite minds it is impossible for us to know everything about an infinite God. But the Bible

does reveal what God wants us to know about Him. The Bible tells us what He is like. It is important to understand that all of God's attributes are infinite; without limits. They have no beginning, no end, and they don't ever change. None of His attributes work independently of any other one. They all work in conjunction with each other.

God Revealed in Christ

In the Bible we learn that God sent His Son to reveal His character to us. By learning about Christ, we are learning about God. Growing in grace and the knowledge



We are to worship God in spirit and in truth.

of Christ strengthens our faith and conforms us to His image, changing the way we think, act, talk and live. It is the application of what you learn that causes spiritual growth.

Priority Focus

The more we know and understand God, the more we will appreciate what He has done for us, and the more we will love Him.

God is not like man, as you will see. The Bible tells us in Isaiah 55:9 "For [as] the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

To successfully fulfill God's plan for our lives we need to understand who He is and what He is like. To accomplish this we need to focus on the person and work of Jesus Christ. He must not be merely important in our life, but He must be pre-eminent. If we make God our highest priority the truth of His Word will become a reality, and our faith will grow; the Holy Spirit will work in our lives and we will learn to depend on God and trust Him completely.

God is Sovereign — God's divine will is above every will; He is always in control

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD is supreme. It is the biblical principle that all things are under His control. He has absolute and indisputable authority as ruler over all His creation. His rule is both universal and eternal. Whatever God wills will come to pass. There isn't anything or anyone who can thwart the plan of God. He, as creator, is king and ruler over all His creation.

God works all things according to His purpose; this includes everything that happens

in the world. As the creator of all things, nothing happens outside His direct or permissive will. Yet God still allows man the freedom to choose and exercise his own free will. God is truly and perfectly sovereign and no one has ever or will ever successfully challenge His supremacy. We can take comfort in knowing that even when bad things happen in the world, we can be at peace in the knowledge that He will work all things together for His good purpose.

If we know this to be true, then we should be able, in the midst of the most difficult circumstances, in the darkest time of our lives, to give thanks to Him. Only when we acknowledge His sovereignty and yield ourselves to it can we rest, knowing that we occupy the only safe place in the universe—the center of His will.

Ps 135:6
Isa 46:9–10
Dan 4:34b

John 5:21
Eph 1:11
1 Tim 6:13–16
Rev 19:16

God is Righteous — He always does what is right and perfect; He can do no wrong

GOD IS ABSOLUTE RIGHTEOUSNESS. His righteousness is the natural and eternal expression of His holiness. He is perfect goodness. It is impossible for Him to do anything wrong. There is no flaw in God's character; He is completely and infinitely pure and free from any sin or error.

God's righteousness makes Him distinct from all His creation. He is exalted above all in infinite glory. Because God is righteous all His actions directed toward us are fair. He consistently acts in accord with His divine

character. He is absolutely righteous both in His person and His ways.

Because He is perfect and right, His plan is perfect and right. If we understand this, then we should realize that whatever He does or allows in our lives is perfect because it is part of His perfect plan and His perfect person. If we know that He never makes mistakes, we can be thankful in all things.

Because Christ paid the penalty for our sin, God shares His righteousness with all those

who believe in the work of His Son—without compromising His righteousness. We can take comfort in this, knowing that believers have fellowship with God eternally because we share the righteousness of Christ as a free gift.

Righteousness is a characteristic of God, which sets Him apart from the rest of His creation. He alone is holy and worthy of our adoration.

Ps 11:7
Ps 71:19
Isa 5:16

John 17:25
Acts 3:14
Rom 3:21–26

God is Love — God's love is perfect and never increases, diminishes or changes

GOD IS LOVE. He does not just love, it is who He is. It is a divine attribute of His infinite perfect Being. God's love is eternal; it has always existed. His love never changes; it doesn't diminish or increase, but always remains constant.

The love that God extends to us is not based on our goodness or integrity. God's love can't be earned, lost, or compromised, because it doesn't depend upon anything we do. His love is based on His holiness, His goodness

and His unlimited benevolence.

His love for us is unconditional, unalterable, and infinite. It is a Divine passion for the ultimate good of men. It is not passive; it is active. It is not casual; it is sacrificial. God's love is exemplified in John 3:16 and Romans 5:8.

It was the love of God that provided the plan for our salvation. His plan called for a sacrifice, not for those who loved Him or sought

Him, but for those who were His enemies.

It is His continuing love for us that sustains us, blesses us, and provides our every need. When the love of God becomes a reality to us, we know that no matter how lonely, isolated, or forsaken we feel, it is His loving-kindness that sustains us.

Exod 34:6
Deut 7:9
Ps 33:5

John 3:16–17
Rom 8:38–39
1 John 4:16

God is Just — God is absolutely fair; It is impossible for Him to do anything unfair

GOD IS ABSOLUTELY JUST. He will never do anything unfair or wrong. The justice of God means He is absolutely correct in every word and action. Everything He does in regards to us is justified and righteous.

He is justified in condemning and judging sin. He is also justified in removing that condemnation from those who place their faith in Jesus Christ and rewarding those who obey His commands and fulfill His purpose. He is fair in judging and punishing evil. And

fair in disciplining His children who have strayed from His Word. Every word from God and every action He takes has a purpose and is perfectly just.

God treats everyone the same, rich or poor, man, woman or child, black, white, yellow or brown. He does not play favorites. God's justice also means that He hates seeing people being treated unjustly. God will judge between right and wrong. He will administer justice in accordance with His standards.

You can face whatever unfairness or injustice you encounter knowing that an all-powerful God is in control. God's justice allows you to have peace when you are dealing with difficulties in your life or witnessing painful injustice. You can be confident that His justice will ultimately prevail. Understanding God's justice should give us the constant assurance that even if the world treats us unfairly, God will always treat us fairly.

Ps 97:2
Isa 30:18

1 Pet 1:17
Luke 18:6–8
Gen 18:25

God is Eternal — He has always existed and always will exist

GOD HAD NO beginning and He will have no end. He has always existed. God is not a created being. He doesn't need anyone or anything to sustain Him. He created all things. Before the creation of the universe, there was no matter, no space, no time. At the beginning of time, God created all things. God is infinite and unlimited. Time does not limit God or change Him in any way.

God created time, yet He exists outside of time. Therefore, the past, the present and the

future are all equally knowable to Him. He knows all things, the actual and every possibility. God always sees everything from the eternal perspective. The future is as certain to Him as the past. He always has our welfare in view, not only for time, but also for eternity.

God is said to be transcendent and immanent. It is in His immanence that He chooses to draw near His creation. With God there is no succession of events. With Him the past, present and future are simultaneous and

knowable. He has known all things forever.

Because God is eternal He is able to offer us eternal life. We can have absolute confidence that what He has promised us in His Word will come to pass. We will abide in His presence forever.

Ps 90:2
Isa 40:28
1 Chr 16:36

1 Tim 1:17
Rom 16:25-27
Col 1:17

God is Omniscient — God has always known everything—past, present and future

ALL KNOWLEDGE BELONGS to God. He knows all things past, present and future, everything actual and everything possible. He also understands all things. He has known and understood everything forever. He cannot be confused or surprised.

God knows everything that is knowable. God does not need to learn. He has known all things eternally. God knows everything that has happened and everything that will happen. Nothing is new to God. When we

understand that God is omniscient, then the greater our confidence will be when we know that a wisdom greater than our own is in control of every circumstance and situation.

God knew us and had a plan for our lives before we were born. He knows us better than we know ourselves. Matthew 10:30 tells us that even the hairs on our head are numbered by God. He knows not only what we do and think, but also why we act and think as we do. He knows the thoughts and

intentions of our hearts. Because of God's deep knowledge of you, His plan for your life is absolutely perfect.

We can take comfort in God's omniscience. Everything that happens to us, fair or unfair, He always knew. God's omniscience is in perfect harmony with all God is and with all His attributes.

Job 28:24
Ps 139:1-6
1 Sam 2:3

1 John 3:19-20
Acts 15:8
Heb 4:13

God is Omnipotent — He is infinitely, awesomely powerful

GOD IS ALL-POWERFUL. He is able to do whatever He wills; anything that is intrinsically possible to do. He is able to do everything that is consistent and in harmony with His infinite perfections.

He is able to accomplish everything that He wills, but He never abuses His power, and He never wills to accomplish anything contrary to His holy nature.

One of the names for God is "the Almighty." Because He is almighty all things are pos-

sible. Everything God decrees will happen because He has the power to perform whatever He decrees.

Every promise God has made will be fulfilled in time. We can be confident that what is stated in His Word will come to pass. We never need to doubt His ability to answer our prayers, or provide our needs.

God's plan for our lives is a supernatural plan, but we can accomplish all He desires because He has provided us with a super-

natural power, the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit. God's power would be a source of great fear if it did not work in conjunction and harmony with all the rest of His characteristics. However, God's desire for us is peace and joy, and He has the power to provide for our greatest needs.

Jer 32:17
Ps 135:6
Gen 18:14

Rev 19:6
John 1:3
Rom 1:20

God is Omnipresent — He fills the entire universe and is always present in our lives

GOD IS ALWAYS in all places. The entire essence of God permeates and penetrates the universe at all times. This means He can see and hear everything all the time and is always present every moment of our lives. His presence is never divided or diminished, never changed or compromised. All of God's attributes are infinite. He is not limited to any one place. He is not only with you every step you take, but He also indwells you. This can be a source of great joy and comfort.

Because God is all powerful, all present and independent of time, He always has time for everyone. He can give full attention to each of us as if we were the only person on earth.

He is always present in every circumstance in our lives and knows our thoughts. We are indwelt by all three Members of the Trinity.

There is no place we can go where God is not already there, nor can we hide from Him. He sees everything we do. We can take comfort in this, knowing that God sees all and is there

for us, giving us His full attention.

We can remember God is with us always and His will for us is to be obedient and do good, but He understands our weaknesses and is always there to guide us back to Him. When we understand this, then we know with absolute certainty that we are never alone, never outside the sphere of His love.

Jer 23:24
Ps 139:3-10
Prov 15:3

Matt 28:20
Eph 1:22-23
John 14:17

God is Immutable — He has never changed and never will change

GOD NEVER CHANGES. He can neither increase nor decrease. His essence and attributes will always remain the same, no matter what.

He is the same today as He was yesterday, and He will be the same forever. God's nature does not change nor does His character. Understanding this, we can rest in the fact that no matter how inconsistent, unstable or undependable we are, God will always be consistent, stable and dependable.

Even if we change, He will not. What He has been, He always will be. Knowing that God does not change provides us with a spiritual and moral anchor in an ever-changing world.

Should we feel like He does not understand us or cannot help us, we can ignore our feelings because we know He never changes.

Like God, His Word never changes either. "Your Word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens" (Psalm 119:89). Times may

change and cultures may change, but God's Word is truth, our consistent and trustworthy guide. If we live according to God's will and purpose, He will faithfully deliver us through every trial we face. "... If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself" (2 Timothy 2:13).

Ps 33:11
1 Sam 15:29
Mal 3:6

Heb 13:8
Rom 11:29
Heb 1:12

God is Truth — He is absolute truth and we can always depend upon His Word

GOD IS TRUTH itself. It is who He is. It is impossible for God to lie; He is always truthful and faithful to us. Therefore, we can rely on His Word as true.

The Bible is God's self-revelation of truth to man. We can rely on the Bible and its promises to us as being absolute truth; without error. Since it is impossible for God to lie, we know that everything God tells us about the future will actually take place.

We can trust that what God says He'll do, He will do. He says in His Word that those who

trust Jesus as their Savior will have eternal life. We don't need to look for other means of salvation. He has provided the one true way, and we can trust Him because it violates His very nature to lie.

Christians have the perfect defense against error. We have to become so familiar with the truth, as revealed by God's Word, that when we are confronted with error, it is easily discerned. When we humbly and dependently allow the Spirit to teach us, we will know the truth.

Without God there is no absolute truth. Truth in the world comes from the character of God, and we as individual followers of Christ need to be truthful witnesses to the world. Truth does not depend on our opinion; it depends on God. If God says it, that settles it—it's a true and trustworthy statement.

Ps 33:4, 31:5
Num 23:19
Ps 100:5, 119:160

John 14:6
1 John 5:6
Rev 19:11

The Trinity

All in one, one in all

The ultimate support group

**One
subject we
will never
fully
understand**

As you continue your walk with the Lord, you'll hear the word "Trinity" used to describe God. Interestingly, this particular word is not found in the Bible. But just because it is not does not mean it is not a biblical concept.

The word is derived from the Latin word "trinitas" which means the number three or threefold and is used to describe the threefold nature of God.

Three in One

If you split the word "trinity" into two parts: "tri-unity" you can see that it means three in unity. This is what the Trinity is: one Holy God who eternally exists as three distinct but equal persons, Father, Son and Spirit, who are each fully and equally God. This is not a perfect explanation but it is a means for us to gain some understanding of God.

We will never fully understand the Trinity because our finite minds simply cannot grasp the infinite. But it is a biblical principle found in Scripture and can be accepted by faith by using the reasoned logic of God's Word.

One Triune God

The Trinity consists of three distinct persons, not three separate gods. They coexist in perfect unity. The Bible tells us repeatedly that there is one true God, only one. Each Member of the Trinity is distinct and each contains the

fullness of God, not just a part of the divine nature. Each is co-infinite, co-equal and co-eternal possessing all the attributes of God, some of which are: sovereignty, righteousness, justice, love, eternal life, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience, immutability and veracity.

Biblical Proof of the Trinity

Evidence for the threefold nature of God is found throughout Scripture. The Triune God created the world. In Genesis 1:2 you see the Holy Spirit "hovering over the waters." In Genesis 1:1 you can see that the Father is the source of creation. John 1:3 shows that all things were created by the Son. Each Member of the Trinity has a different role. Creation is from the Father through the Son and is revealed by the Holy Spirit.

The Father is God

God the Father, called theologically the first person of the Trinity, is the Author of the plan for man's salvation and spiritual journey. He planned salvation for us and gave His perfect and only Son for us (John 3:16). He has a perfect plan for both time and eternity

(Romans 8:28-29; 2 Corinthians 5:8).

The Son is God

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the only person of the Godhead that has been manifested or seen.



Pure white light is composed of red, green and blue.

OUR FINITE HUMAN minds will never fully understand the concept of the Trinity. We have to resort to analogies to help understand it, but this one is commonly used.

The basic color spectrum is made up of three primary colors: red, green and blue. The entire personhood of God is encompassed in the pure white light, encompassing the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Pure white light has three forms: actinic, luminiferous and calorific. Actinic represents the Father, in that it can neither be seen nor felt. Luminiferous is both seen and felt, representing the Son, Jesus Christ. Calorific light can be felt but not seen, therefore representing the Holy Spirit.

He is an equal Member of the Triune Godhead and existed with Them from eternity past. Jesus is both God and man in one person. The Deity of Christ is eternal, but the humanity of Christ is finite, just like us. The Bible tells us "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14a). In John 8:58, you can hear Jesus telling the Jews that He existed before the great Jewish patriarch Abraham. The disciple Thomas called Jesus "My Lord and my God," in John 20:28. Titus 2:13 expresses that Jesus Christ is our great God and Savior. Peter's response to Jesus' question in Matthew 16:16 was, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

The Holy Spirit is God

The Holy Spirit is God as is attested to by the fact that He can think, feel and act. The Holy Spirit comforts, counsels and teaches. Indeed, it is He who will take the basic ideas in this book about the Triune Godhead and show you marvelous truths in the Bible, revealing to you personally the love and devotion God has for you. 2 Corinthians 3:17

shows us that the Lord is the Spirit, and in His Spirit, there is freedom. The Apostle Peter told Ananias that by lying to the Holy Spirit, He was in fact lying to God (Acts 5:3).

A Perfect, Loving and Unified Relationship

An amazing truth about the Trinity is that each member has pure love and delight in the others. Unconditional love exists between each member of the Trinity and is expressed in perfect unity. When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, all three members of the Godhead were present. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, the Holy Spirit rested on Him, and the Father in heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

It is in the inherent nature of the Triune God to have perfect love for each other. In the 17th chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus stated that all He has is the Father's, and all the Father has is His, illustrating the perfect unity of the Trinity.

God's greatest purpose in your life is to glorify Himself in and through you (John 17). He gives us

all we need to accomplish this. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit indwell every believer.

As a Christian, you have been adopted by the Father as His son or daughter. As a child of God you are heirs of God and coheirs with Christ (Romans 8:17a). You have been given the precious gift of the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit as a proof, or deposit, of this great and glorious future inheritance which will last for all eternity.

Total Equality

Jesus said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). In the "Great Commission" in Matthew 28:18-20 we are told: "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"

Each Member of the Trinity is Distinct Yet Contains the Fullness of God

Characteristic	Father	Son	Holy Spirit
Called God	Phil 1:2	John 1:1, 14; Col 2:9	Acts 5:3-4
The Creator	Isa 64:8	John 1:3; Col 1:15-17	Job 33:4, 26:13
Love	John 3:16	Eph 5:25	Rom 15:30
Eternal	Ps 90:2	Mic 5:1-2	Rom 8:11; Heb 9:14
Possesses A Will	Luke 22:42	Luke 22:42	1 Cor 12:11
Speaks	Matt 3:17	Luke 5:20, 7:48	Acts 8:29, 11:12, 13:2
Omniscient	1 John 3:20	John 16:30, 21:17	1 Cor 2:10-11
Omnipresent	1 Kgs 8:27	Matt 28:20	Ps 139:7-10
Life Giver	Gen 2:7; John 5:21	John 1:3, 5:21	2 Cor 3:6, 8
Indwells	2 Cor 6:16	Col 1:27; John 17:23	John 14:17
Fellowship	1 John 1:3	1 Cor 1:9	2 Cor 13:14; Phil 2:1
Sanctifies	1 Thess 5:23	Heb 2:11	1 Pet 1:2
Resurrects	1 Thess 1:10	John 2:19, 10:17	Rom 8:11
Searches Heart	Jer 17:10	Rev 2:23	1 Cor 2:10

Examples of Trinities

ANY EXAMPLE TRYING to explain the Trinity will always fall apart when taken far enough. With that said, here are four examples of trinities.

Triangle – An equilateral triangle has three sides, and if you remove any side it ceases to be a triangle.

An egg – Eggs have three parts: a shell, a yoke and the albumen.

Water – While water is one substance, it can appear in three different forms. It can be a liquid, or it can be frozen and become ice or if heated it can be steam.

Time – While time is continuous, it is made up of the past, the present and the future.

"Bring me a worm that can comprehend a man, and then I will show you a man that can comprehend the Triune God."

John Wesley

God the Father

The Author of the perfect plan

It includes you and me

**The Father
who never
fails**

Perhaps the best way to describe God the Father is to examine how He reveals Himself to us in His Word. In our study of the Trinity just completed, we noted that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit possess the same characteristics. Let us look at aspects of man's relationship with the Father in both the Old and New Testaments.

Old Testament Relationship

In the Old Testament, the Jews understood God as their Father, Abba. As their Father, they knew He was the beginning and the source of all things.

The Jews knew God was near them. He loved them and had a special tenderness toward them. They saw Him as gentle and kind, having a special concern for orphans and those who were abused. They depended on God to forgive them, to treat them in grace, and to guide them by His perfect wisdom. He clearly communicated all His expectations of them in His law given to them through Moses.

The Jews saw God as powerful and sovereign, but also considered Him to be capable of great wrath and punishment.

Revealed to Us by Jesus

Today we have Jesus to point us toward the Father. We don't see the Father (or the Holy Spirit) because they are unseen Members of the Godhead (John 1:18). But He is revealed to us by His Son, Jesus, who said "... Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9b). Jesus also said "If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well" (John 14:7a).

One God

Note that while there are distinctions between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, there is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4). Sometimes in Scripture it is difficult to distinguish which Member of the Trinity is referred to in any given verse. This difficulty should be expected and embraced because God cannot be separated or divided.

God is a Person

God wants to have a personal relationship with every member of the human race. But because of the vastness of His nature, He is only partially knowable. When He chooses to reveal Himself as "Father," He is telling us about Himself in a way we can understand. It is simply one aspect of who He is, but it does teach us something about how to relate to Him.

"Father" certainly does not give us a complete picture of Him that encompasses who He really is. However, just the title "Father" tells us much. The role of an earthly father is to protect, teach patiently, guide with wisdom, discipline gently, give comfort when hurting, provide for and above all love unconditionally. No human can do this perfectly, and some fail miserably—but God is the perfect Father and He never fails.

God is the Ideal Father

Our Heavenly Father is truly beyond comparison. He is the One Who can fill the void sometimes created by the shortcomings of our earthly existence. He adopts us as His children the moment we trust in Jesus Christ.

As our Father, God wants us to have a close and personal relationship with Him. The depth of our relationship is not limited by Him, but by our own unwillingness to open ourselves to Him and what He wants for us. Close relationships always involve honest disclosure, mutual communication and trust.

In the Bible, God has revealed all the information we need in order to maximize our relationship with Him. As we read and study our Bibles, we begin to understand His character. The depth of His love for each of us is reflected in His plan for our perfect fellowship with Him despite our pre-salvation sinfulness and total incompatibility with His holiness.

God imputed our sins to Jesus Christ on the cross and judged them so that we might have a restored relationship with Him. In the Father's perfect plan, He was willing to make this sacri-

fice for us. Jesus Christ was willing to obey His Father. He is our role model in obedience.

Talking to God

While God reveals Himself to us and communicates with us through His written Word, how do we talk to Him? We pray! Jesus explained the means of communicating with the Father in the model prayer of Matthew 6:9-13. Your Heavenly Father wants to hear from you about all of your concerns, praises, problems, heartaches, difficulties, decisions you are making, seeking His wisdom, giving thanks, intercessions for others, etc.

He Already Knows

Of course, He already knows everything and knew all about every situation you will ever encounter since eternity past—before it even happens. He wants you to place your faith in Him and trust Him to answer your prayers in a perfect way. 1 Peter 5:7 says, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." Never forget, God cares for you, and He knows your every need.

When we are honest with Him and let Him search our hearts, He will draw ever nearer to us into a companionship unlike anything on earth between human beings.

Worthy of Obedience

Fathers train and guide their children and, in turn, expect their children to listen and obey. If our earthly fathers deserve to be obeyed, how much more our Heavenly Father! (Ephesians 6:1). When we fail to obey, we may receive discipline—just as we would from our earthly father. But this is lovingly applied from a perfect Father.

Obedience in Love

If it takes love to obey, then what produces love? If you are tempted to disobey, what is it that will change your mind? It is love! But where does that

love come from? Understanding our identity in Christ creates love—the Spirit within us unleashes the love of Christ which awakens love from us in return.

When we consider the magnitude of the gift given us, the cost of the sacrifice to secure it and the unconditional love that provided it, our response should be obedient love.

See how John puts it in 1 John 4:19: "We love because he first loved us." Remembering this awakens love. Or, as Paul says in Romans 5:5a: "... God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

Worthy of Praise

God the Father is not only worthy to be obeyed, but to be praised and worshiped. We should humbly bow down before our Creator, the One who sustains us and blesses us. We should praise Him not only with words, but in everything we do. He demands all of our worship and praise—we are to give glory and honor to Him. Let us give all glory, honor and praise to Him who is worthy.

The Psalms are a beautiful example of God's worthiness and a wonderful example of praise.

7:17	72:19
9:1-2	86:12
13:6	99:3
18:46	103:1
28:7	104:33
30:4	118:28
33:1	139:14
52:9	145:2-3
66:2	145:21
71:8	150
71:23	

The Bible Says

■ 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.

1 Pet 1:3-5

■ How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

1 John 3:1a

■ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin.

1 John 1:5-8

■ It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us.

2 John 1:4

■ 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.

Rom 8:29

■ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Rom 15:13

■ And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.

2 John 1:6

"It is a sweet compound of faith that knows God to be my Father, love that loves Him as my Father, joy that rejoices in Him as my Father, fear that trembles to disobey Him because He is my Father and a confident affection and trustfulness that relies upon Him ... God of earth and heaven, is the Father of my heart."

C.H. Spurgeon

God the Son

His name is Jesus

Perfect God, perfect man

How can we know who Jesus Christ was and is? Did He really exist? Was He born of a virgin? Did He physically rise from the dead? Was He God in the flesh? If you listen to some people, you'll get different answers; not because of what the Bible actually says, but because of what they feel the Bible lacks.

Therefore, we must always depend upon Scripture. According to Scripture, Jesus Christ is the Messiah, second person of the Trinity, God in flesh (John 1: 14), who came to earth, was born under the law (Galatians 4:4), and was the perfect sacrifice for our sins (1 Peter 2:24). He was crucified, buried and rose from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

The Biblical Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is undiminished Deity and true humanity in one person. He is not simply a good man, but eternal God who became a man (John 1:1, 14). He is the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15, John 14:8-9, Hebrews 1:3). His life on earth is the focal point of history. His earthly ministry is recorded from four different perspectives in the four gospels of the New Testament. Matthew wrote to the Jews, Mark wrote to the Gentiles and Luke wrote a chronological account of the life of Christ. John's Gospel was written so that all might believe in Him (John 20:31).

He Always Existed

God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, existed before His physical birth. The Gospel of John establishes His pre-existence. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning" (John 1:1-2). Later John says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14a).

The God-Man

Jesus is both truly God and truly man. This truth is difficult to understand but it is indeed truth. Remaining fully God, He was also born

fully human. He was human just as we are except He did not have a sin nature as we do. Jesus Christ remained truly God with every attribute of God intact and undiminished.

Jesus, the Creator

Jesus Christ created everything that exists: "Through him all things were made; ..." (John 1:3a). Jesus Christ carried out the plans made and directed by the Father and revealed by the Holy Spirit. This includes creating and sustaining all things in heaven and on earth, providing our salvation, and directing the course of all human history (Colossians 1:16).

Jesus, the Servant

Why would a perfect and eternal God, Who has perfect happiness, wisdom and righteousness, take on human form and attributes? Because Christ eternally loved His Father, He subjected Himself to the Father's will in order to carry out the Father's plan. We are the beneficiaries of the Father's plan to redeem us, and of Christ's fulfillment of this plan through His death on the cross.

Perfection Incarnate

Jesus was perfect in every way: perfect God, perfect man. Jesus had no human father, but was "fathered" by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35) that He might be called the "Son of God." With no human father, Jesus did not inherit Adam's sinful nature, setting Him apart from the rest of humanity. Adam was created perfect and then fell. Jesus was born perfect and never fell.

Victorious Forever

The challenge of tempting Jesus to sin was too big, too important to the satanic mission to be left to underlings. Satan himself, intent on ruining Christ's mission of redemption, was the one who approached Jesus in the desert.

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting 40 days and 40 nights, he was hungry. The

tempter came to him and said 'If you are the Son of God tell these stones to become bread.' Jesus answered, it is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said, 'throw yourself down.' For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only'" (Matthew 4:1-10).

Jesus used Scripture to refute Satan. The Word was His sword against Satan ... just as it is ours. Yielding to any of these temptations would have made Jesus a sinner, and therefore, incapable of redeeming anyone. With the failed temptation of Christ, Satan knew that God's plan for the redemption of mankind would come to pass.

Birth/Childhood

Mary the mother of Jesus was engaged to Joseph, but they had not yet consummated their marriage when Jesus was born. He was conceived by a Divine miracle, and the Deity of Christ joined the humanity of the infant Jesus.

Angels witnessed and testified of His birth. Shepherds came to worship Him. Eventually, the wise men found Jesus and brought gifts.

Many prophecies familiar to the Jews were fulfilled by the circumstances of the birth and early years of Jesus' life. He was born in Bethlehem, although His parents lived in Nazareth. When He was presented at the temple, Anna and Simeon recognized that He was the long-awaited Messiah. He traveled to Egypt with His parents, under God's protection, escaping the wrath of Herod.

The Bible tells us that Jesus grew in strength and wisdom, and God's grace was upon Him. At age twelve, in the temple, the Jewish scholars were amazed at His knowledge of Scripture. His Father in heaven taught Him in the mornings, and He was obedient (Isaiah 50:4-5). His parents went on to have more children, but Jesus remains the only sinless Child ever born.

Truly God and Truly Man

Jesus Christ is the most important person in history, and He is totally unique.

Jesus is not half God and half man. He is 100% God and 100% man in one person inseparably united forever. He has two distinct natures, but they do not mix or blend together. Jesus' divine nature was not changed in any way when He took on humanity as a baby.

While on earth, Jesus restricted the independent use of His divine attributes. He chose to humble Himself so He could become our Savior and know firsthand our trials and tribulations. "Who, being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8).

Throughout His entire life Jesus remained sinless. In His humanity Jesus had no sin nature, and He resisted every temptation to sin in order to satisfy God's perfect righteousness.

Divine Nature

Jesus is God. Every attribute of God applies equally to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ knows and always has known everything that is and everything that is possible. He knew that He would be rejected by many, and many would reject His sacrifice on the cross.

Jesus Christ is perfect wisdom and perfect truth. He is unable to lie. He embodies perfect righteousness and justice. He can't be unfair or make a bad decision or act in any way that compromises His perfect justice. He is consistent in all that He does. He is perfect and He never changes.

He is the sovereign King of all the universe. All authority in heaven and on earth was given to him (Matthew 28:18b). He is all powerful and is everywhere present.

He not only has love, but He is love. His love does not depend on the one He loves, and it never changes. Christ existed eternally as God and will exist for eternity as the perfect God-man now glorified. He is truly God and truly man!

*Truly God
and truly man
in one person*

*"He came the first
time to die; He
is coming again
to raise the dead.
When He came
the first time,
they questioned
whether He was
King; the next
time the world will
know that He is
King of kings and
Lord of lords ..."*

Adrian Rogers

*“I am the way and the truth and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

John 14:6b

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.”

John 11:25b–26a

Character

Jesus Christ's character is and always has been consistent with His Divine nature. As the Member of the Trinity who carried out the Father's salvation plan, Jesus was humble and obedient. As God, He is worthy of all honor and praise. But He set that aside and willingly submitted Himself to becoming a man. Moreover, He was a bondservant, obedient even to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:6–8).

During His earthly ministry, no fault was found in Him. Every statement He made was perfectly true. He never sinned. Even historical accounts of the time agree that He was a good man. Pontius Pilate, the judge at Jesus' trial, examined Him and declared Him not guilty of any of the charges the Jews had made against Him.

Jesus was compassionate towards the weak and the sick and healed many. He sought out those who were outcasts. He was criticized by the religious leaders for eating with sinners and tax collectors. His perfect righteousness valued mercy and rejected the false self-righteousness of the religious leaders of His day (Matthew 9:11–13).

Preincarnate

Jesus Christ always existed as God. He is coequal and co-eternal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. He is the second Member of the Trinity, known in the Old Testament as YHWH (considered so sacred that it contained no vowels making it very difficult to pronounce), or in Aramaic: Memra (Word). When Scriptures were read in public the word LORD was substituted.

He is the only Member of the Trinity who has ever been seen by men, even in the Old Testament. The pre-incarnate Christ appeared to Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Balaam's donkey, Gideon, Samson's parents and Elijah. The Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' time had extensively studied the Scriptures. They understood the Son of God (the "Word") to be the Creator of all things, the Messiah or Anointed One. He was the One Who made covenants with them and kept His word, and the One who would reveal God the Father to them. After His incarnation, when He said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30), the Jews became furious and tried to stone Him. They knew He was claiming to be God.

Ministry

The three-year earthly ministry of Jesus Christ is described in the four Gospels. In the first half of His ministry He made His claim to be the Messiah and offered the eternal kingdom to the Jewish people.

He verified who He was with many signs and miracles, fulfilling prophecies familiar to the Jews. He spoke plainly in public and healed those who asked.

The second half of Christ's earthly ministry began after He was rejected. It focused on preparing the disciples for His death and their ministry after He was gone. During this time He only healed people who had professed their faith in Him, and only away from the presence of the Jewish leaders.

Jesus refused to perform signs for the Jewish leaders, telling them He would only give them the sign of Jonah. He fulfilled this by His own resurrection. Jesus was buried for three days and three nights before He was raised from the dead, just as Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights (Matthew 12:38–45). The resurrection was not an act of one person, but a joint effort by all three Members of the Trinity.

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

John 8:12b

“I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”

John 8:51

Miracles

The Old Testament book of Daniel is quite specific about when the Messiah would come.

In the days when the time was near, according to rabbinic writings, the rabbis believed there were three miracles that only the Messiah could perform. The first was to heal a Jewish leper. Their law stated what to do when a leper was healed, but no Jewish leper had ever been healed until Jesus did so in Matthew 8 and again in Luke 17 (ten lepers!).

Second, was to heal a man born blind. When Jesus healed the man born blind in John 9, the man and his family endured intense interrogation and persecution from the Jews, but the miracle could not be denied.

The third miracle expected of the Messiah was to cast out a mute demon. The Pharisees could only cast out demons if they knew their name. The Messiah cast out a demon who was unable to speak in Matthew 9:32.

Jesus performed all these miracles and many more, so there should have been no doubt that He was who He claimed to be.

Parables

Jesus frequently taught in parables: a simple story designed to communicate a spiritual truth. To those who believed in Him and were hungry for truth, He would explain the parables. To those religious Jewish leaders who only sought to trap Him and arrest Him, He did not explain their meaning.

The story was built around an everyday experience the people could relate to, such as a blind man leading another blind man, building a house on a rock or on sand, sowing seeds in different soils, lighting a lamp. These and many other simple stories illustrated profound spiritual truths about the Kingdom of God.

Jesus especially taught with parables in the second half of His ministry, when the Jewish leaders sought to harm Him. Those who believed in Him understood the meaning which was hidden from the religious leaders who had already rejected Him.

This was a protection because the truth in the parable would have angered the leaders and possibly caused them to arrest and to attempt to kill Jesus before the time ordained by His Father.

Builds His Church

God now uses all people who believe in His Son to bring His message of salvation to the world.

There are no distinctions among believers in Jesus Christ, not racial, social, gender nor any other. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

Jesus Christ's church is made up of everyone who has placed their faith in Him. It is called the body of Christ (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:27).

The church is not a building, but rather all believers in Christ. Peter said, "... You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). Jesus responded "... you are Peter, and on this rock (faith in me) I will build my church..." (Matthew 16:18).

Jesus is the only foundation. The church began when the Holy Spirit was poured out on those who had believed in Christ at Pentecost, shortly after Jesus' resurrection. The church will continue to be built until Christ removes it from the earth and takes it to heaven at the Rapture of the Church.

“He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

1 John 5:12

“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”

John 5:24

Sermon on the Mount

Do you ever wonder how Jesus wants you to live as a Christian? In Matthew 5, 6 and 7 He gives us the answer.

The Sermon on the Mount, presented by Jesus early in His ministry, teaches us the priorities for His reign as King. God’s values are not of this world.

He helps the weak who need Him, as well as those who are strong. Submitting to Him is the important thing. We are not under the law, which Jesus fulfilled perfectly, but are actually held to a higher standard: “... Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ...” (Matthew 5:44b).

He taught the disciples how to pray to His Father. We are warned against having our eyes on earthly wealth rather than eternal values, against judging others, hypocrisy and worry.

Summing it up: treat people the same way you want them to treat you. In the Sermon on the Mount, we have Jesus’ very words telling us how to live and what He values and expects from the wise person who will trust in Him.

The Cross

Why did Jesus have to die on the cross? How could God let His own Son suffer so much?

It was God the Father’s plan from all eternity that His Son would be judged for the sins of the world on the cross. Jesus willingly obeyed His Father and went to the cross, even though it was the most difficult thing any person has ever done.

Jesus was betrayed by a friend (Judas), unfairly condemned by the Jews and Romans in six trials (some legal and some illegal) and was tortured by those for whom He was dying.

Jesus was not only sinless, but He had created and sustained the life of those for whose sins He was being judged! The torture He suffered was minimal compared with the three hours when God imputed the sins of the whole world to Jesus while He was on the cross and judged for them.

The sun became dark so no one could see the agony He felt being separated from His Father. It was so great that He said “... My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” (Matthew 27:46b)?

Death

Deity cannot die. The humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ died the most painful and terrible death in all of history as a substitute for us.

He took our place and paid the penalty for our sins because we could not. We are told that “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

When we talk about the death of Jesus Christ, we actually are referring to two deaths. Christ died spiritually and He died physically. When you hear scholars talk about the blood of Christ, they usually mean the entirety of the Cross—the physical and spiritual deaths of Christ.

Every sin you have ever committed or will commit was paid for at the Cross. The moment you embrace Christ as your Savior that gift becomes a reality in your life and your sins are forgiven.

Jesus’ physical death came after His spiritual death which paid the penalty for our sins. He said “... it is finished” (John 19:30b). And it is—for all eternity.

“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never go thirsty.”

John 6:35b

“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

Resurrection/Ascension

Jesus claimed that He would be raised from the dead and thus had it not literally and historically occurred, His entire ministry would have been discredited and we would still be lost in our sins.

The tomb of Jesus Christ was found empty on the third day, the day we celebrate as Easter. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to many people, including: Mary Magdalene, to the apostles, to over 500 disciples on a mountain in Galilee, to the eleven disciples at His ascension to heaven and to Paul after His ascension.

Since Christ rose from the dead, as He had said He would, we can believe everything else He says, especially that His death on our behalf is effective for our salvation. Since Christ was resurrected, we can be assured we will also be resurrected.

Christ’s “ascension” refers to His return to heaven from earth after His resurrection. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father.

The ascension occurred ten days before the Day of Pentecost when Jesus sent the Holy Spirit as He had promised and established His Church.

Shepherding His People

The risen Christ ascended into heaven and He remains there seated at the right hand of the Father. The time Christ spends seated at the right hand of the Father until He returns at the Second Advent is known as the “session.” It refers to Christ’s exalted position as the ascended and glorified God-man. It portrays that all authority has been given to Him, and “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, ...” (Philippians 2:10a). It is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel 7:13–14.

From the right hand of the Father Jesus Christ ministers to His people.

1. Intercessor—As our “Intercessor” Christ appeals to the Father for all believers. This is done together with the Holy Spirit and is a request to the Father to work all things together for good (Romans 8:28) in accordance with the Father’s will.

2. Advocate—As our “Advocate” Jesus stands as our “Defense Attorney” to answer charges brought against God’s children by Satan.

3. Mediator—As our “Mediator” Jesus Christ mediated a new covenant between God and man grounded in mercy rather than law. The New Covenant was a result of the sacrifice He offered to pay for the penalty of sins which were committed under

the old covenant based in the Mosaic Law. This New Covenant will last for all eternity.

4. High Priest—Christ is our “Great High Priest” by direct appointment of the Father. Now all believers are priests and we are to imitate Jesus Christ by offering ourselves as a sacrifice to God’s will.

5. Head of the Church—Jesus Christ is the “Head” or leader of the Church. All who believe in Jesus Christ form the “bride” or “body” of Christ that is known as the Church.

Jesus is the promised husband of the Church and, as such, continuously extends His unconditional, unchanging love. The actual “wedding ceremony” will take place in heaven just before Christ returns to earth at the Second Advent, but His love and faithfulness are present now. The Church, as the “bride,” is being made ready for her Husband.

6. The Shepherd—The term “pastor” is actually a word that means “shepherd.” Christ as the “Good Shepherd” laid down His life for His sheep, which rendered Him the “Great Shepherd.” During His present session at the right hand of the Father, He is the “Chief Shepherd,” the One who guides and protects His sheep.

God the Holy Spirit

He reveals and powers God's perfect plan

Tapping into His power

Shortly before His death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ promised His disciples and all future believers: “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. ... he lives with you and will be in you” (John 14:16–17).

Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit. And what did Jesus' promise mean to every Christian? It meant that after Jesus returned to heaven, God would send the Holy Spirit to take up personal, permanent residence within the hearts and lives of each of His people. Not just some, but all.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit must be seen and understood as a person, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. He is God, just as God the Father and God the Son (Jesus Christ) are. The Holy Spirit possesses the exact same characteristics and is co-equal in personhood, power and glory with the Father and the Son.

The Spirit is not some vague, impersonal, ghost-like entity, but a person. The Scriptures tell us that—like the Father and the Son—the Holy Spirit speaks, He teaches, He has a will, He has a mind and He has emotions.

And, like the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit knows everything, is omnipresent and is eternal. He is God the Holy Spirit.

He Indwells

The Spirit indwells us from the moment we trust Christ as Savior. “Do you not know,” wrote the Apostle Paul, “that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, *who is in you, whom you have received from God?*” (1 Corinthians 6:19a, emphasis added). What a magnificent, personal gift from God!

He Counsels and Teaches

The Spirit's role in our lives is to provide ongoing counsel, comfort, instruction and power to live according to God's will. Jesus said in John 14:26, “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit,

whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

He Convicts

Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit would “... convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8). The Spirit would help nonbelievers realize their sinful state and their need for new life in Christ. He also is that still, small voice that convicts the believer of sin in his life and his need to turn back to God.

He Intercedes

The Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf, especially when we're weak spiritually, to help us live according to God's Word. He is always there to strengthen and encourage you.

He is in You

When you embrace Christ as Savior, you are not alone on this journey! God's presence lives within you through His Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the ongoing, active presence and power of God in your life. You can trust Him to comfort and guide you in tough times, to remind you of God's ways and to empower you to honor Him in everything you do.

OT Believers and the Holy Spirit

Some Old Testament (OT) believers received special help from the Holy Spirit (called endowment) for special tasks. For example, the craftsman who made the temple furnishings (Exodus 35:31), Moses and the 70 elders who ruled the people of Israel (Numbers 11:17) and King David (Psalm 51:11). But they were not indwelt by nor filled with the Holy Spirit as believers are today.

Be Filled with the Holy Spirit

Believers are commanded to be filled with the Holy Spirit, that is, to allow the Holy Spirit to control us. “Do not get drunk on wine, which

leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). This means we must examine ourselves for sinful thoughts, motivations, words and actions which break the intimate fellowship we have with God and hinder the Holy Spirit from controlling our lives.

When we turn back to God and confess these sins, the Holy Spirit fills us again so we may continue our Christian walk dependent on Him. We are only truly living the Christian life when the Holy Spirit is controlling everything we think, say and do.

Fruit of the Spirit

When we are filled with the Spirit, we have all of the Holy Spirit's enabling power that we can possibly have. The issue is not asking for more of the Spirit to fill us, which is impossible, but for the individual believer to make constant decisions to surrender his own will and very life to the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit can only use us in God's plan when we let Him take control. When we walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16), we will not carry out the sinful desires of our own hearts, and we will automatically produce the “fruit” of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22–23).

A Correct Understanding

It's important to understand what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit. Some embellish or add to the biblical descriptions of the Holy Spirit. Some even say that the Holy Spirit is nothing more than a force, which is false. If the Holy Spirit were merely a force, then He could not speak (Acts 13:2); He could not be grieved (Ephesians 4:30); and He would not have a will (1 Corinthians 12:11). The Bible alone defines the Holy Spirit.

Enabling Power

Every believer who allows himself to be controlled (filled) consistently by the Holy Spirit will naturally manifest true characteristics of the Christian life. In our own power we cannot do it. The world can only imitate this Christian walk. This is not something you can do by just trying harder.

Many believers do not trust God enough to abandon their own agenda and let Him use them as He wills. But when we trust God enough to yield to His plan and rely on the strength of the Holy Spirit in us, our lives are filled with a peace, power and blessing that is unsurpassed on this earth.

The difference between the indwelling and filling of the Holy Spirit

Indwelling	Filling
<p>AT THE VERY moment you place your faith in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to indwell you. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is permanent and cannot be lost. This indwelling makes the body of the believer the sanctuary of God.</p> <p>Sin does not remove the indwelling of the Spirit. Indwelling gives the believer the supernatural power for Christian living and glorifying God.</p>	<p>YOU ARE IMMEDIATELY filled with the Holy Spirit for the first time at the moment of salvation. The believer who allows the filling of the Holy Spirit to continually lead, guide, counsel and control him will manifest the characteristics of the Christian life. Christ is glorified in the believer's life when the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of His character. To continuously be filled with the Spirit, you must not harbor sin in your life. Turning back to God and seeking His way is always right.</p>

Works of the Holy Spirit

- ▶ Access to God—Eph 2:18
- ▶ Anoints for service—Luke 4:18
- ▶ Assures—Rom 8:15–16; Gal 4:6
- ▶ Authors Scripture—2 Pet 1:20–21
- ▶ Baptizes—1 Cor 12:13
- ▶ Birth of believers' spirit—John 3:3–6
- ▶ Calls and commissions—Acts 13:24, 20:28
- ▶ Cleanses—1 Thess 3:13
- ▶ Convicts of sin—John 16:9
- ▶ Creates—Job 33:4
- ▶ Empowers—Gal 3:3
- ▶ Fills—Acts 2:4, 4:29–31
- ▶ Gives gifts—1 Cor 12:8–11
- ▶ Glorifies Christ—John 16:14
- ▶ Guides in truth—John 16:13
- ▶ Helps our weakness—Rom 8:26
- ▶ Indwells believers—Rom 8:9–14; Gal 4:6
- ▶ Inspires prayer—Eph 6:18; Jude 20
- ▶ Intercedes—Rom 8:26
- ▶ Interprets Scripture—1 Cor 2:1, 14; Eph 1:17
- ▶ Leads—Rom 8:14
- ▶ Liberates—Rom 8:2
- ▶ Molds character—Gal 5:22–23
- ▶ Produces fruit—Gal 5:22–23
- ▶ Raises from the dead—Rom 8:11
- ▶ Regenerates—Titus 3:5
- ▶ Sanctifies—Rom 15:16
- ▶ Seals—Eph 1:13–14; 4:30
- ▶ Strengthens—Eph 3:16; Acts 1:8, 2:4; 1 Cor 2:4
- ▶ Teaches—John 14:26
- ▶ Testifies of Jesus—John 15:26
- ▶ Victory over the flesh—Rom 8:2–4; Gal 4:6
- ▶ Worship helper—Phil 3:3

The Holy Spirit is co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father and God the Son

“All who are willing to accept the Bible as the Word of God recognize that inspiration is a work of the Holy Spirit and that the Scriptures would have been impossible apart from this supernatural ministry of the Holy Spirit.”

John Walvoord

Sin

The biggest battleground in your life

The enemy within

The Bible teaches that when God created us, He gave us volition—the right to make choices, the right to choose between right and wrong, good and evil. But Adam brought sin and death into the world when he used his volition to disobey God. Our Creator regards sin so seriously that Adam’s sin has been imputed to the entire human race ever since.

The Sin Nature

Thus all of us are born with a “sin nature,” inherited from Adam. As the Psalmist wrote, “Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Psalm 51:5). The Apostle Paul confirms this in 1 Corinthians 15:22a, “For as in Adam all die”

The good news is that this is exactly why Jesus came to earth! Through His death on the cross, He paid the penalty for our sins and canceled the spiritual death sentence for all who entrust their lives to Him. Christians are heaven bound! Paul completes the above sentence this way: “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22).

The Conflict Within

The Holy Spirit resides within the believer to guide and empower us as we walk with the

Lord, but, at the same time, as human beings, we still have the sin nature which in the Bible is also called “the flesh.” Because God wants us to obey Him by our own choosing, we still have volition. Thus, we face a significant inner conflict between the Holy Spirit and the sinful nature within us.

The Choice

Unbelievers are slaves to the sin nature—it rules their lives. If you believe in Christ, you have been set free from the rule of the sin nature, but it’s your moment-by-moment choice whether the old nature or the Holy Spirit will prevail. The Holy Spirit desires righteousness, but your sin nature pulls you toward sin and compromise. Paul described the tension this way: “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want” (Galatians 5:17).

Some sins seem so nice and comfy, that there doesn’t seem to be any reason to leave. But remember, sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay and cost you more than you can ever pay. However, the door to return to God is always wide open.

Adam’s original sin and the sin nature

Adam knew just what he was doing when he committed the first sin in all of human history. He chose to disobey God’s single command, to not eat of the fruit of one tree.

This one act of rebellion resulted in spiritual death for the whole human race. Now we are physically born separated from God, unable to have any relationship with Him. Only God can break down the barrier that separates us from Him; there is nothing we can do to overcome it. Even if we never commit a personal sin [which would be impossible (1 John 1:8)], we are still condemned before God’s righteousness based on the sin of Adam because we all died spiritually in Adam (Romans 5:12–14).

Everyone is born with a sin nature. We are condemned, separated from God, even before we commit our first personal sin. The Bible calls this sin nature our “flesh.” Our sin nature is in constant rebellion against God. It entices us to commit sins that may shock even ourselves.

All of us have different areas of weaknesses in our sin natures. What one person may be tempted to do, you may never be tempted to do at all. Unbelievers are enslaved to their sin natures; they have no Divine power to overcome their sinful patterns.

Sin often conceals the believer’s identity in Christ

“The inward area is the first place of loss of true Christian life, of true spirituality, and the outward sinful act is the result.”

Francis Schaeffer

Overt Sins

When considering sin, most people tend to think in terms of the overt sins—apparent, conspicuous actions in opposition to how God wants us to live. The first chapter of Romans provides quite a list, including envy, murder, shameful lusts, sexual immorality, strife, deceit,

malice, gossiping, slander, hating God, insolence, arrogance, pride and boastfulness. Elsewhere in the Bible we find God’s condemnation of idolatry, stealing, oppression, covetousness, selfishness, self-centeredness and self-righteousness, among others. Any act, attitude or

word that is in opposition to God’s Word is sin, and Romans tells us that people doing such things “... exchanged the truth of God for a lie,” (Romans 1:25a).

Also, remember that any sin an unbeliever can commit, a believer can also commit.

■ Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Rom 6:16

■ Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

Rom 8:8

■ For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

Rom 8:13

■ But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

Gal 3:22

■ The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction.

Gal 6:8a

■ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

Eph 2:3

■ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

1 John 1:8

■ The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Gal 5:19–21

Mental Sins

No one can see what you are thinking, but God knows. He judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12). When we are feeling sorry for ourselves, unforgiving, bitter, worried, fearful, envious, jealous, justifying ourselves or comparing ourselves to others,

He sees all of this. Many mental attitude sins are subtle. When we live in a world of our own fabrication rather than the rich life God has provided, when we trust our plans to solve our problems and guide us into the future rather than trust that God does have a plan for us, these too are mental

attitude sins. Almost all of them are rooted in arrogance and/or pride that imitates the original sin of Satan. These sins focus on our own importance rather than walking in humility, as God wants us to. You cannot lose by living your inner life honestly before God.

Verbal Sins

It is very difficult to be full of mental attitude sins and not let them spill out of your mouth! When you are self-centered or unforgiving in your attitude, your words will be full of judgment, gossip or even slander. When you focus on yourself and how you are not appreciated, you

will eventually complain, nag, lie, exaggerate or judge others. Only God can see your “thought” sins, but many people will be affected by the sins you speak. You can’t take them back! Even when God forgives your sin and your intimate fellowship with Him is restored, the memory of

that sin might remain forever with those you hurt and offend. Your witness as a Christian in the world is lost, at least temporarily. “Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark” (James 3:5).

The Cross

The indescribable cost of His gift

Five major doctrines of the Cross

To restore the broken relationship between God and man, God had to fix what severed the relationship in the first place. That was sin—man’s disobedience. Yet God could not compromise His perfect character to reunite man with Him.

We are born spiritually dead, alienated and separated from God; without the means or the power to reconcile ourselves to Him.

God had to find a way to restore this broken relationship without compromising His character.

And He did! Our greatest need was provided for by the grace of a merciful, loving God.

God’s Masterpiece

His great masterpiece on behalf of all mankind centers on the life, the death, and the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The Cross is the only way of salvation. God’s holiness required a perfect sacrifice. Jesus Christ in His perfect humanity was the only acceptable sacrifice. Referring to Christ, Luke said, “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).

Sinless Perfection

The manner in which Jesus Christ came, lived, died and was resurrected fulfilled every requirement for restoring man’s relationship with God.

All that is required for our restoration is for us to realize there is nothing we can do on our own, and to accept Christ’s sacrifice as being the only means of satisfying God’s requirement for restored fellowship.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation means that man, who has been separated from God because of sin, can once again return to the perfect relationship with God—he has been reconciled.

For God and man to come together, or be reconciled, man had to be declared holy; not through anything he could do himself, but by a substitute paying that debt for him.

There is a barrier between God and man. It includes not only our condemnation because of Adam’s original sin, but the sins we ourselves commit. We are helpless and without any means of approaching a holy God.

It is impossible for us to remove that barrier ourselves. Only by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross could that be accomplished.

There was no other way for man to be reconciled to God. His plan called for a perfect sacrifice. Reconciliation was not by man’s efforts, “... but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:19).

When God reconciled us to Himself it was forever. We are no longer His enemies, but His children; the children of a loving God who is able to provide our every need. Reconciliation is the most comforting doctrine in all of God’s Word.

Redemption

Redemption is the work of God by which He has brought about our reconciliation and removed the barrier between Himself and us. The work of redemption deals not only with the problem of sin, but how Scripture views this problem. The Bible says we are imprisoned by sin.

God created Adam and Eve perfect, but they willfully disobeyed Him. Their sin created a barrier between them and a holy God; a barrier they could do nothing to remove. They needed someone to redeem them.

Redemption implies a price has to be paid to redeem us from a hopeless situation—to buy our freedom from this enslavement to sin. The price required was huge: the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the God-Man—God’s own Son. Jesus Christ not only became fully human, “...he humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8b). He willingly endured the separation of Himself from His Father and bore the judgment for all our sins.

God designed the perfect plan to buy us back; now we belong to Him when through faith we accept that gift. “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1).

“Life is wasted if we do not grasp the glory of the cross, cherish it for the treasure that it is, and cleave to it as the highest price of every pleasure and the deepest comfort in every pain. What was once foolishness to us—a crucified God—must become our wisdom and our power and our only boast in this world.”

John Piper

Justification

Justification refers to God’s declaration that we have been made forever righteous and acceptable in His sight. Justification is a work of God alone on our behalf. “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies” (Rom. 8:33).

The condemnation we were born with has been removed. “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1).

Our sins—past, present, and future have been forgiven because of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. The penalty, as well as the guilt, of sin has been removed. God no longer sees our sin; He sees only Jesus’ righteousness.

As those who are justified we are also sanctified, set apart, for God’s purpose. We no longer stand alone, but we are now “in Christ.” It is this complete standing in Christ that sets us apart as God’s possession. It does not matter what others may think of us, but only how God sees us.

Through the Cross of Christ, the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, and the grace of God we will forever have a right standing before Him.

Regeneration

At the moment of faith in Christ we become a new creation; free not only from the penalty of sin, but also free from the power of sin.

We are born physically alive but spiritually dead. We are born with a soul, but it is already condemned due to the sin nature we inherited from Adam. God’s plan offers a solution to our problem. We must be “born again.” “... children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:13). If we are born again of God, though our body dies, we will live forever in the presence of God.

Only the work of Jesus Christ on the cross can free the Holy Spirit to give us new life—spiritual life. We are “reborn” to serve and worship God. “... he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit ...” (Titus 3:5). We are said to be born again.

In John 3:6–7 Jesus explains to Nicodemus: “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’” This is the irreversible act of God through the Holy Spirit. We are now alive to spiritual things of God.

Propitiation

Propitiation (or atonement) signifies that the person and death of Jesus Christ turned away the wrath of God and satisfied His holiness by Christ’s offering. The word propitiation means to appease or atone for. Jesus Christ fully met and completely satisfied the righteousness that a holy God demanded. God was satisfied by the perfect and completed work of Christ on the cross.

Propitiation is actually a two-part act that involves (1) appeasing the wrath of an offended person and (2) being reconciled to them. In other words, propitiation represents the withholding of God’s divine punishment for sin. Christ took that upon Himself so that we could avoid it.

Just as the first four previous doctrines are the work of Christ toward man, propitiation is the work of Christ toward God.

Jesus Christ, the sinless man, was the only person who could turn away God’s wrath, satisfy His holiness, and make provision so that God could see us as He sees His Son.

Because God is holy He can have nothing to do with sin. He must always think and act in a way that is consistent with His perfect righteousness and justice. His righteousness and justice had to be satisfied (propitiated) before we could be reconciled to Him.

Body, Heart, Mind, Soul and Spirit

From the material to the immaterial part of man

This is who we really are

You are much more than you think or imagine

The entirety of the believer is his body, soul and spirit. But the real you is in your soul. Your soul began to function the moment you entered this world as a baby and will continue for all eternity.

In fact, all that you can take with you from this earth after your physical death is what you have stored up in your soul and your spirit. These invisible parts of you are eternal. The decisions you make, thoughts you have, the trust you exhibit, and the deeds you do while under control of the Holy Spirit will endure and bring glory to God forever.

The Material Part of Man

Man's body began when God formed Adam out of the dust, and then He formed Eve out of Adam. Every person who has ever lived is descended from Adam and Eve.

The body is the material part of man. It possesses the senses of sight, touch, hearing, taste and smell. Our bodies are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14).

The way each cell in your body performs its many functions and many organs and body systems work to keep your whole body in balance is nothing short of a miracle.

One day the believer's earthly body will be changed into a new and perfect body that is no longer subject to death, decay or illness. It will be like the resurrected and glorified body of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this new body we will have a complete and full relationship with the Lord.

The Flesh

Since the fall of Adam in the Garden, each person is born with a sin nature in his or her body. This sin nature is the source of temptation to sin. In the Bible it is often referred to as the "flesh." The sin nature overlaps and intrudes on both the body and the soul.

The Immaterial Part of Man

As we look at the characteristics of the soul, realize that the terms soul, heart, mind and spirit are different manifestations of the immaterial

part of man. This is a difficult to understand from Scripture because several words are used interchangeably. We must note, however, that the Bible tells us that the human spirit is different from man's heart and soul (Hebrews 4:12).

Your Soul

The soul cannot be seen, touched, heard, tasted or smelled. Since the body cannot live without the soul, many times the Hebrew word "Nephesh" and the Greek word "Psuche" are translated not simply as soul but as life or person.

Your soul sets you apart from the animal world. All people are created in the image of God. This means you have soul essence that animals do not have. You have mentality, the ability to think. You have a memory to retain knowledge. You have volition, a capacity to make decisions. You have a conscience, an inherent knowledge of right and wrong. You have self-consciousness, a sense of yourself as a distinct person. Finally you have emotion, the capacity to have feelings.

Human Spirit

The human soul is the spiritual life force that originates from and is formed by God. The human spirit is the invisible part of man that is designed to be filled by the Holy Spirit to grow and transform our relationship with God.

God and God Alone

Inside of our human spirit there is an emptiness that only God can fill, and make us complete. The very moment we place our faith in Christ, God fills that empty hole, and we enter into an eternal relationship with Him.

When God the Holy Spirit controls our human spirit, He helps us recall the biblical truth we have learned and apply it correctly to situations we face in our lives. As we continue to abide in the Holy Spirit, we find the power to resist sin and enjoy a moment-by-moment walk with God that brings contentment and peace as we travel life with its many varied circumstances and situations.

Immaterial Part of Man



“Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart [emphasis on emotions] and with all your soul [emphasis on your entire being] and with all your mind [emphasis on your thinking].’ This is the first and greatest commandment” (Matthew 22:37).

“Happy the soul that has been awed by a view of God’s majesty.”

A.W. Pink

Angels—Elect & Fallen

God's created creatures

Mighty, powerful and watching us

Angels are real and they are all around us

Do you expect to go to heaven and become an angel? I don't think so! Angels and humans are two separate types of created beings.

God created multitudes of angels long before He created people. As created beings they are under the authority of God just like us. But the Bible indicates that angels were created higher than humans (Hebrews 2:9). Angels are not omniscient nor omnipresent, but they have individual personalities and intelligence. They bear responsibility for their own behavior and decisions.

Apparently angels were created all at once some time before the creation of the heavens and earth. They do not necessarily have bodies, although they may take on human form. Angels are always referred to as "he." They do not die, nor reproduce.

Angels and Their Assignments

God created different types of angels for special jobs. Michael, the archangel, is the head of all the angels and the primary angel who stands guard against the fallen angels. Seraphim and cherubim protect God's holiness from the evil forces. Gabriel was sent by God to bring special messages to Daniel, Zacharias and Mary, the mother of Jesus. Millions of angels filled the sky to witness the birth of Jesus Christ.

Angels carried Lazarus to Abraham's side (Luke 16:22). Perhaps this means they escort believers to heaven after physical death. Some angels are ministering spirits sent out to provide service to believers (Hebrews 1:14). Angels ministered to Jesus after He was tempted by Satan in the desert (Matthew 4:11).

Your Own Guardian Angel

You are assigned at least one angel to protect you. We call them guardian angels. Psalm 91:11 promises us, "For he will command his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways ..." Only in heaven will we know the full extent of how these guardian angels protected us during our time on earth.

Good vs. Evil

Most people naturally understand there is a conflict between good and evil. Many of our favorite stories or movies have battles between good and evil. But the real story of good versus evil unfolds throughout the Bible. It began in heaven when there was an angelic revolt!

Elect Angels

At the time of Satan's rebellion against God, two-thirds of the angels remained loyal to God. They are watching us to see if we choose for God—as they did. They witnessed creation and have seen everything God and men have done since then.

These loyal angels are called the elect or holy angels. The elect angels are more aware than we are of God's sovereignty, His righteousness, and how He is unfolding His plan in human history. They are eyewitnesses to His glory! This is why they continually worship God saying, "... Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:3).

The Fall of Satan and Demons

When Satan defied God and fell from grace, one third of the angels followed him in rebellion (Revelation 12:4). These sinful or fallen angels are called demons. Satan and these demons have been sentenced to the Lake of Fire, but the sentence is yet to be carried out. Some of these fallen angels are presently bound (Jude 6), and others are still free to roam about the earth, which is still under Satan's command.

We may conclude then, since the fallen angels and Satan are not yet punished, they have appealed their conviction. This sets the stage for the current unseen, but very real, conflict between (1) God and His elect angels and (2) Satan and the fallen angels.

A Very Real War

This war is fought on many levels. Satan tried to stop God's plan for redemption of the human race by keeping Jesus Christ from going to the

cross. Satan has an agenda to influence world powers and the course of world events. If you look at history, past or present, from the perspective of this invisible battle surrounding us, many issues can be more clearly understood.

Demon Possession

So what power do demons have over people? Demons can and do indwell people's bodies. Jesus cast out many demons during His time on the earth. Demon possession may be relatively uncommon in a predominantly Christian culture, but in places where idolatry and drug use are rampant, demon possession is prevalent.

Believers Are Never Possessed

While demons can have great influence on believers, they are not able to indwell the bodies of people who have believed in Jesus Christ as Savior. The Holy Spirit is continually indwelling believers, and demons are unable to enter their bodies. But

they will still try to influence your mind through what you see, hear and think.

A Roaring Lion

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Satan knows God has a perfect plan for history and individuals and that God will ultimately win. But he wants to delay his punishment so he spends time deceiving as many people as he can. He and his forces distort the true gospel into a system of works, and he has invented religion as a substitute for true Christianity. He not only promotes evil, but also entices us down paths that seem good, but that are not from God.

Very Subtle Tactics

Satan is a master at manipulating the media, the entertainment industry and influencing social change. Today many people call God's good "evil" and world viewpoint evil "good." This can include issues related to

race, abortion, environment, social behavior and politics of destruction and many other things that are at odds with the Bible and God's truth.

He also likes to keep God's people busy, busy, busy with distractions and non-essentials. This list could include too much television, time on the computer, sporting events, other time-wasting activities—anything that keeps us from God.

Even more destructive is discouraging family time together with too many outside activities and working long hours to maintain empty lifestyles.

God's Victory

When we have not armed ourselves with the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10–18), we are no match for the schemes of Satan and his demons. They know the very best ways to deceive and tempt us.

However, when we fill our souls with God's Word and continually seek His will and plan for our lives, we will share in God's ultimate victory!

Satan's strategies

Satan's Tempting Beauty

IF YOU WERE to sit down with Satan today for a cup of coffee, you would comment on how attractive, how brilliant, how charming and delightful he is. He would be like the most "Christian" person you have ever met!

Apart from the filling of the Holy Spirit, you would join his team because it sounds so good.

Satan, in his brilliance, can be whoever he has to be to enter into any relationship to achieve his goals.

Satan does not have red skin, horns and a forked tail as he is often pictured. Our enemy is bigger, meaner, quicker, smarter and smoother than any mere human who has ever lived. He is not a cartoon character but is very real. Satan was the most beautiful, powerful and intelligent angel that God created. But

that was not enough for him and he decided to "make himself like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:12–14; Ezekiel 28:12–15).

Satan's primary strategy is deception. He is a liar who can disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). He distorts the truth and promotes the idea that good can come from evil.

This is what he did in the Garden when he deceived Eve into thinking that life could be made better by doing something that God prohibited. The fruit looked good to her; the promised result of eating it seemed good. Satan makes evil look just as beautiful and seem just as noble today.

Satan often uses religion as a cloak for evil. He has his own churches, his own

communion table, his own pastors (1 Timothy 4:1; 1 Corinthians 10:10–21). They all look so good, and yet are so evil because they are distorting truth and substituting human values for the righteous values of God (Isaiah 64:6; 2 Corinthians 11:4, 13–15; Galatians 3:1–6; Colossians 2:21–23).

Satan can only be in one place at one time. But he can send his minions (demons) anywhere. Satan is working on big things like international leaders and governments.

Ignorance of the nature of our enemy and of his strategy is one of Satan's greatest weapons. God intends that we understand what is going on and who it is we are fighting. In the Bible He tells us all we need to know about Satan and his troops.

"Angels—like all other intelligent creatures—were designed to render worship to God, not to receive worship themselves. In fact, in every case in Scripture, whenever angels are offered any form of worship, they always rebuke the worshiper and redirect all worship to God alone."

John MacArthur

A Biblical/Historical Timeline

Jesus Christ unites the Old Testament and the New Testament

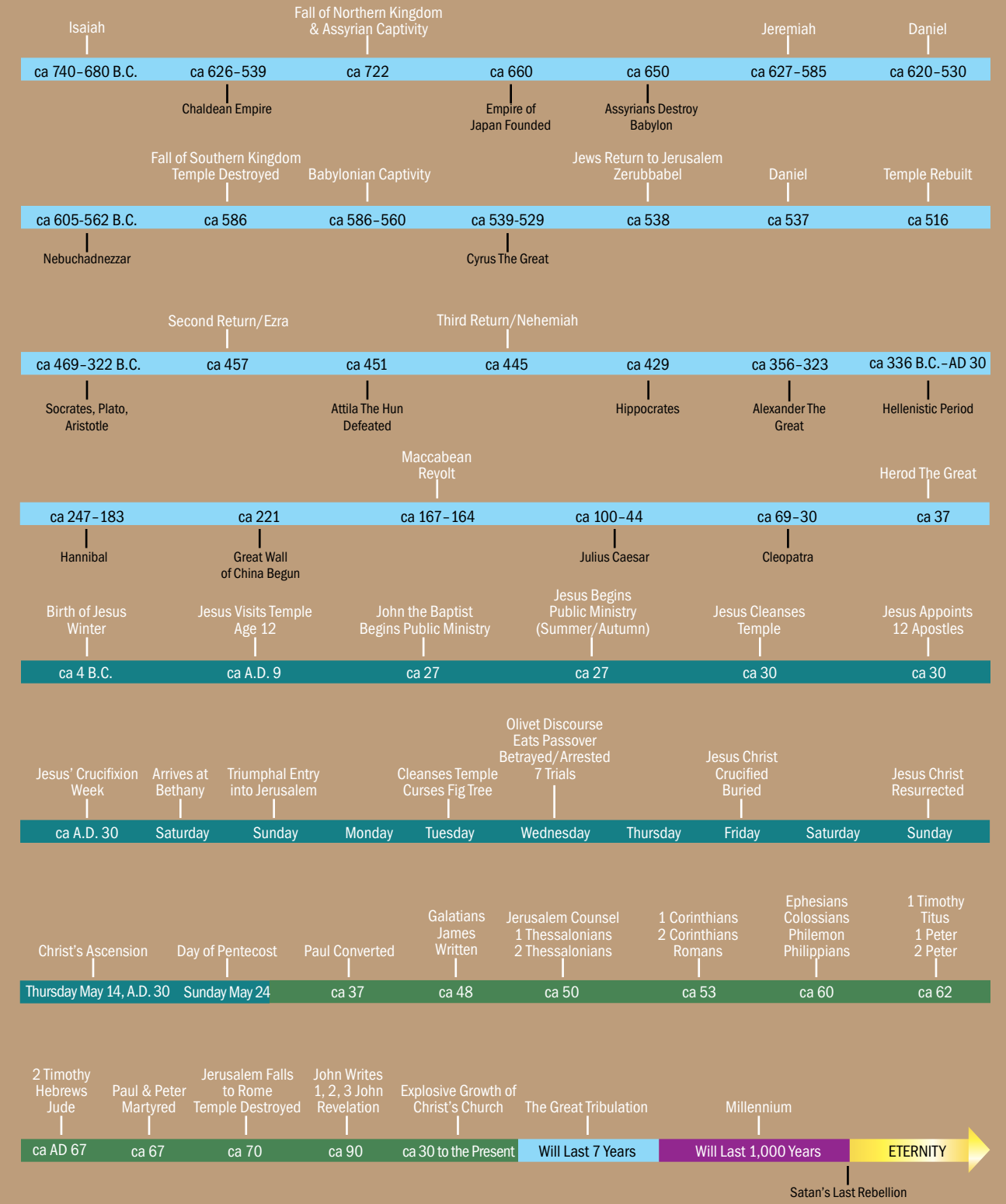
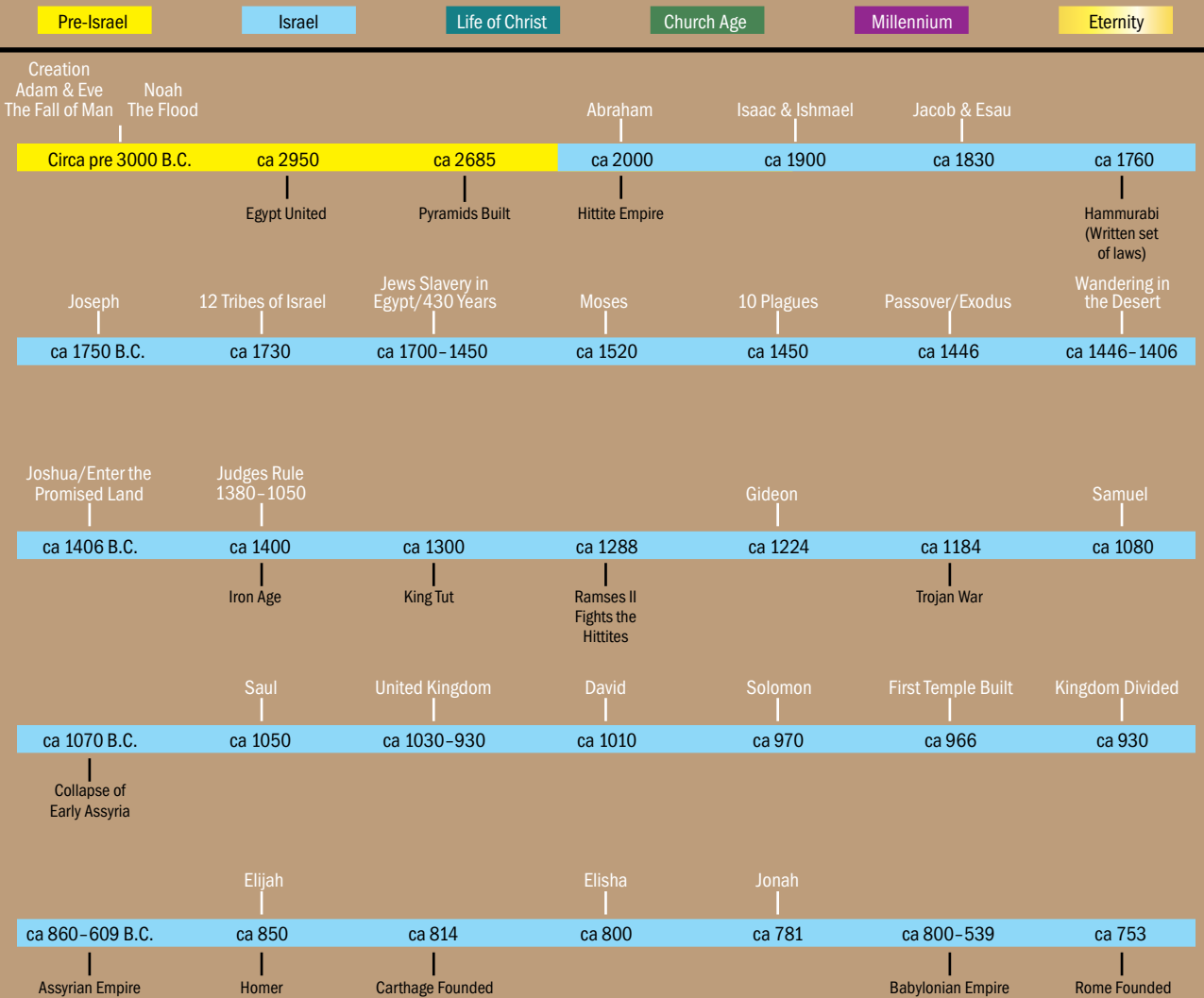
The seasons of God

In order to gain a better understanding of the Bible, prophecy and God's plan, it's helpful to have a historical point of reference that provides context to the major events recounted in the Bible.

Although biblical/historical timelines abound, universal agreement as to specific dates when certain biblical events took place remains elusive.

The timeline below will provide a general frame of reference for the timing of important biblical events. It is important to note that God's timeline is never-ending—as are His mercy and forgiveness.

This timeline gives a framework for events of the past and insight and hope for events yet to come. (Not drawn to scale).



Orienting to God

Jesus Christ—the perfect pattern

Relying on the Lord as your frame of reference

The key to staying on course is keeping God as the center of your life

When you trusted Christ as Savior, you determined to try to make better choices and live the new life in a way that's pleasing in God's sight. But it probably wasn't long before you realized that the world still offers all sorts of distractions and temptations to lure you into straying off course in your Christian walk.

Staying on Course

The key is to stay oriented to God, to consciously focus on Him as the center of your life. You have the

best help in the universe for this! God gave you His Holy Spirit to empower and guide you, and one of the Spirit's roles is to help you calibrate your thinking with God's thinking—not once or twice, but every day moment by moment.

Just as Jesus promised, God's Holy Spirit is your personal, powerful friend and counselor.

The Perfect Pattern

You have a perfect pattern to follow in the life and ministry of Jesus, who modeled complete trust in His Heavenly Father in every circumstance. And because Christ's Heavenly Father is also *our* Heavenly Father, we can confidently align ourselves to God, just as Jesus did.

Jesus Put God First

As you read the Gospels, you'll see that Jesus often arose before anyone else, went off by Himself and prayed. He prayed throughout His day and often into the night. He was in constant communication with the Father.



Choosing to follow Christ means we won't be following the masses of our fellow man.

Jesus Was Humble

Paul wrote to fellow believers, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant ..." (Philippians 2:5-7a).

Jesus Obeyed God's Word

Christ's knowledge of the Scriptures, as well as His constant communication with the Father, gave Him the strength and fo-

cus to complete the work the Father sent Him to do. Philippians 2:8b says, He, "... became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"

Jesus quoted Scripture while teaching and preaching. If our Lord was so confident in the truth of God's Word that He staked His entire life, purpose and credibility on it, then should we not boldly and confidently do the same?

God's Armor

Ephesians 6:10-18 tells us to put on the armor of God. We are told to grow in the Word, apply it in our daily lives, to be in prayer and to stand firm against the assaults that will inevitably come. The evil that runs rampant in the world today will provide daily assaults and most of them will be very subtle. We must always be alert.

God is God

What it comes down to is that God is God and we are not. He's the Creator, the Designer and the Sustainer of all things. We can follow the perfect example of His Son, orienting ourselves daily to the one and only way—keeping God first and foremost in all things.

Putting on the full armor of God



Helmet of Salvation

Christians are born again to glorify God through good works. In Ephesians 6 we have a call to arms to put on all of God's armor. First we must have the helmet of salvation guaranteeing our eternal security. It also serves to protect us from the way the world thinks and demonic influence.



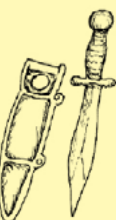
Breastplate of Righteousness

A breastplate protects us from the fiery darts of Satan. Because we now share Christ's righteousness, we must seek to live a righteous life. A lifestyle of righteous living serves the same purpose for believers as the breastplate of armor served Roman soldiers. It is a very real protection.



Shield of Faith

Faith is believing that what God says is true. This shield can be moved to cover all our weaknesses when we are attacked. Memorizing and applying the promises of God keeps us moving forward and standing firm in the face of the enemy. Faith demolishes fear in our lives because faith and fear cannot exist together in our hearts.



Sword of the Spirit/The Word

The Bible is our weapon, the Sword of God. In the face of the overwhelming onslaught of all we hear and see each day, we must study the Bible daily and with the power of the Holy Spirit, apply what we learn. While we will never learn all there is to know about God's Word, we must arm ourselves with its power.



Belt of Truth

Just as a physical belt holds our pants in place, the spiritual belt supports the Sword of the Spirit, God's Word. Spiritually, we must wrap the belt of truth around us to keep us secure in God's plan and to defend the truth of God's Word. Do you want to please God? Learn about Him.



Feet to Spread the Gospel

Forward, march! Every believer is an ambassador for God. The gospel allows us to step into the battle without fear. With the truth of God, we're always prepared to share the Good News about Christ and how only He can bring peace into our hearts and the hearts of all mankind.

The Bible Says

■ A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

John 13:34-35

■ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin.

1 John 1:7

■ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Gal 2:20

■ You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Eph 4:22-24

■ Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Eph 5:1-2

■ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.

Col 2:9-10

■ What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.

2 Tim 1:13

■ Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1 Pet 1:13

"We must learn to live on the heavenly side and look at things from above. To contemplate all things as God sees them, as Christ beholds them, overcomes sin, defies Satan, dissolves perplexities, lifts us above trials, separates us from the world and conquers fear of death."

A.B. Simpson

Faith That Sustains

Saved by faith, walk by faith

The backbone of a relationship with God

Faith is simply taking God at His Word and believing Him with all your heart, mind, soul and spirit

Many people think that faith is simply blind obedience to some dogma. They think that faith in and of itself has merit. But it doesn't. It is always the object of faith that has the merit. In the Bible, God never asks for blind faith. God always gives proof of who and what He is before He asks for faith. This is why biblical faith is so incredibly powerful. It is focused on the Creator of all things.

Faith is Not Blind

Faith can be presented as an interlocking system—Faith is expressed by our love for God which results in total dependence on Him and finally our desire to live in obedience to His Word.

Christians, though limited by their finite minds, are sovereignly equipped with faith as another filter through which to see the spiritual realm. A Christian writer once wrote, "The heart never takes the place of the head, but it can, and should, obey it."

Take God at His Word

Faith is simply taking God at His Word and believing Him with all your heart. It is a commitment to believe, trust and stake the rest of your life (as well as your eternal future) on the premise that God's Word is truth.

Just as unbelievers are saved by faith, believers are to walk with God by faith. There is a dynamic Scripture passage that beautifully sums up what walking by faith is all about: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were

taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (Colossians 2:6-7). Walking by faith is necessary for spiritual growth and is the "backbone" of a thriving relationship with God.

Faith is Love for God

When you walk by faith, you choose to love God with "... all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind," as Jesus said in Matthew 22:37. You give Him first place in your life and seek to bring glory to Him with your actions, words and attitude. You go about your day with a spirit of praise and gratitude for all of His blessings, big and small. Your faith will grow along with your love for God as you see His love and faithfulness in your life.



The strength of our faith is reflected in the confidence we place in God.

Walk by Faith

Unfortunately, many Christians, who joined God's family through an initial faith decision to receive Christ, make the mistake of failing to walk by faith. They try to live in their own power instead of by God's power. As a result, they wander the rest of their lives without fully realizing the "Promised Land"—the abundant life that Christ offers (John 10:10b). If you want to be sure you are "walking by faith" as you move forward, take heart and orient to the following principles.

Faith is Active

Walking by faith is not passive, it's active! You express faith by consciously choosing to act on God's Word and what He has promised. For example, Romans 4:21 commends the faith of Abraham, that "... being fully persuaded that

God had power to do what he had promised." By acting on his faith, Abraham became the patriarch of God's chosen people.

Faith is Dependent

We cannot walk by faith by doing our own thing. In fact, going our own way is how we get into trouble! In the Bible, the word "faith" always conveys a sense of *dependence*—not on our stubborn self-will but on God's power and promises. Walking by faith means placing your hand in Jesus' hand, walking alongside Him on life's pathway, and trusting Him by following His lead. Living and walking by faith require a personal and intimate relationship with Him.

Faith is God-Powered

Fortunately, God does not leave us to our own power to walk by faith; He supplies the strength and guidance for us. Christians have the indwelling Holy Spirit, whom God gives to every believer. Through Him we find the power to "live by faith, not by sight," to make life choices that are pleasing to God and glorify Him.

We cannot succeed on our own strength—that wouldn't be faith. But we can tap into God's power by keeping in close touch with Him through His Word, prayer and by heeding the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Faith is Obedient

The more we love God, the more we'll want to depend on and obey Him. And the more we obey Him, the more intimate our relationship with Him will become.

Don't miss out on the wonderful adventure of walking by faith. As you received Him by faith, so live by faith. As Paul said, "... continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (Colossians 2:6b-7).

Growing in Christ

Instant Insights



■ Faith should always be focused on God. God, the object of our faith, is where the power is.

■ Faith has no merit in itself. It is the object of our faith that has merit—not our faith. Therefore, our faith must be in the right object or person.

■ There is no limit to the amount of faith you can have, but your faith will grow stronger the more you understand the Bible.

■ Faith grows stronger and stronger as we express it and apply it to our lives.

■ Don't forget that it is always Scripture that determines theology—not your experiences or feelings.

■ Any theology apart from what the Bible teaches is misguided and in error.

■ Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Our reliance and confidence should be in Him, not on what we "know" or think we know.

■ Obedience is the natural response to revelation—knowing and understanding God's Word.

■ Real success is receiving rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ; did you accomplish what God gave you to do?

■ No matter how far you are from someone you are praying for, God is right next to both of you. That is faith and confidence.

■ With growing faith you will have a desire to serve Christ. You will no longer be consumed by your own goals, desires or agendas. Your goal will be furthering the work of God.

■ The strongest faith of all is the faith reflected from the soul of the believer in his daily walk with the Lord. Jesus Christ is the pattern and example in all things spiritual as we strive to fulfill God's plan for our lives.

The Bible Says



■ Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Rom 5:1-2

■ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Col 2:6-7

■ For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Rom 1:17

■ We live by faith, not by sight.

2 Cor 5:7

■ Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.

1 Cor 16:13

■ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Gal 2:20

■ But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.

Gal 5:5

■ In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Eph 3:12

■ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.

1 Cor 2:4-5

"Faith sees the invisible, believes the unbelievable, and receives the impossible."

Corrie Ten Boom

The Battle for Your Soul

The Holy Spirit vs. the sin nature

Maintaining God's power

*Living with
the enemy
within*

God wants us to steer clear of the destructive effects of sinful acts, attitudes and words. He gave us ultimate victory over sin at the cross. He then provides the Holy Spirit to reside within us to strengthen, encourage and give guidance.

Our soul is influenced by both our sin nature and the Holy Spirit. It is a constant battle. Our old nature seeks to control our attitudes and actions and keep us buried in sin. But we have the far greater power of the Holy Spirit to strengthen us against temptation and fill us with God's power.

War Already Won

The war against sin was won at the cross, where judgment for every sin that has ever been or ever will be committed was poured out onto Jesus Christ. No believer will ever be judged again for his sins.

But just because the war has been won doesn't mean we won't have many battles ahead of us.

We Still Have a Sin Nature

Our sin nature is still as strong as it ever was and it is still there trying to distract us from God and the joy of serving Him.



Without the filling of the Holy Spirit, you'll lose this battle every time.

The Holy Spirit works through us only when He is in control. But if we do not have God's Word stored in our souls, we have made the Holy Spirit a workman without tools. He can only use the truth we have learned and understood. That is why we feed on the Word every day. The more we store in our souls, the more the Holy Spirit has to work with and the more He will accomplish through our lives.

What if I Sin?

Indeed, you will sin. All Christians do. God knows this, and He has made provision for us to return to intimate fellowship with Him. The important thing is that you not try to ignore the fact that you have sinned. It's vital to make things right with God by turning back to Him whenever you sin.

Even Paul struggled with sin

SATAN IS THE master of illusion and deceit; he knows how to make sin and evil look beautiful. Even a spiritual giant like the Apostle Paul candidly admitted to battles with his sin nature. "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out" (Romans 7:15, 18b).

Fortunately, that's not the end of the story for Paul—or for us! He concludes: "Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (v. 25). God loves you so much that He wants you to live in victory—not weakness or defeat—so He has provided the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit so that Christ can live His life through you. When the Spirit whispers, pay attention. "So I say,

live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Galatians 5:16).

Oswald Chambers wrote, "... when the Holy Spirit rouses the conscience and brings him into the presence of God, it is not his relationship with men that bothers him, but his relationship with God."

Turning back to God when you sin

There is only one thing that can interrupt your intimate walk with God, and that is ... you!

God's remarkable recovery procedure

God never cuts His intimate fellowship with us. But all too often we sin and block our intimate fellowship with Him. Then God the Holy Spirit can no longer work freely in us.

We must recognize that any sin (whether we call it a "little white lie" or breaking one of the 10 Commandments) affects our walk with God.

God has provided an incredible, powerful and loving way for us to recover and restore our intimate fellowship with Him whenever we stumble and sin. What can we do to restore that fellowship?

Turn back to God. And continue walking in His Truth. How? It is actually quite simple.

God promises in 1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Remember ALL of our sins were judged and paid for at the cross. They will never be judged again. But when we sin, we break our intimate fellowship with God.

When we examine ourselves, and acknowledge our sin to God, He immediately restores us to our intimate relationship with Him. We add nothing—He has done

it all for us in love—no further atonement is required.

Confession is God's grace provision to restore our intimate relationship with Him, a place of perfect peace and joy.

Then changing direction to follow God's plan strengthens your walk and helps you avoid "chain sinning."

What a powerful and simple tool God has given us to get up after we have fallen down. And it works any time and every time. We should use it as often as needed.

The very moment you turn back to God He restores the intimate relationship that you broke. You can now serve God totally—filled with the power of His Holy Spirit. Your relationship is restored instantly, whether you feel it or not.

Amazingly, God is conforming you to Christ; it is His work not yours. He shares with you His love, joy, peace, forbearance, goodness, faithfulness and gentleness.

Don't ever let your sins or failures prevent you from serving God. He knew of your failures in eternity past and has made provision for every single sin and failure in your life because you are His child and He really does love you.

Q "Oh no! I just messed up big time. Why do I still struggle with sin?"

The Bible Says

■ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.

John 17:15

■ Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Rom 6:16

■ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.

Rom 7:18–21

■ So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

Gal 5:16–17

■ Finally, be strong in the Lord and his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Eph 6:10–12

■ The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

2 Tim 4:18

"We can be assured that each step deeper into the Lord's presence will reveal areas in our hearts which need to be cleansed. Do not be afraid. When the Spirit shows you areas of sin, it is not to condemn you, but to cleanse you."

Francis Franqipane

God's Power Walk

Spirituality—Not what you thought it was

The perfect navigation system

What makes a person spiritual? Some people would say a person is spiritual because he “feels spiritual,” or believes in or seeks to tap some sort of “higher power.” Then there are those who, oddly, identify themselves as “Christian” but don’t subscribe to the basic tenets of the faith, such as the virgin birth, the resurrection or the deity of Jesus Christ.

An interest in spiritual things does not make one spiritual—you *must* be born again. Webster’s dictionary which defines spirituality as “the quality or state of being concerned with religion or religious matters: the quality or state of being spiritual” does not agree with God’s definition.

God Defines Spirituality

God’s definition is the only one that counts. Anything else is a counterfeit. His definition is revealed in His Word and it can be clearly discerned. According to the Bible, a person is spiritual when he is filled with the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16–17). At the moment of salvation, every believer is indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. Indwelling is a once-for-all thing; it cannot be changed or lost. The Spirit indwells every believer forever (John 14:16).

With the indwelling, an inner conflict begins between the Holy Spirit and our sin nature. Our volition—our freedom to choose—is the determining factor in the conflict. We decide moment by moment who will be in control of our soul.

God's Perfect Power Source

The power that sustained the humanity of Jesus Christ during His life on earth and raised Him from the dead is available to you today! That power is the Holy Spirit. Just imagine, you are sustained and powered by the very same Holy Spirit that sustained Jesus Christ in His earthly ministry.

Beginning the Walk

You cannot walk alone and be successful, and

you don’t have to. God’s plan is a supernatural plan and requires a supernatural power to succeed. Your spiritual walk, just like a regular walk, must begin with a single step. To reach your destination, you must keep walking. Once you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, a spiritual journey that will last a lifetime has begun.

Your First Steps

God loves you. He knows that you are weak and prone to sin, so He has provided for your every need. But there is one thing that you must do. It is the one thing that God demands from every one of His children that would walk with Him in holiness; that is obedience.

It is another thing to actually make that choice. You must learn to say, “Not my will Father, but Your will be done.” God will not force Himself upon anyone. He gave us free will so that our love and obedience are genuine.

You must continue your walk in God’s light. If you stumble, He will lift you back up. If you grow weak, He will carry you.

Putting it All Together

You have placed your faith in Jesus Christ and are now embarking on a journey. The journey will be a lifelong one. Your destination is the glory of God. God has provided you everything you will need for the journey, but you must take the initiative to begin. Once you have begun, God’s love for you should be your motivation to keep walking. You have God’s Word as “... a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” (Psalm 119:105). Jesus is your companion on this journey and the Holy Spirit is your guide.

A Love Story

The journey may be difficult, but it will be one of joy and peace because, “The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deuteronomy 33:27a). The journey is a beautiful love story; love for God and love for one another.

4 power techniques



God took your burden away at the cross. Now walk freely in His power.

1. Focus on God. We need to live with a constant focus on serving God. When we fail, God wants us to come boldly to the throne of grace in full assurance that all of our sins were paid for at the cross (Hebrews 4:14–16).

We need only to turn back to Him acknowledging our failure. He is not honored when we come crawling and cringing into His presence, begging for something that He has promised to give.

When we turn back to Christ, we are immediately cleansed and can walk with confidence.

2. Filling of the Holy Spirit. We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit if we are to walk in His power. Basically, our guideposts require us to obey two commands: do not grieve the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) and do not quench the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19), which we do by sinning and by being apathetic to God’s Word.

Dependence on the filling of the Holy Spirit leads us to Christian living, including Bible study, prayer, application and growth in Christ.

By living in the power of the Spirit, we begin to take hold of the Word of God. We learn to rely on the promises, the principles and the doctrines of the Word, and that reliance produces inner rest, peace and tranquility (Matthew 11:29).

Apart from grace (which comes from God) and truth (which comes from His Word) being balanced in the soul, there is no power in life.

When we learn to apply the Word of God to our lives daily, then we enter into the power that brings inner rest in outer turmoil (Philippians 4:6–7; Hebrews 4).

3. Living in the Word. This means that we have come to the realization that everything in life but the Word of God is a detail. We begin to understand that we can live without money, without health, without friends, but we cannot live without the Word of God.

We make decisions to saturate our soul with God’s Word. This involves personal study above and beyond anything we do in church. Study and application of the Word of God brings spiritual growth.

Spiritual growth causes us to imitate Christ, the Living Word. The only way to be conformed to the Living Word is to grow in the written Word.

4. Occupation with Christ. When we reach the point at which we are occupied with the person of Jesus Christ, we are fulfilling the command to “Love the Lord your God ... with all you strength” (Mark 12:30).

If we are occupied with things, with people or with ourselves, then we have not yet learned this. We are commanded to study and imitate His life (1 Corinthians 11:1).

The only way to avoid growing weary and losing heart, and to finish the race set before us is by coming to an intimate personal knowledge of the person of Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:10).

The Bible Says

■ Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Rom 12:2

■ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

2 Cor 9:8

■ ... I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Eph 4:1b–3

■ Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Eph 5:1–2

■ ... whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Phil 4:8

■ So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Col 2:6–7

■ ... let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith ... so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Heb 12:1b–3

*The joy of
obedience
is the key to
skillful living*

“Beginning well is a momentary thing; finishing well is a lifelong thing.”

Ravi Zacharias

Mental Attitude

Your attitude is your life

A focus on Christ vs. a focus on self

Happiness is a choice only you can make

We all face challenges in life. In the words of the great hymn, *Amazing Grace*, life holds “many dangers, toils and snares” for earth’s inhabitants. As believers in Christ, we are not exempt from such challenges.

A big difference between the Christian and the non-Christian, however, is that the Christian has been given an incredible reason to face life’s challenges with an upbeat, positive spirit. He also has the most rock-solid, reliable resources to help overcome doubt and discouragement.

We are finite creatures with finite minds. Eternity is infinite, and only God comprehends eternity. Therefore, our eternal destiny is really in Him.

Glass Half Empty

The Bible clearly teaches throughout its pages that what we think is who we really are. Through the ages, both medical science and human psychology have proven that our attitude can affect our happiness.

If you think negative thoughts, you produce negative emotions and you will be a negative person. You’ll approach life from the perspective of doubt, fear and even cynicism.

You are more likely to be susceptible to illness.

Your outcomes—your decisions, tasks and interactions—are more likely to turn out negatively. And you won’t be much fun to be around.

Glass Half Full

On the other hand, if you approach life with a positive mental attitude, you will engage people, challenges and tasks with an upbeat, can-do outlook. You’ll be more content and your outcomes will be more desirable. And it’s much more likely that others will enjoy being around you!

Happiness is a Choice

The choice is yours! Don’t let others control your happiness, and don’t let the “dangers, toils and snares” around you determine your happiness.

Happiness is a moment-by-moment choice that you can make, regardless of what is happening around you.

If you follow Christ, you have every reason to approach life with a positive mental attitude. You have new life in Jesus—eternal life! You have the Holy Spirit within you to comfort, guide and empower you!

The Mind of Christ

As the Apostle Paul wrote, “But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16b), meaning that in the big scheme of things, the troubles of this earth are only temporary. God knows the big picture, and He has your best interest in mind

(Romans 8:28). You can take daily joy in His divine, big-picture perspective.

Achieving stability in an unstable world

IF YOU WATCH the news, it seems our world is getting more unstable each day. It can be discouraging—even depressing. How can you overcome all the negativity and defeat discouragement?

Take comfort in this fact: As the world changes, God doesn’t. He is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble, according to Psalm 46:1. The psalmist goes on to affirm, “Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way ...” (Psalm 46:2). So whatever is happening, whether it’s around the world or around your workplace or in your home, the Lord is there to help you stay strong and steady.

God is stable and constant. The Scriptures assure us that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). While your world may tremble, He is trustworthy. You can tap into God’s dependable constancy by claiming the amazing promise of Hebrews 13:5b–6: “... God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’”

Walk in the Spirit

How do you keep a positive mental attitude? By walking in the Spirit, focusing on Christ and not on yourself.

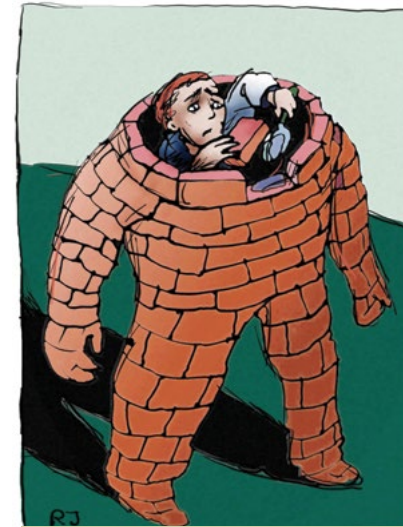
By doing so you appropriate the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control that are the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the Christian’s life.

Trust God in All Things

Give all your concerns to God and trust Him for the outcome. As you do this, the Bible promises, “... the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

Jesus Christ is both your reason as well as your resource for engaging life with an authentic, positive attitude. With Him, you’ll discover the marvelous power and promise of Philippians 4:8–9: “... whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things ... and the God of peace will be with you.”

Attitudes become thoughts. Thoughts become actions. Actions become habits. Habits become your character. Character determines destiny.



Building your own entrapment with your own self-defeating attitude

MAKING CHRIST YOUR focus allows you to tear down the bricks that so often entrap and keep you from enjoying the very best that God has prepared for you in eternity past.

Getting your mental focus off of God and onto yourself—constantly thinking “me, me, me, what do I want, or how can I ...” *rather than* “what is God’s attitude, what does God want me to do or how can I serve God” is a recipe for disaster in your life.

By choosing God as the center of your focus, everything else will take care of itself.

My Mental Attitude Checklist

- Am I focusing on God moment by moment? Or is my primary motivation what I want? Is there unconfessed sin in my life? Having sin in one’s life weighs one down and keeps one from walking with God.
- What can I thank God for today—right now? Gratitude and praise lift one’s spirit by redirecting my focus from personal problems onto Christ’s remarkable love and His solutions.
- Is my attitude one of love, thoughtfulness and kindness to others?
- What am I worried or discouraged about? Give it to God and move on with your day. “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).
- What do I need to change in my mental attitude—right now—to start serving God?

Instant Insights

Excuses Begone!

It’s human nature to allow negative, self-defeating thoughts to enter our minds. And for followers of Christ, such thinking may even be instigated by Satan who seeks to tempt us to think ill of ourselves or others and to discourage and immobilize us from living as Christ wants us to live.

God is the positive answer to our negative thoughts. Take a few moments right now to look up, read and think on the Scripture verses below. These are just a few examples of how God redirects us from “stinking thinking” to His positive, uplifting promises when we keep our eyes on Him.

■ **It’s impossible!** With God All things are possible (Matt 19:26).

■ **Nobody loves me!** I love you. I really do! (John 3:16).

■ **I can’t go on!** My grace is sufficient for you (2 Cor 12:9a; Ps 91:15).

■ **I just don’t know what to do!** I will direct your steps (Prov 3:5–6).

■ **I can’t!** You can do all things through Christ (Phil 4:13).

■ **I’m not able!** Trust Me: I am able (2 Cor 9:8).

■ **I can’t forgive myself!** I forgive you (1 John 1:9; Rom 8:1).

■ **I can’t manage!** I will supply all your needs (Phil 4:19).

■ **I’m afraid!** I have given you a spirit of power (2 Tim 1:7).

■ **I’m worried!** Cast all your cares on Me (1 Pet 5:7).

■ **I’m not smart enough!** I give you wisdom (1 Cor 1:30).

■ **I’m all alone in this!** I am here when you’re having trouble (Heb 13:5; Ps 46:1).

“I believe the single most significant decision I can make on a day-to-day basis is my choice of attitude. Attitude keeps me going or cripples my progress. It alone fuels my fire or assaults my hope. When my attitudes are right, there is no barrier too high, no valley too deep, no dream too extreme, no challenge too great for me.”

Perfect Prayers, Perfect Answers

Praying God's way

God always answers prayer in your best interest

One of the amazing privileges of knowing God personally is that the Creator and Ruler of the universe invites His followers to talk with Him directly in prayer. Because every believer is a priest (1 Peter 2:9), we do not need any intermediary to talk to God for us. Christ is now our High Priest and He intercedes on our behalf.

What exactly is prayer? The short answer is that prayer is simply your communication with God—real, honest, person-to-person communication. Much as you build a relationship with a good friend through regular, forthright communication over time, so your relationship with God will grow as you engage in frequent, honest communication with Him.

Many Reasons for Prayer

There are many reasons to go to God in prayer. Often our prayers are just to praise Him and thank Him for who He is and what He has done for us. We may thank Him for all the blessings He has bestowed upon us. There are times when we may just seek to commune with Him in silence and meditate upon Him or His Word as we recall Bible passages of encouragement and blessing. Sometimes we go to God's throne seeking comfort and peace as we go through the trials and tribulations of life. Often we seek to intercede for others and pray for their needs and comfort and guidance and that God would soothe their troubled souls.

Many of our prayers are for our own needs—be they physical, spiritual, mental or emotional. We may ask God to strengthen our walk with Him. We may ask Him for answers to problems we are having. When we seek to serve Him more

actively, we may seek His guidance to direct us to serve Him more fully. And there may be times of great stress when our prayer may be only one word, "Help." Whatever the time or situation, God is only a prayer away, and He is never too busy to hear you.

The Nuts and Bolts of Prayer

Before we can adequately describe what prayer is and how to do it, it's important to remove any false premises that exist concerning prayer. For example, we often hear the phrase "God answers prayer." Nothing you read here will take anything away from that truth. What's important to know is prayer is not merely God's children asking Him for things. God is not a "genie in a bottle," existing only to grant our wishes. If that were the case, He would be our servant, and we would be the master. It goes without saying that nothing could be further from

the truth. God is our Lord, and we exist to serve and glorify Him.

Jesus Prayed Often

Jesus bids us to follow Him, which means to live by His example and teachings. Jesus' disciples had the benefit of being able to follow Him literally. Jesus was not confined to teaching in a building or specific area; He traveled from place to place with His disciples in tow. The events in Jesus' earthly ministry that we read about in the Bible—they saw with their own eyes. They saw Him heal the sick, turn water into wine, raise the dead and so on. Of all the things they could have asked Him to teach them,



Conversing with your Heavenly Father.
God is always there for you.

Energized
prayer lets
loose an
earthshaking
power

"Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Spirit, for such things as God has promised."

John Bunyan

Jesus Prayed

THROUGHOUT THE GOSPELS we have examples of Jesus' prayers. He rose up early in the morning to spend time alone with God before going about His day (Mark 1:35). He prayed at meals, He prayed at night, He prayed for Himself and at the worst time in His life, hanging on the cross, He prayed for others, for those who hated Him. When the disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray in Luke 11:2-4, He told the disciples to address their prayers to the Father praising Him, to ask for forgiveness, to pray for their needs and to forgive others.

His Faithfulness

Yes, Jesus knows more about prayer than anybody, and even though He is God, He still prayed to the Father throughout the day. Offering praise and thanksgiving in prayer is part of our worship. Being thankful reminds us of all God has done for us and remembering His faithfulness to us reinforces our faith in Him and helps us remember we can rely on Him. Praise is remembering who He is and what He has done because of His character, His love, His power and His righteousness.

Our Response

Prayer is part of worship, a duty of the priesthood, and our greatest spiritual weapon for fighting the battles of the world, the flesh and the devil. Our time set apart, dedicated to God in prayer, provides us with the most intimate, personal relationship with our Heavenly Father. As the Apostle John said "...our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete" (1 John 1:3b-4). What a great joy and privilege it is to come face to face with the Creator of the universe in prayer.

God has already answered your prayers!

EVERY PRAYER YOU have ever prayed or ever will pray, God already knows! And He has actually already answered it in eternity past.

He knows everything about you. He knows the end from the beginning including every thing that affects your life. Knowing all things, He in His infinite wisdom, has already provided perfect answers to your prayers.

He has factored into His plan every single thing that affects you and His plan for your life—even your sins and failures.

You may not always get the answer you think you want, but you will always get God's perfect answer. Keep praying with confidence knowing that God has answered your every prayer in His infinite, perfect love.

it was "... Lord, teach us to pray ..." (Luke 11:1b).

In their travels, they witnessed Jesus frequently going off alone in prayer. They realized there was a connection between His prayer life and His power. After ministering to large masses of people, Jesus refreshed Himself by seeking out His Father in prayer. He had been modeling

prayer for them all along, but now they were ready to seek His guidance in how to pray.

The result was what has become known as the Lord's Prayer, which many have committed to memory, perhaps even you. While that prayer is beautifully worded and beneficial to know, we aren't simply to recite it verbatim in some ritualistic fashion. Jesus didn't command us to pray exactly like that. He admonished us to use it as a model.

Notice what that model prayer is not. It's not a laundry list of things we want. God is not a cosmic "Santa Claus" existing to bring us things that serve only to benefit us. When we are in sync with God's way of thinking and God's priorities, we want His will to be done, not ours as Jesus said in Luke 22:42.

Commanded to Pray

New believers are sometimes confused by Matthew 6:8, which tells us that God knows what we're going to pray for even before we utter a word. So, the obvious question is, why pray at all? An equally obvious answer is: because Jesus commanded us to. But why?

God Really Knows Us

An earthly father who knows his children well often knows what they will ask of him before they do so.

How God answers prayer

God Says				
Yes	Yes to Intent	No	Not Now	Under Grace
God may say "yes" to our prayers when we are seeking His will in our lives.	God may say "yes" to the intent of our prayers but no to the specifics of our request—He has a better way.	God knows all the circumstances for which we are praying and to give us His very best He may say "No."	God's timing is better than ours and for our benefit He may have us wait for His perfect timing.	There are times when God will leave problems in place and then give us the strength to deal with them.

That's because he has an intimate relationship with them and knows them thoroughly. He knows how they think, what they want and what they're passionate about. If that is true of an earthly father, how much more does a sovereign, all-knowing Heavenly Father know His children?

Seek God's Will

Therefore, prayer works when we ask Him to work His will through us. The more we know Him, the more we love Him and want His will to be done. Prayer works because it acts much like a radio tuner; it tunes us to God's frequency, His sovereign will. Prayer is coupled with personal Bible study because the more we know His Word, the more we know His will. And when prayer and Bible study are combined with the help of the Holy Spirit, (Romans 8:26) we are fine-tuned to the Almighty God.

The Bible contains its own book of songs, known as the Psalms, many authored by King David. The Bible tells us David was far from a perfect man. Despite his many failures, God declared him to be a man after His own heart in Acts 13:22. David's prayers drew him close to God. Today,

some people use the Psalms as a launching pad for their own prayers.

Pray Anytime

Prayer can take place anytime, anywhere—24/7. You can talk with God

The amazing real power in prayer

Our prayers, at best, are based only upon the knowledge we have at hand. But God knows everything that might affect our prayers. So when our prayers may be weak, unknowing or even when we are distraught—God's answer will be perfect. Here's how.

The incredible power in prayer is that Jesus Christ, Himself and the Holy Spirit, Himself encapsulate our prayers. This means that when our prayers get to the Heavenly Father they are perfect! Just imagine—even when we don't know what to pray for, our prayers are perfected on the way to heaven.

throughout your day or during periods that you designate as "quiet times" with Him.

Pray Frequently

You need not worry about trying to craft lengthy, lofty prayers like those you may have heard ministers pray in formal settings—God doesn't care so much about your words as He does about the attitude of your heart, about your willingness to share your thoughts with Him and to seek His guidance. Use your own words, much as you would talk with a close friend.

Some Things Don't Need Prayer

That sounds strange doesn't it? But there really are times when prayer is not needed. When the Bible clearly states facts, principles or doctrines that cover certain situations, we need only to obey the Bible.

For instance, if you're considering telling a lie or stealing something, having sex outside of marriage—you don't need to pray whether you should or shouldn't. The Bible is very clear about these things. These are the times we exercise obedience and simply do what God says. Now, it would be appropriate to pray for the Lord to take the temptation from you and to strengthen your resolve.

Seven reasons God may say "No" to your prayer

Lack of Faith	Disobedience	Trying to Exploit God	Improper Motivation	Improper Desires	God's Method Rejected	God's Refocusing Us
The Bible tells us to live by faith and not by sight. When we don't show confidence in God and what He commands us to do, He may not answer our prayers and petitions until we turn back to Him.	When we are disobedient and living in sin and refuse to turn back to Him, He sometimes may not respond to our prayers until we have turned back to Him.	When we try to manipulate God to get the answers we want, we should not expect God to answer our prayers. He is God the Father and we are His children.	God will not partner with us when our prayers are self-centered or have evil intent. God always seeks a humble and loving heart in prayer.	When your prayers contain lustful desires for things God prohibits or you seek gratification for your sin nature, God will reject your prayers.	Don't reject God's answers to your prayers just because you don't think they fit your expectations or desires. God's answers are always the best ones for you.	We are to trust God in all things and He may be refocusing our lives to serve Him more powerfully. Even though His answers may be slow in coming He tells us to keep on praying.

How to pray

HOW DO YOU pray and for what do you pray? Many have found the following acronym—ACTS—helpful in their approach to prayer.

"A" is for Adoration

This acknowledges God's greatness and our love for Him. As you read the Psalms in the Old Testament, you'll see that the writers often began their prayers with adoration and praise for God. (If you wish, you can use some of these psalms in your own prayers.)

Praising God for His incredible love, power, all-knowingness, creativity and majesty helps us approach Him with humble hearts. It acknowledges that God is God and that we are not and that our hearts are open to whatever He may want to convey to us in response to our prayer.

"C" Stands for Confession

To confess simply means to agree with God that we have sinned, that our sin was wrong and offensive to Him. Unconfessed sin stands in the way of honest fellowship with God because He is all about purity and truth: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

We can try to pretend that our sin doesn't matter, but God knows. So humbly ask Him to reveal anything you may have said, thought or done that would be displeasing to Him and confess it.

The good news is that He always forgives the genuinely contrite heart: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Confession and forgiveness remove any barriers between you and God.

"T" is for Thankfulness

When you think about it, no matter what challenges you face on any given day, there are also dozens—most likely hundreds—of blessings all around you. Blessings large

and small, tangible and intangible, all from God.

Take time to thank Him for these blessings: an answer to prayer, for your family and friends, for food, clothing and shelter, for His creation, for sunshine and rain, for life itself. And thank Him, by faith, for whatever trial or challenge you may be going through—that He will guide and strengthen you through it and even use the situation for your good.

"S" Stands for Supplication

This is a fancy word for "requests." You can bring your requests directly to God anytime, anywhere. He invites it! "... call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you ..." He promises in Psalm 50:15. One of Jesus' apostles, Peter, instructed the early Christians, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). No topic is off limits with God, so tell Him exactly what's on your mind. Ask Him to provide for your needs. Ask Him to guide you through life's challenges.

God's Promise to You

This is God's invitation and promise to you: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6, 7).

Take God up on His invitation to talk with Him throughout your day. You will not only draw closer and closer to Him, but your faith will grow richer and deeper as you come to know Him. You will discover a sense of inner peace and confidence greater than you've ever known before.

While the ACTS acronym may be helpful, you will do well to remember that prayer is not about a formula, but is an intimate conversation with the most tenderhearted and loving Father in the universe.

The Bible Says

■ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Heb 4:15-16

■ Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

Matt 7:7-8

■ Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

Jer 29:12

■ This is the assurance we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

1 John 5:14-15

■ Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.

Isa 65:24

■ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

John 15:7

■ and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.

Ps 50:15

■ When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Matt 6:6

Managing Your Emotions

Get this one thing right and you're on your way to a better life

Heart vs. head

Our emotions are a gift from God. He intends for us to enjoy our emotions and to learn and grow in our spiritual lives through our exercise and stewardship of these emotions. Emotions are one of the key elements that determine how we live our lives. Without emotions we wouldn't be able to enjoy relationships with our families, friends and even circumstances of life.

The proper function of emotions determines how we relate to God. Without them we would not be able to enjoy that close intimate fellowship He desires us to have with Him and with others. Our emotions help us to experience peace, joy and contentment in this life—but all too often, great pain.

How we handle our emotions may be one of the greatest tests of our Christian walk. This is, potentially, where we will have our greatest successes—and greatest failures. We have both the wonderful joy of positive emotions and, at the same time, the added burden of negative emotions to deal with.

The Function of Emotions

Our emotions can be a wonderful “appreciator” of the many good things in our lives. They can also be a “release valve” at moments of great stress. Our emotions can be affected by many things; some internal and some external, some in our control, some not. They can even affect our health. And sometimes our health affects our emotions.

The Problem with Emotions

Emotions are always reactions to situations, circumstances and events. Emotions arrive at our door unbidden and without warning. But they don't come alone. A circumstance or situation triggers an unsolicited reaction that in turn triggers an emotional response that may be positive or negative.

Tragically, because of our fallen nature, our emotions are no longer always trustworthy or positive, nor do they always enrich our lives as

God intends. They can also be negative, making our lives miserable, destroying relationships and making other people miserable also.

Emotions are extremely difficult to manage. But we are far more successful at managing our thoughts. Thoughts are the messengers that deliver news of the circumstance and events to us and provide us with an opportunity to weigh the validity of our response before we react.

An Invitation to Disaster

There is a key concept we need to master and understand if we are to express our emotions as God intends. *He designed our emotions to respond to our thinking.* The one thing we need to avoid is allowing our emotions to control our thoughts. This is an invitation to disaster.

The Great Ambush

We need to be aware of the things we can control and those we can't. If we don't concern ourselves with what is going on around us, we will be ambushed by our emotions. While so many uncontrollable things factor into what contributes to our emotional state, it makes sense that we should concern ourselves with what we can control—ourselves.

Living Beyond Your Feelings

Our emotions are notoriously unreliable. There's a reason we use terms like “emotional roller coaster” in our lives. Daily we can experience many different emotions depending on external circumstances or inner conflicts. So, making decisions and taking action based on how we feel is a recipe for disaster. Victory over life's trials is pretty much impossible until we learn how to live beyond our feelings.

“But I Can't Help How I Feel!”

We live in imperfect, constantly decaying bodies, and therefore, may be affected by hormonal or chemical imbalances in our systems. But far too often our choices lead us into emotional turmoil. We ensnare ourselves with our own

bad decisions, attitudes or seeking to make others behave the way we want or think they should.

Whatever the case, it is still our responsibility to live like Christ, not to sit back and say, “that's just the way I am.” We are to do everything in our power to strive for Christ-likeness, and let God pick up where we fall short.

Spirit-Filled Decisions

Understanding how God wants us to respond in the situations and circumstances of life is essential. Our emotional stability depends on our relationship with God. And our emotions play a key role in determining the outcome. We must be emotionally stable if we are to stay in fellowship with God and grow spiritually. This is possible only through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Whenever something happens that evokes a negative thought or emotion, we need to be able to halt the process of reacting and substitute a new way of considering the validity of that thought or emotion.



Running on emotions won't get you far—and can even cause great damage.

When you feel anger, hurt, sadness, humiliation or any other negative feeling welling up within, you need to filter that thought or feeling through the light of God's Word. The Holy Spirit will help you avoid making what could be disastrous mistakes. We need to remember that our emotions should always respond to our thinking. God has given us all we need to be successful in our pursuit. We need only to apply what we know.

Emotions in a Nutshell

Everyone has emotions. Emotions are intended to enhance our enjoyment and appreciation of things in life. Emotions are to be evaluated, understood and enjoyed. But emotions have no place in establishing standards and criteria for your daily living. They have nothing to do with spiritual reality. Some people even make emotions a false criterion for spirituality.

The Word of God is the criterion for the Christian way of life. It is never how you feel. How you feel does not determine whether you are saved or not, or whether you are spiritual or not. Your status depends upon what the Bible says.

Emotions are a response ... or a reaction to something in your thinking. When you are walking with God, you appreciate things

based upon who and what He is, His creation and what He has done for you. You are joyful and appreciate things because you are responding to God's truth, God's plan and God's love.

When you refuse to apply God's Word to your life, you create a vacuum that draws in human viewpoint—and emotionalism. When you let emotions become your standard for dealing with other people, decisions you make and actions you take, you become one miserable person. You will also make those around you miserable.

Remember, emotions have little place as a criterion or standard for the Christian life. Living for God is always based on His Word. Use your emotions to serve God—and bless others.

Instant Insights

■ Emotion is the response to something in your thought pattern, a result of what you think. When you think of things biblical or scriptural, you are laying a solid foundation for your emotions.

■ How we think about things determines how we feel about things. Positive thoughts produce positive emotions.

■ Emotions are normal. We all have them. And the reality is we sometimes have negative ones.

■ You no longer have to be held prisoner to negative emotions. Negative emotions build up strongholds in your soul, but those strongholds can be demolished by the Holy Spirit.

■ Emotions should respond to thinking—never let your emotions direct your thinking.

■ If your daily life is rooted in God's Word, your emotions will be positive. They will enrich your spiritual walk and you will experience the life God wants you to have.

■ Don't invest your emotions in anything you can't control or that won't improve your situation or is not in your long-term best interests. Focus on those things which will benefit you in the long run.

■ Thinking is cause; emotion is effect.

■ Emotions are rarely an adequate guide for action.

■ Negative emotions are a sin and must be overcome if we are to grow spiritually.

■ Sin is compounded by emotionalism. Many sins arise from our emotions. Therefore, if we control our emotions, we can control much of our sin.

■ Positive emotions are the key to a long-lasting and joyful relationship, be it family, friendship or marriage.

Serving the God of the Bible or the god of your “feelings”

“Emotions are a gift from God and were designed to enrich our lives, give meaning to our desires, bring us joy, and to glorify Him. But when we allow our emotions to run our lives and not focus on biblical principles, we are in very dangerous and self-defeating territory.”

Anonymous

Divine Guidance

Discovering God's will for your life

Illuminating the fork in the road

As a Christian, God's will should be your goal. The words "God's will" are used frequently in the Bible, in sermons, even in this book. Every Christian, new or not, understands there is a daily struggle to do God's will instead of his own. No Christian is immune from this dilemma.

So what are some practical steps a Christian can take, regardless of spiritual maturity, to know and obey God's will more easily?

Preparation

The key to understanding anything involving the Christian life is to *know and understand God's Word*. The more you learn about God through the study of His Word, the better you will be able to understand what He expects from you. Unless you understand what God's will is you will not be able to obey Him. God's will for us is not part-time obedience, it's a moment-by-moment walk with Him.

Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15). All God's commands are according to His will and our obedience is a sign of our love for Him.

Prayer Comes First

Prayer brings us into the presence of God where we become aware of our dependence on Him, and this makes us humble. Before we begin a study of God's Word, we should pray that the Holy Spirit will make clear to us what God's will is. Not just for our prayer requests, but for divine guidance that we might understand God's will for our lives. God's Word also reminds us there are no "secret agent"

Christians. Going it alone can be dangerous. If you go off track, how will you know? Of course the Holy Spirit will give you direction, but He often works through other people.

A Wise and Humble Friend

This is when having a spiritual mentor can be beneficial. A spiritual mentor can be a great source of knowledge in helping you understand what God's will is. This is someone who is further along in their spiritual walk than you. His life should reflect a love for God, a pure mind and humble soul. He should be someone who not only has a thorough knowledge of God's Word, but understands God's will and is actively walking in fellowship with Him. Such a person will be humble and eager to share his wisdom with you.

A Church Body

While a mentor will be beneficial, we are commanded to meet together with other believers that we might encourage one another (Hebrews 10:25). In other words, go to church regularly. Just as the physical body is composed of different parts working for the good of the whole, each

member of the church body has different roles and functions, as well.

Mutual Support

The local church is composed of believers with different spiritual gifts which they use for the edification or building up of each other. Through community worship, we unite with other believers in prayer, the preaching of

Divine Will vs. Permissive Will of God

GOD HAS GIVEN us freewill—the opportunity to make our own decisions. God realizes that some of our decisions will be bad and some even disastrous. Because some of our choices will be in conflict with His Divine plan, God may offer alternatives.

- God's Divine will, His best for you
- God's permissive will, or what He allows
- God's overriding will

God knows our sinfulness will sometimes rise up, and He may allow an alternative path ... a path which is less satisfying to us. And, in some instances, God will actually override our decisions to keep us from harm. While we can always make our own decisions, God is still watching over us as a loving Father.

God's Word, mutual encouragement and understanding the ultimate will of God: His glorification. The result is the strengthening of our faith and effectiveness of our spiritual walk.

This is a clear path to discovering and understanding the will of God.

Paul's Clear Path

The Apostle Paul clearly tells us the surest way of discovering God's will for your life. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:1-2).

The indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit should create a desire to learn, know and understand the Word He authored. We can have blessed assurance that we are in Him if we experience a constantly growing desire to know and obey His Word.

Putting it All Together

Here's where it all comes together. With regular prayer, Bible study, interaction with other believers, exposure to accurate teaching *and* the filling of the Holy Spirit it becomes increasingly easier to discern God's will from our own. The key to learning and understanding God's will is obedience, not partial obedience, but total obedience. No matter the issue, knowing His will is vital in our quest to be obedient.

If we will faithfully apply biblical principles, we can be assured we are in God's plan and walking according to His will. We must not let doubt, fear or willful sin keep us from obeying Him. Our own plans can't compare to the good things the Father has in His infinite wisdom for us.

Growing in Christ

Instant Insights



■ There are no accidents in the Christian way of life. So be watchful—everything that happens to you can lead to God's ultimate guidance for you to do His will no matter where, why or how.

■ God always leads in His truth. He never leads contrary to the Word.

■ You must be filled with the Spirit and have an understanding and knowledge of spiritual information.

■ God often leads through providential circumstances—where you are and what is going on. But, you must test those circumstances; they must not conflict with the statements, doctrines and principles of the Bible.

■ You must yield to the will of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Yielding is not a one-time experience. It is a moment-by-moment way of life.

■ There are three hindrances to doing the will of God: Ignorance of the Word, carnality and a lack of spiritual growth.

■ You don't need to pray for guidance where the Bible gives clear direction. Example: A believer should never pray about marrying an unbeliever. The Bible is very clear on this matter. But that does not mean that a believer should not pray for the Lord to lead them to a godly spouse.

■ Divine guidance usually involves one step at a time. Each step is an opportunity to grow and advance.

■ The wisest thing we can do is obey God and leave the consequences to Him.

■ Because God is omniscient, He knows the perfect path for you to take. Because He is omnipotent, He has the power to take you where He wants you to be. And, because He is omnipresent, He is always with you every step of the way.

The Bible Says



■ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.

John 3:21

■ But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

John 14:26

■ But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

John 16:13

■ We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

1 Cor 2:12-13

■ I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

Eph 1:18

■ But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

Eph 5:13-14

■ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Tim 3:16-17

You must know the Word of God before you know the will of God

"In the midst of an ever-changing world, the good news is that the life of faith is anchored by the power, provisions, and promises of God. Circumstances may change, but the future is as sure as the character of God Himself. No matter what happens, those who trust in God hope in His Word."

Scott Hafemann

Spiritual Gifts

God's special gift to you

Building up the body of Christ

Among the many incredible benefits of giving your life to Jesus Christ is the promise that God's Holy Spirit endows every believer with at least one "spiritual gift." Upon salvation, God gives His children a special responsibility but not necessarily based on talents or skills we already possess. He provides us with the tools to perform our given role in His kingdom. God doesn't call the equipped; He equips the called.

God's Supernatural Gifts

A spiritual gift is a supernatural, God-given ability that, when utilized in a spirit of unselfish love, helps build up fellow Christians and advance the cause of Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote regarding spiritual gifts, "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but

the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men" (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit has empowered you with at least one spiritual gift as a means for you to express God's love to others.

Our Gifts Serve Others

Note in 1 Corinthians 12:7 that spiritual gifts are given for "the common good." God does not bestow spiritual gifts to be used for our own self-advancement, but for the distinct purpose of reaching beyond ourselves to help, edify and serve others.

As Christians work together, using their spiritual gifts to build each other up and to meet

one another's needs, we help each other grow in fellowship with God and with one another.

Different Gifts Working Together

Spiritual gifts are not all the same. In fact, they are widely varied in order to meet the diverse needs around us. "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us," Paul writes in Romans 12:6a.

For example, if Jack is spiritually gifted in teaching (a supernatural ability to clarify

and communicate God's truth), he might teach a class or Bible study, serving those who do not have the gift of teaching. If Janine has the spiritual gift of giving (a supernatural desire and ability to liberally provide time, talent and treasure to God's work), she can benefit from Jack's teaching as a participant in his Bible study, while at the same time she takes special joy in

providing funds to help finance—among other things—the church's Bible study ministry.

All Gifts Are Important

It's also crucial to understand that no spiritual gift is more or less important than any other gift. While some gifts might be more visible than others, all gifts are equally essential to the vitality of the body of Christ.

Paul compared this interdependence to that of the parts of the human body: "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat



Building the body of Christ together.

Serving others—with God's gifts

Gift	What it means	Verse
Service/Helps	Desire and ability to help others, meet their needs and assist in God's work	Rom 12:6-8
Faith	Trust God totally to fulfill His promises and meet the needs of His people	1 Cor 12:9
Encouragement	A heart to console and uplift others with biblically based hope	Rom 12:8
Giving	Joyfully provide time, talent and treasure to God's work and those in need	2 Cor 9:7
Mercy	Show mercy, empathize with and provide comfort and help to others	Rom 12:8
Wisdom/Knowledge	View life from God's perspective; apply God's Word to life situations	1 Cor 12:8
Teaching	Communicate the truth and applications of Scripture in engaging ways	Rom 12:7
Leadership	Inspire and direct the combined efforts of others in the work of ministry	Rom 12:8
Evangelism	Present the gospel with clarity and have a burden for those who don't know Christ	Eph 4:11
Pastor/Teacher	Effectively shepherding and teaching the church according to God's Word	Eph 4:11 Rom 12:7
Implied Gifts	Desire and ability to help others, meet their needs and assist in God's work	

with special honor" (1 Corinthians 12:21-23a). Do not seek to "acquire" another spiritual gift if God has not ordained it.

Using Your Gift(s) for God

Peter wrote that "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:10).

This doesn't mean that you should avoid serving in areas outside of your spiritual gifts—but that you will be

most effective (and realize the greatest joy and fulfillment) if your areas of service are congruent with the strengths inherent to your spiritual gift(s).

You will not only help build up and meet the needs of God's people more effectively, but you'll experience the joy and fulfillment of knowing that God is using the passions and abilities He's given you to advance His Kingdom.

Instant Insights

How to Discern Your Spiritual Gift(s)

■ Be sure you have a genuine personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Pray for God's Holy Spirit to make your spiritual gift(s) clear to you.

■ Spiritual gifts are appointed by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, you don't need to seek a spiritual gift. You do not earn or work for spiritual gifts. You do not receive one based upon any human ability.

■ Whatever gift you have is the sovereign decision of the Holy Spirit.

■ Never seek a particular spiritual gift or envy another believer's spiritual gift. Resolve to be humbly content with the gift(s) God gave you in His sovereign wisdom. He has a special purpose for you!

■ Consider times in your past when you felt God successfully used you to minister to others. What were you doing at those times, and which spiritual gift(s) most closely describe what you were doing?

■ Spiritual giftedness often resides at the intersection of special ability and joy. In what types of service to others do you find greatest joy and fulfillment?

■ Ask mature Christians, who have worked with you or know you well, for their thoughts. Which gift or gifts do they see manifested in you from day to day?

■ It is not always necessary for you to recognize your spiritual gift for you to function under it. Functioning in your gift is dependent upon the filling of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit empowers every believer with at least one spiritual gift

"Spiritual gifts to be profitable must be used in love. Spiritual gifts in themselves do not make great Christians. Their use in the proper way motivated by divine love, which is the fruit of the Spirit, is effective and bears fruit to the glory of God."

John Walvoord

The Fruit of the Spirit

The result of the Christian walk

God produces in us what we can't produce ourselves

The moment you placed your trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, His Holy Spirit took up residence within you to help, instruct and guide you.

The Spirit's Character

The Spirit brings with Him numerous Christian character qualities to nurture and grow within you—Christ-like virtues that will help transform you into the person God designed you to be.

In Galatians 5:22–23, the Apostle Paul calls these virtues “the fruit of the Spirit,” signifying that they grow out of the Holy Spirit’s nourishing presence much as a cluster

of luscious grapes grows from its nourishing vine. In other words, these character qualities are a natural outgrowth of a Christian’s intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul goes on to list nine specific character qualities that make up the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Authentic Virtues

That’s quite a list, isn’t it? One author has aptly described it as “The Ultimate New Year’s Resolution List” because these are the inner virtues that men and women have striven for since time began. But the only sure

way to make these virtues authentic and consistent qualities in your life is to walk closely with God. Then obeying His Word and living according to the prompting and guidance that the Holy Spirit provides for you.

It's a Process

Christian growth is a life-long process. We make mistakes because Christians are still very much “works in progress.” Just turn back to God and ask Him to help you do better next time. He will! As you stay in close fellowship with God, seeking to honor Him in your thoughts, words and deeds, He will develop these nine character qualities within you.

Love

JESUS GAVE LOVE the highest priority. In John 13:34, He instructed His disciples, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” The love Jesus talked about is called *agape*, a Greek term for selfless, unconditional love. It’s the kind of love God extended to us when He gave His Son Jesus to pay for our sins. We didn’t deserve that love, but He gave it anyway. *Agape* is extended “in spite of” the recipient’s deservedness, not “because of” it.

But sometimes it’s difficult to love others, isn’t it? Maybe you’re feeling cranky, or the other person doesn’t seem worthy of love. That’s where the Holy Spirit comes in: He enables you to love others with God’s love, by faith in the fact that God loves that person unconditionally and wants you to love that person unconditionally, too. You can claim His power to love because the Holy Spirit empowers you to love.

Joy

JOY IS MORE than mere happiness. It’s much deeper and richer. Joy is an inner gladness that helps you “look up” in bad times as well as good. Joy comes from knowing, deep down, that God loves you, cares for you, has a divine plan for you and is in control despite the circumstances you may be going through.

From a human perspective, the Apostle Paul had every reason to be miserable while locked up in a prison cell for his faith. He was uncertain whether he’d be released or put to death. Yet he was able to write, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4). Paul is saying that sulking, worry or negativity do not bring honor to God. We honor Him with our joy and our gladness and our praise.

Whatever your situation, the Holy Spirit will help you handle it with joy rooted in confidence that God is in control.

Peace

PEACE IS A sense of inner calm and security amid the storms that rage around us. It’s a quiet confidence that says, “Do your very best, then relax. All is well, for God is in charge here.”

God’s Word assures us that the Holy Spirit is our true and enduring Source of peace. Jesus said, “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you ... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:26–27).

God wants you to experience His peace every moment. How? “... in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6–7).

Patience

PATIENCE IS THE ability to wait calmly while trusting God for something we need. Patience also puts the rights and needs of others before our own. When we’re impatient, we can thwart God’s will by acting presumptuously, and we can destroy relationships by being impatient with others.

God is incredibly patient with us, because He is love. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13 that “Love (God’s love, *agape* love) is patient and kind.” So as you walk with God and seek to love others with His love, the Holy Spirit within you will give you patience as you need it.

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 15:5).

Kindness

KINDNESS IS LOVE expressed in word or deed. It treats others with gentleness and respect. Kindness helps you regard others as important and valuable to God—created by Him, precious in His sight, and, therefore, worthy of dignity and respect. It takes initiative to offer affirmation and encouragement. Kindness temporarily sets aside our own priorities and concerns to see if we can lighten someone’s burden with a listening ear or a helping hand. It is quick to give the benefit of the doubt.

“Love is patient, love is kind,” writes Paul in 1 Corinthians 13. As you read the story of Jesus in the first four books of the New Testament, you see compassion in action. His Spirit makes that same spirit of compassion available to you to extend to those around you.

Goodness

GOODNESS IS NOT so much what you do as it is what you are. It is a genuine desire to live as God wants you to live—by the precepts of His Word and by unquestionable moral and ethical standards. Goodness is “living” the fruit of the Spirit in your everyday thinking and behavior.

But contrary to what society tells us, we cannot possibly be good people, consistently, in our own strength without the Spirit of God within us. Jesus said that “No one is good—except God alone” (Luke 18:19b). Because of mankind’s sinful condition, we are naturally inclined toward evil and self-gratification. That’s why the ministry of the Holy Spirit is so essential, so invaluable—because as the Spirit grows God’s virtues within us, the fruit of the Spirit (including goodness) flourishes and flows outward from us to others. The power of the Holy Spirit helps us to be good and do good works for God’s glory.

Faithfulness

FAITHFULNESS MEANS STAYING steadfast and loyal to a person or a cause. It means hanging in there and staying true to your original commitment through good times as well as bad.

And just as we need the Spirit’s help to remain faithful to one another, we also need His power to help us be spiritually faithful. Jesus reserved some of His harshest words for those who lack faithfulness in their relationship with God: “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 3:15–16). We cannot honor the Lord, or experience the abundant life He promised, with fickle or lukewarm faith.

When God is on the throne of your life, His Spirit will guide and empower you.

Gentleness

GENTLENESS, AS DEPICTED in God’s Word, is neither weakness nor cowering submission. The gentleness God wants for you is a healthy humility that comes from strength, confidence and inner peace.

Consider Jesus, who had ultimate strength and power at His disposal because He was God. But He was never arrogant and He showed His gentleness in love.

And He wants us to follow His example. The Apostle Paul instructed his fellow believers, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). Jesus said, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). He was talking about the gentleness that becomes a part of you when you are filled with the Holy Spirit—the gentleness of a strong, quietly confident person who acknowledges Jesus as the Source of strength.

Self-Control

DO YOU STRUGGLE with anger or fear? Lack of consistent time in Bible study? Haphazard distracted prayers? Or how about impure thoughts, or giving in to temptation? Poor self-discipline robs you of joy and diminishes the abundant life. Weak self-control can lead to wasted potential and even personal misery.

Lack of self control can lead to drunkenness, drug addiction, pornography and reckless behavior which wreck lives, marriages and families. So much pain and self-induced misery comes from lack of self-control.

But because God wants the very best for you, He helps you enjoy a self-controlled, disciplined life. As you walk closely with Him, the Holy Spirit empowers you with the fruit of self-control. He enables you to be a new and different person with a fresh awareness in all you do and think.

Proclaiming the Faith

Doing the Father's work His way

It's about obedience

In His Word, God has given us commands and precepts that help us navigate life in ways that honor and please Him.

Obedience to these commands is not optional: "If you love me, you will obey what I command" Jesus said in John 14:15. "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23). The genuineness of our love for Christ and the quality of our fellowship with Him is demonstrated by our obedience to Him.

On these two pages we'll look at five big-picture practices God encourages us to engage in to help us live and proclaim the Christian faith. As you obey God in these areas, you will find yourself growing deeper in your love for Him.

As your love for God grows, the focus of your life begins to shift to the Lord, away from self. You increasingly trust and rely on the Word of God and the Holy Spirit for guidance. Life gets better. You get better.

Baptism



BAPTISM IS A public acknowledgment of new life in Christ. Being baptized does not save you from eternal separation from God; rather, it symbolizes the saving transformation that already took place when you trusted Christ as your Savior and Lord.

The ceremony is simple, celebratory and significant.

There are several cultural variations of baptism. The Christian being baptized may be immersed under water for a brief moment to

symbolize the "death and burial" of the former life. Then he is lifted back above water to symbolize the "resurrection" of Jesus Christ and that he now embraces the new, eternal life found only in Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19; Romans 6:3-10).

This should not be confused with the baptism of the Holy Spirit that happens at the moment of salvation and is entirely the work of God.

Communion/Lord's Table



THE NIGHT BEFORE His crucifixion, Jesus led His disciples in what is now known as the "Lord's Supper" or "Communion." He broke and served bread to symbolize His body, which was to be broken for us; He poured and served wine as a symbol of the blood He would shed for us. Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of Me."

The Lord's Supper is not only a tribute to Christ's suffering and death; it is also a celebration of joy and thanksgiving for God's

forgiveness of sin and complete restoration to Him. The Apostle Paul called the Lord's Supper a "cup of thanksgiving" for Jesus' selfless act of love.

As you participate in Communion, thank Jesus for what He went through for you. Take joy in God's forgiveness of sins through Christ's sacrifice, and celebrate the fact that you are one in Christ and bound for eternity with Him (Luke 22:7-20; John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 10:16).

Assemble Together



SEVERAL LOGS BURN brightly together in a campfire, but, if you set one log aside on the cold earth, its fire quickly goes out. Like those burning logs, God has designed us to need one another!

Gathering with fellow believers for worship, prayer, mutual help and encouragement has been vital to the success of Christianity since the early church. So vital, in fact, that the author of Hebrews wrote: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love

and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Take initiative to become part of a local church that honors Christ and preaches God's Word. Participate actively in small-group fellowship so you can "spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

Witnessing



WHEN YOU COME across a very good thing, you want to tell others about it. And what's the very best thing that's ever happened to you? If you're a follower of Jesus, there's only one answer: discovering new life—eternal life—through Jesus Christ.

The news is just too good to keep to ourselves. That's why we are commanded to help others learn about Jesus. "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). He instructed. Every

Christian has the privilege of being God's conduit of this Good News!

Who would you like to see trust Christ as Savior? Begin praying that the Holy Spirit would open their hearts. Look for opportunities to tell them of God's incredible gift of His Son. Tell why and how you received Christ into your life, and the difference He is making now that you are a believer.

Ambassadors



BEFORE RETURNING TO heaven, our Lord's final instructions were to "make disciples of all nations ... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." With these words, Jesus appointed every Christian to be His designated role model and spokesperson to the world. You are privileged to be His ambassador!

Jesus' final words demonstrate God's desire for each of us to reach out and teach others on His behalf, as a way of life. The

Apostle Paul made this clear to a young disciple, Timothy: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others." As we teach others what God is teaching us, we build disciples of Jesus Christ and pass God's truth from generation to generation (Matthew 28:20; 2 Timothy 2:2; Hebrews 5:12-14; 2 Corinthians 5:20a).

Stewardship

Caring & sharing

Using God's bounty responsibly

In biblical times the manager of a wealthy household was given the title of “steward.” The owner of the household entrusted his steward with responsibility for managing the owner’s assets on his behalf—spending and disbursing wisely while preserving and growing the owner’s wealth.

God Owns it All

This metaphor of the steward illustrates the principle that everything we have is God’s, not ours: “The silver is mine and the gold is mine,” declares the LORD Almighty” (Haggai 2:8). He owns it all, and we are simply temporary stewards or managers of the assets He gives us. This perspective can save us a lot of anxiety, but with it comes responsibility.

Wise Stewards

It’s clear from the Bible that God wants us to be wise stewards on His behalf. His Word provides extensive advice regarding money and possessions. God wants us to provide responsibly for our families, to make smart choices

in planning, budgeting, spending and sharing His bounty with others.

True Financial Freedom

At the same time, God also wants to free us of our very human tendency to let wealth and possessions assume unhealthy priority in our lives. When we keep money and things in proper perspective, we’ll enjoy the blessings of true financial freedom: freedom from anxiety and fear, freedom from consumer debt, freedom from irresponsible spending and freedom from preoccupation with things that do not last.

Freedom to Share

And then there’s the most gratifying aspect of faithful stewardship: God blesses us so that we can bless others. Thus, true financial freedom is the freedom to share God’s provision with our church, with worthy causes and with others in need. Our Heavenly Father wants us to be lovingly generous with what we have—whether it be with our money, our time, our talents or our possessions.

Money



No, No, No! Christ and His Church are not about money

THE GREATEST GIVER ever is God Himself. He is the one who actually owns everything. We are simply temporary managers.

One of our loving responses to God is to want to further His plan on earth. One way we can do this is to share our material resources. And often the question arises is how much we should give. In the Church Age

in which we live, there is no set amount to give. We are to give as the Holy Spirit leads us. Some people consider 10% (called a tithe in the Old Testament) to be a starting point. But never give under pressure or compulsion. You should give joyfully because of what God has done for you. God is more interested in you than He is in your money (2 Corinthians 9:7).

We are accountable to God for all He has given us

“A steward manages assets for the owner’s benefit. The steward carries no sense of entitlement to the assets he manages. It’s his job to find out what the owner wants done with his assets, then carry out his will.”

Randy Alcorn

Time

WE MAY EACH have differing amounts of money, talents or possessions, but one thing that we all have is an equal amount of time. Everyone has 24 hours each day, seven days each week and 365 days each year. Assuming a 40-hour work week and estimating conservatively, you have approximately

sixty “awake hours” every week when you’re not on the job. How do you manage those non-work hours? How about investing some of them to help make a big difference?

For example, what if you were to exchange just two or three hours of TV time per week to be of assistance to others? You can volunteer

at church or with a Christian ministry. You might deliver meals and encouragement to shut-ins, mentor a younger person or engage in many other things that serve God and your fellow-man. Giving of your time has little to do with money but can have far greater impact because you’re giving of yourself.

Talents

GOD HAS GIVEN you unique talents, abilities and skills. He wants you to use them to help others in all aspects of your life—friends, neighbors, business and volunteering. As Christians all our labors and interactions should reflect God’s love and compassion. As we use our talents and skills helping others, opportuni-

ties may arise which could lead to sharing the Gospel or praying with people for situations in their lives.

There are many opportunities to share talents and interests—just look around you. Is there a neighbor in need, a volunteer opportunity in your community, or service in your church.

Chances are there are many to choose from.

Whatever strengths and talents you have, there’s someone in your neighborhood or community in need of what you have to offer. Enjoy the talents God’s given you, but don’t keep them to yourself.

Possessions

IF YOU ARE like most people, you have accumulated lots of “stuff” over the years, much of which you rarely use. Consider why you are holding on to these items. If there is no good reason, then donate or share them with those in need. There are many organizations, shelters or individuals who could put these items

to good use. So start digging through those boxes in the basement or garage and ask yourself, “What do I have that could bless someone else—clothing, books, furniture, electronic equipment, toys, blankets? Sometimes it is hard to give up these items—“I might use it someday” ... but others may need it today!

Prayerfully consider how you can serve God through sharing that which God has given you. The question we need to continually ask is “Do I own these things, or do these things own me?” Regardless of the answer everything really belongs to God.

The Bible Says

■ *God owns it, we just manage it.* “The silver is mine and the gold is mine,” declares the LORD Almighty (Hag 2:8). “... for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills” (Ps 50:10).

■ *God expects us to manage His resources wisely ...* “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?” (Luke 14:28). Also see Matt 25:14–27.

■ *... and give generously from what He’s provided ...* “A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed” (Prov 11:25). “Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops” (Prov 3:9). Also see 2 Cor 9:6–7; Luke 6:38.

■ *... and stay free from unsound debt.* “The borrower is servant to the lender” (Prov 22:7). “Give everyone what you owe him ... Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another” (Rom 13:7–8). Also see Prov 6:1–5, 22:26–27.

■ *We should plan and save for future needs ...* “Every prudent man acts out of knowledge, but a fool exposes his folly” (Prov 13:16). Also see Prov 30:24–25; 1 Tim 5:8; Prov 6:6–11; Gen 41:34–54.

■ *... so that we’ll keep our focus and trust in God.* “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt 6:33). “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’ ” (Heb 13:5). Also see 1 Tim 6:10–11; Ps 46:10.

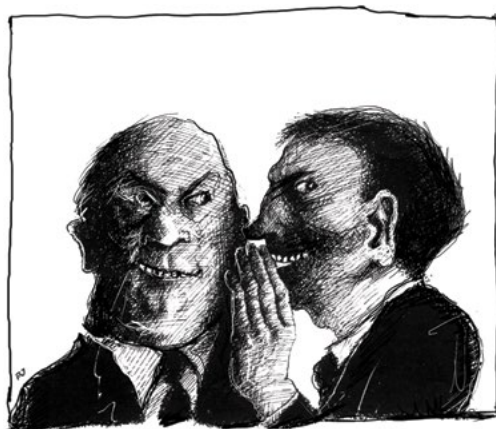
“The Killer Sins”

The sins that ruin relationships

Putting peace and harmony into your life

*Subtle sins
that are so
deadly to
peace,
harmony and
relationships*

When we think of terrible, devastating sins, we usually think of sexual immorality or murder. And it's true that God hates all sin. God gives us quite a list in Galatians 5:19. This list includes sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like.



The evil of insidious sins can ruin lives.

Seven Sins God Hates

In Proverbs 6:16–19 He has a list of sins He hates.

- 16 There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him:
- 17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood,
- 18 a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil,
- 19 a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.

All Sin Starts in the Mind

Interestingly, of this list of sins, only two can be seen. God hates the sins we think or say. Does that surprise you? All sins begin in our minds, in our thinking as a mental attitude. Thoughts

progress to words, and words to actions. Anyone who has committed murder has first had the mental attitude sin of hate, greed or anger.

It is always best to get rid of mental attitude sins quickly before they fester and grow into something larger.

Self-Induced Misery

Mental attitude sins and verbal sins are so dangerous because when we commit them, they not only hurt the intended “victim,” but also bounce back to hurt us. In short we make ourselves miserable. More importantly we lose our intimate fellowship with God.

It is said, “Harboring hate for another is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.” Indeed, holding on to hate and anger does nothing to the other person but actually hurts us. We’re expending emotional energy which affects our mood and, potentially our actions while the other person isn’t affected at all. We have made ourselves the victim!

Mental Attitude Sins

Mental attitude sins can even affect our health. There are times when their detrimental side effects can show up as high blood pressure and other physical ailments, aches and pains. God knows what is best for us and He tells us to avoid mental attitude sins and the trouble they cause.

Maintaining healthy relationships is difficult enough without having to overcome the adverse effects that are the fruit of these sins.

Choose to Sin, Choose to Suffer

When a Christian willfully chooses to disobey God, he must be willing to accept the consequences. God’s will for us is perfect. It is for us to, “... not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” Romans 12:2.

Gossip

A GOSSIP LIKES to talk about other people’s private lives, and often in a derogatory way. There is no such thing as benign gossip, for it is always unloving and always a betrayal of trust and confidence. Thus gossip is in direct opposition to God’s Word, which emphasizes that “love is kind” and “it is not rude” (1 Cor 13:4–5). Paul specifically warned that Christians should always be “... worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything” (1 Tim 3:11).

Ps 41:7
Prov 11:13, 18:6
Matt 12:36–37

Judging

TO JUDGE IS to form and/or express a moral conclusion about another person—an act that only God Himself is qualified to do. Jesus warned us, “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?” (Matt 7:1–3).

This does not mean that we shouldn’t use good judgment and discernment when evaluating things.

Luke 6:37
Rom 2:1
Jas 2:2–4

Anger

THE BIBLE TELLS us that human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Being angry not only gets us riled up inside and renders us less able to think clearly, but it also can damage our credibility, injure personal relationships and harm our Christian witness. For these reasons, James says, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry” (Jas 1:19b). Paul writes, “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry ...” (Eph 4:26b).

Gal 5:19–21
Eph 4:31

Hostility

TO BE HOSTILE is to oppose someone in an aggressive, malicious or vicious manner. God’s Word addresses two types of hostility: hostility toward one another and hostility toward God. Hostility toward others is sinful because it contradicts kindness and produces enmity. Hostility toward God is sinful because it is rebellion against the sovereignty of our Heavenly Father. Paul wrote “... the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace, the sinful mind is hostile to God” (Rom 8:6b–7).

Jas 4:4

Self-Pity

SELF-PITY IS AN obsessive, self-absorbed unhappiness over one’s problems. It focuses our attention inward instead of outward, and it always makes our troubles seem more catastrophic than they really are. God doesn’t want His children to wallow in the “woe-is-me” syndrome because self-pity demonstrates a lack of faith and trust in Him. Instead, we can warmly embrace the promise that “... in all things God works for the good of those who love him ...” (Rom 8:28).

Job 3:1–4
Job 19:21

Jealousy

“LOVE IS PATIENT, love is kind. It does not envy ...” declares 1 Cor 13:4. When we harbor or display envy over someone else’s good fortune, we’re nurturing jealousy—another form of self-pity. Jealousy is unloving and immature; it can turn a friendship cold because jealousy means we no longer want the best for the other person. God wants us to demonstrate our love for others by truly rejoicing with them when something good happens in their lives.

Rom 13:13
Jas 3:16
Prov 14:30, 27:4

Bitterness

LOVE “... keeps no record of wrongs,” we’re told in 1 Cor 13:5. Keeping records of real or perceived offenses without forgiving them results in bitterness, which is like an emotional cancer that spreads throughout the soul. Bitterness infects our entire outlook. It makes us negative, resentful, cynical and unpleasant to interact with. God’s Word lists it prominently among the sins that ruin relationships and displease God: “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice” (Eph 4:31).

Acts 8:22–23
Eph 4:31
Heb 12:15

Malice

MALICE IS ill will, vindictiveness or hatred. It is typically manifested in hostile thoughts, words and actions toward someone. It is motivated by the misguided desire for revenge. It, too, is a clear violation of our mandate to love one another. “At one time we too ... lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another,” Paul wrote in Titus 3:3, referring to times prior to the believer’s conversion to Christianity.

Eph 4:31
Col 3:8
Titus 3:3
1 Pet 2:1

“If the guilt of sin is so great that nothing can satisfy it but the blood of Jesus; and the filth of sin is so great that nothing can fetch out the stain thereof but the blood of Jesus, how great, how heinous, how sinful must the evil of sin be.”

William Throsby
Bridges

Pride

“PRIDE GOES BEFORE destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall” Prov 16:18 cautions. Yet Christians can become tripped up by pride because it is one of the primary coping mechanisms of the human heart. The sinful pride that the Bible talks about is also known as conceit, arrogance, and egotism—all of which may be smokescreens to cover deep-rooted personal insecurities. The wiser path, of course, is to imitate Jesus Christ, whose humility demonstrated true love, power and strength.

Prov 8:13, 11:2
Isa 2:11
Phil 2:3

Idolatry

IF ANYTHING IN your life is more important to you than God, it is an idol. When God gave the Ten Commandments, He specifically addressed the folly of idol worship: “You shall have no other gods before me ... You shall not bow down to them or worship them ...” (Exod 20:3–5). We might not worship literal idols today (though many misguided people still do) but the core issue of idolatry remains highly relevant: Ask yourself “Are you giving higher priority to anything in your life than your relationship with Jesus Christ?”

1 Cor 10:7
Col 3:5
1 Pet 4:3

Self-Righteousness

PERHAPS THE MOST annoying of the “killer sins” is self-righteousness; no one wants to subject himself to the smug sanctimony and moral superiority of a self-righteous individual. Jesus Himself had little patience with self-righteousness: “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?” (Luke 6:41). Paul followed up by teaching, “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought ...” (Rom 12:3b).

Phil 2:3
Prov 30:12–13

Arrogance

IF YOU’VE EVER heard of someone being “full of himself,” you have heard about the sin of arrogance. Closely related to pride and self-righteousness, arrogance is having an exaggerated sense of one’s own importance or abilities. And like pride and self-righteousness, arrogance defies the spirit of humility, gentleness and quiet confidence that God wants His children to live by. The writer of Proverbs classified arrogance right alongside other detestable behaviors: “I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech” (Prov 8:13b).

1 Sam 2:3
2 Cor 12:20

Hyper-Sensitivity

BEING OVERLY SENSITIVE is another manifestation of self-pity and self-centeredness, and it is a sure recipe for misery and resentment. Getting upset at what others say (rightly or wrongly) to you or about you can hurt—if you let it! Even if the comments are meant to hurt you, don’t fall into the trap of internalizing them. Always seek God’s way and God’s wisdom. Remember, to try to be sensitive to others but never hypersensitive to yourself.

1 Sam 18:8
Job 10:1–3

Unforgiveness

REFUSAL TO FORGIVE lies at the epicenter of anger, resentment, bitterness and misery. “... if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” Jesus taught in Matt 6:15. Yes, forgiving can be a tough thing to do—especially when the offender does not show remorse. Yet, when Peter asked Jesus how many times we should forgive someone, Jesus replied that we should forgive “seventy times seven”—in other words, every time, wholeheartedly, without limit.

Matt 18:21–22

Lying

“DO NOT LIE to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices,” Paul admonished fellow believers in Col 3:9. Lying in any form, even the proverbial “white lie,” is dishonesty. When you lie, you earn the distrust of others. You also may feel horrible inside, because your “new self” was redeemed for truth, not falsehood. Whenever you’re tempted to misrepresent or deceive, choose the new self. Be a living example of honesty and sincerity.

Ps 78:36
Rev 22:14–15

Deceiving

CLOSELY LINKED TO lying, deceiving takes deliberate steps to cause someone to believe something that is not true. Typically the deceiver is trying to gain a personal advantage. Synonyms for deceive include: to fool, outwit, hoodwink, dupe and mislead. “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” lamented the prophet Jeremiah. Fortunately, Jesus Christ shed His blood so that we could become new creations in Him, recalibrated toward honesty and truth. If in doubt, ask yourself: What would Jesus do?

Prov 24:28
Jer 17:9
2 Tim 3:13

Lust

LUST CAN BE described as an inordinate desire. One can lust for money or power, but it most often refers to a strong sexual desire for someone other than your marriage partner. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt 5:27–28). This is why God’s Word commands us to “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires ...” (Col 3:5).

Jas 1:14–15
Exod 20:17

Strife

STRIFE IS DIFFERENT from healthy disagreement or civil debate. Where there’s strife, there’s ongoing friction, factions and hurt feelings. The Bible condemns strife among Christians because churches who fight or believers who don’t get along are poor examples of God’s love. Instead of the world saying, “See how they love one another,” the world may observe, “My, how they fight with each other!” The fruit of the Spirit is not strife, but love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22).

Rom 16:17
2 Tim 2:23
Prov 10:12, 22:10

Self-Centeredness

AS THE TERM suggests, someone who is self-centered thinks “the whole world revolves around me.” When you’re self-centered, you’re preoccupied with your own situation. You talk mostly about you. While you pretend to listen, you are actually thinking about yourself. God’s Word, on the other hand, instructs us “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better (more important) than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others” (Phil 2:3–4).

Rom 12:16
2 Tim 3:2

Maligning

LIKE A TANGLED web, maligning works its evil right alongside gossip, judging, anger, hostility, bitterness and malice. To malign someone is to speak about him or her in a spiteful, vilifying manner. Maligning is unkind; it fails to think the best of the other person; and it nearly always comes from a heart of anger and bitterness. “But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips” (Col 3:8).

Prov 10:18
Titus 3:1–2
2 Pet 2:2

Envy

ENVY OFTEN CONSPIRES with jealousy to arouse feelings of covetousness, longing or resentment regarding someone else’s possessions or favorable circumstances. Envy causes us to want something or someone we don’t have, making us feel deprived and discontent. Like all the other killer sins, envy is selfish and ugly. God spoke strongly against envy when He gave the Tenth Commandment: “You shall not covet ...” (Exod 20:17).

Gal 5:26
Titus 3:3

Self-Will

SELF-WILL IS PUTTING ourselves on the throne of our lives instead of Christ. Disregarding God’s will leads to trouble every time. Paul described people who are controlled by self-will, and it’s not a pretty picture: “People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud ... ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control ... conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them” (2 Tim 3:2–5).

Rom 6:11
2 Pet 2:10

Unrealistic Expectations

UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS of others and situations are terribly self-defeating. When we expect others to behave in a certain way and do things the way we think they should and then they don’t behave the way **we** think they should, we may become disappointed or even angry. Our expectations may be right and true, but others have their own free will (including a sin nature) and behave the way they do for their reasons, not ours. To expect people and circumstances to go the way we want is totally unrealistic because they often won’t.

Ezek 28:2
Rom 1:21–22

Evil Desires

EVIL DESIRES COULD aptly describe most of the “killer sins” we’ve mentioned, but the Bible actually lists evil desires separately, as in Col 3:5: “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed ...” All sins listed in this passage are “evil” (morally wrong) so perhaps the distinguisher is the word “desires.” To desire something is to focus on it, to want it and even long for it to happen—and if we long for evil, our hearts are obviously out of tune with God.

Ps 112:10
Eph 2:3

The Joy of Dying

Crossing the threshold of forever

Finding God's peace in the midst of Him calling you home

The joy of dying? You're likely thinking, "What an odd title." Yes, on the surface, it seems like an oxymoron; joy and death should not belong in the same sentence. If a person does not trust in Christ as Savior, he or she has every reason to fear dying and what lies on the other side. God has made it clear that those who do not accept His Son face a terrible, eternal separation from Him. No joy to be found in that! But for the Christian, it's an entirely different matter.

The believer in Christ, on the other hand, can actually look forward to death—relaxed and confident in God's promise of a joy-filled, everlasting life for all who believe in the name of Jesus (John 3:16–18).

A Gift from God

From a strictly human perspective, death may seem tragic because life on earth is all we know. But from God's perspective, death is simply our doorway to a spectacular eternity with Him in heaven. Thus, Christians can look on physical death as a gift from God. He knows how wondrous our eternal life in heaven will be. "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him," Paul mused in 1 Corinthians 2:9.

The Greatest Reunion Ever

Not only will we see God face to face and enjoy His spectacular heaven throughout eternity, but we'll also reunite with friends and loved ones who preceded us there. We will know one another in heaven. We will recognize our friends and loved ones, as well as everyone else. We know this because on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:28–33), Elijah and Moses knew each other. In Luke 16:19–24, Jesus taught about Lazarus and the rich man. And how that man, after death, recognized Lazarus and Abraham.

Indeed, there will be absolutely no loneliness there. Have you ever gone somewhere and

felt uncomfortable because you didn't know anyone there? That won't be the case in heaven! It'll be the greatest reunion ever!

Heaven Our Real Home

The Bible teaches that, for Christians, heaven is our true home: "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Philippians 3:20–21).

Since our citizenship is in heaven, we are just passing through this mortal life on earth. As believers in Christ, we are His ambassadors here, sharing His love with those who may not yet know Him. Assurance that our real home is in heaven gives us peace of mind, tranquility and contentment as we contemplate our transition from this life to the next. Life on this earth is just a few short years, while eternity is forever.

God's Perfect Timing

Another confidence we have as Christians is that God's timing for our physical death is always perfect. From the human perspective, of course, this idea may seem baffling—especially considering those who die in childhood, early adulthood or even middle age.

When, Where, Why and How

We cannot live one moment longer than God wants us to live—nor one moment less. God alone determines when, where, why and how we are promoted to eternity. Whenever He chooses to take us is the right time, because He is sovereign and knows what is ultimately best for us.

In light of eternity, there is no such thing as "premature death" for the Christian, because our times are in God's hands (Psalm 31:15). The means of our physical death may be terrible, such as a car accident, murder or perhaps a devastating illness. But nothing about our death

Our Grand Entrance

God has given each one of us a ticket from time to eternity. Each ticket is unique and has been tailored for just one person—you.

Our trip to heaven might be because of a health issue, accident, a disaster or victim of crime, war or some other tragedy. For some it may be at a very early age and others a great old age. No matter the circumstances, you are not going until God's appointed time.

Because God is perfect and His plan for you is perfect, you don't have to worry one bit about how or when you will go to Heaven. God has planned it all out in eternity past.

So relax Christian, you are in God's infinite and loving hands.

Welcome home, Christian!



The door into the eternal presence of God

is a surprise to God. He is sovereign and has every detail of this world planned out far in advance.

Dying Grace

Because believers have the assurance of eternity with Christ, we can have a peace-filled perspective about dying that nonbelievers cannot possibly comprehend. And it's not just eternal life in heaven that is unique to the Christian.

Death, a New Beginning

Yes, for all who know Jesus as Savior there is indeed joy in dying. Death for the Christian is not the end, but the beginning. It's a joyous transition from earthly life to heavenly eternity with the Savior. "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Only in Heaven

When we forsake our old life, and choose the new life in Christ Jesus, our priorities change. The constant pursuits of what this world defines as success, wealth and "the good life" will no longer have such a strong

hold on us.

The Holy Spirit begins changing us from inside our hearts and minds, and we are then more concerned with the things of God. The pressure is taken off despite having to stay in these imperfect, broken bodies that fail us and become ill. We can endure bouts of poverty and hunger, heartache and sadness, but only for a season, because we know this is not all there is.

Once we are rid of these earthly bodies and are present with the Lord, then we will understand the trials of our previous life. The veil will be lifted, and we'll understand that, indeed, everything *did* happen for a reason. We will want for nothing and be totally satisfied for all of eternity. Words like depression, sickness, worry and doubt will no longer be part of our vocabulary.

Questions about Heaven

The Bible actually says very little about heaven and inevitably many questions arise. Here is a brief glimpse into what the Bible indicates about heaven.

The Bible Says

■ 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.
Ps 23:4

■ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.
Rev 21:4

■ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die; ..."
John 11:25

■ "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."
John 14:1–3

■ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.
Phil 3:20–21

■ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.
Phil 1:21

■ When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."
1 Cor 15:54

■ I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.
John 5:24

**Safely home,
into the arms
of God**

"Death is nothing else but going home to God, the bond of love will be unbroken for all eternity."

Mother Teresa

An Interim Body

Scripture refers to death as the moment our soul is separated from our physical body (2 Corinthians 5:6–8). Indeed, to be absent from our body is to be present with the Lord. However, Scripture makes clear that we are not resurrected as Christ was until the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Therefore, it appears that those in heaven right now currently have some form of interim body.

A Brand New Body

Christ was raised in the same body He was buried in. However, He was transfigured from mere flesh and bone, to a physical body devoid of any imperfections at all. His hands and feet will still bear the scars of the cross, commemorating His sacrifice for us.

“So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor,

it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:42–44).

Some use this verse to argue that our resurrected body is not a physical one, but spiritual only. Yet the disciples saw and touched the risen Christ. In Luke 24:40–43, they even ate with Him! Thus, we can be sure our new bodies will be the gloriously perfected versions of the ones we have now.

Perfection in Heaven

1 John 3:2 tells us that in heaven we will be “like Him.” God is the infinite personification of pure holiness. That being said, our limited capacity to fully understand Him now, in this life, will be lifted in the next! Just imagine—ever enjoying comprehension of His immensity.

A Natural Fear

As encouraging as and as wonderful as this is, it is perfectly normal to have doubts and fears about dying.

We agree with the anecdote, “Yes Lord bring me home, but not today.” The Apostle Paul said, “I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:20–21).

The Joy Set Before Us

Face each new day with a desire to glorify God. “... let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1b–2).

And when God is ready to call us home we can embrace death as Christ did, “for the joy set before us.”

What about the death of a child or someone who hasn't attained the mental capacity to make a decision for Christ?

WHEN THAT HAPPENS the question arises “Does this person go to heaven?” And while the Bible doesn't address this situation directly, many verses seem to indicate that, indeed, these people do go to heaven.

We must be clear that we can't base answers to this question on what we feel or what we hope. We must base our answers on scriptural evidence. There are many good reasons both biblically and theologically to believe that God saves all people who die without reaching a state of understanding biblical accountability.

First and most important, our God is a God of love, full of grace, goodness and mercy and desires that all be saved. A loving God would not condemn someone who could not make a rational decision for Him. Also, there are numerous verses where God shows His love and compassion for children.

One of the greatest examples is when David's son dies and David says, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, ‘who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.’ But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.”

David understood that he would see his child again in heaven (2 Samuel 12:22–23).

Verses of Comfort

“See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven ... In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost” (Matthew 18:10, 14). This seems to imply that the little ones have their own angel watching over them.

In Jeremiah 1:5 God says “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, ...” So even in the womb God has a plan for everyone. Death is a part of God's plan, and He is not caught unawares or surprised. It is His plan to bring that baby, young child or special-needs person to heaven—in His time, not ours.

“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. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified (Romans 8:28–30).

The other side of death—God's point of view

As children of God, we wait in expectant hope for our promised future of heaven. But as we think about leaving earth, it is often with anxiety and fear of the unknown. For a people who have such a wonderful future and eternity to enjoy, we sure fret and fuss about the process of actually making the trip.

The Ultimate Trip

The journey into the unknown realm of His presence—seeing things, and hearing and feeling things that we can't even begin to imagine is overwhelming. We wonder about our true home of heaven. What does Jesus look like? What does His voice sound like? How will we recognize loved ones who have gone before us? What will our days be filled with? And, a myriad of other questions.

But there may also be feelings anywhere from trepidation to fear of the unknown. That's our human perspective. After all, oxygen is the only air we've ever breathed. Gravity is the only environment we've ever experienced.

A Homecoming Like No Other

Now, try to imagine that someone you love dearly has been away for a long time and now they are coming home. Consider too, that all of your communications have been either letters or e-mails. A pent up desire to see each other has been building for many months or even many years.

Now that time is getting close to seeing each other face-to-face, to actually hug and kiss this very dear loved one, excitement is ris-

ing. You may be preparing a very special homecoming party for this person. You might be thinking about who you want to invite over, special meals, favorite foods and then spending time doing favorite things.

God's Viewpoint

Let's try to look at this from an entirely different perspective. God created everything including heaven and earth—and you. As our Creator, we were designed and built specifically to be with Him forever. He lives in heaven. We still live on earth. One day He will come for us—to bring us home, our eternal home in heaven.

Truly Unimaginable

God joyfully looks forward to our homecoming. He knows what an amazing experience it will be. He's been preparing a place for us since Jesus returned to heaven. God knows we need such assurances—that it's going to be okay. He created each one of us with different passions, interests and desires. In line with that, He is preparing a home that is perfectly suited for each one of us.

Thank You, God

God will be overjoyed to see us, and He anxiously awaits our homecoming. He knows the day, the hour, the minute and even the second when we shall see each other face-to-face. He is longing to embrace us in His arms, to wipe away the tears from our eyes, and bring us into the trueness of who we really are, created by Him for His pleasure and for all of forever.

Instant Insights

■ Death is nothing more than a doorway through which we pass when Jesus comes to take us home to enjoy Him in eternity.

■ Death is not the end—it's just the beginning—of everlasting life. It is a gift from God because He knows how amazing our life in heaven will be.

■ Death is a shadow, Christ is the reality. As a believer our last breath on earth is an exhale of earthly air. Our next breath is an inhale of heavenly air.

■ God is in charge of the death of every single person on earth. He chooses when, where, why and how we will die. Therefore you don't need to worry about when you will die or even the manner of your death.

■ You cannot live one second longer than God wants you to and you cannot die one second sooner than God wants you to. However, when a believer is in great despair and chooses to override God's timing by suicide, the permissive will of God allows it to happen. God deals with suicide the same way He deals with all sin. It was judged at the cross.

■ Dying grace eases the fear of death for the believer. David wrote, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; ...” (Ps 23:4). And the Apostle Paul affirmed, “Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Cor 15:54b–55).

■ Don't question God when, in His omniscience, He takes someone home. In God's eyes whether that person is young or old he is “a full age.” This is His promise that the timing is perfect.

People, People, People

What a joy, what a hassle

Winning the human race

People are fragile—handle with care

When we look at our world, we see a sea of humanity. Out of the billions of people on the planet, we will meet only a tiny fraction. Some we will meet for only seconds while others for a lifetime. Just like ourselves, each one comes with a past that has shaped them into the person they are today. Each one is a sinner in need of a Savior. Many will test our character in some fashion ... as we will theirs.

The Perfect Model

The love Jesus displayed for people should be our pattern. His love was balanced between a tender love (compassion, patience, understanding) and a protective love (discipline, challenge, correction). Therefore, our love should also be balanced. We must be willing to cry with someone as well as lovingly point out truth to another, with gentleness and respect.

Different Levels of Involvement

Each type of relationship we have calls for different levels of involvement. Each one is a life God has brought into our sphere of influence. Some people we will only meet for a few moments, such as salespeople or the cashier at a convenience store. Others may be people we see every day because of work or school. Then there are our true friends who are people we have decided we want and need in our lives. Perhaps the toughest group of people we'll be in a relationship with is our own family, immediate or extended. No matter from which of these areas people enter our lives, as Christians, we are to allow God to live through

us for His purposes. Some of these people will not have accepted Christ as their Savior, but as His ambassadors, we are to represent Him in our words and actions.



Harmony vs. conflict—cooperation trumps conflict every time.

A Godly Perspective

Whether we like it or not, each person God brings into our lives is going to have an effect on us as we will on them. What will that effect be? This is where our character comes in. If we understand that everybody currently walking the earth is a flawed person to some degree, that alone should give us perspective. No one we meet will “have it all” spiritually, mentally, emotionally, physically, materially, etc. Every one of us is deficient in some areas. So to choose to be in a relationship with someone is to expect those flaws to come out now and

then. Just know that the people around you don't make you what you are, they reveal who you already are. While we may know in our minds how we should respond or not respond to someone, our good intentions don't determine our character; our actions do.

Reflecting God?

Others are watching us. One way or another, our lives will serve as either a positive or negative example to others. Only we can make that choice; nobody makes it for us, not even the Lord. He gives us free will, but with it comes responsibility and the consequences of our actions. He will not force us to live for Him. He gave us the Holy Spirit to guide us—if we choose to listen and to follow Him.

It's all about love

“DEAR FRIENDS, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him” (1 John 4:7-9).

Love as God Commands

That's as simple as it gets, isn't it? No deciphering required here. God's love should be the motivation for all our dealings with one another. Love should be the common denominator in every thought, every word spoken and every interaction we have with others. It doesn't matter if the person is a total stranger or our closest friend. Our commandment from God in 1 Corinthians is “above all is LOVE.”

Jesus' Love

Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

As Jesus' ambassadors, we are to obey His command to love one another by showing the same love for each other that He has for us.

In John 14:15, He tells us “If you love me, you will obey what I

command.” Acts of obedience are how we show God that we love Him. If we love one another and obey God, we will worship and glorify Him.

Agape and Philos

Love is a vast subject and is defined many ways by many people. Therefore, when we see the word “love”

The greatest secret ever to successful relationships

THERE ARE TIMES when putting love into action gets very difficult, if not impossible. But when you approach it with the right attitude the results may surprise you. It all boils down to this:

“Treat all people as an act of devotion to the Lord.”

This doesn't mean you let people take advantage of you or abuse you. There are some people you just have to love from a distance. But you should deal with them reverently and wisely—even as God has dealt with you.

in the Bible, we need to understand how the Bible uses it.

To understand the biblical concept of love we need to consider two Greek words; *agape* and *philos*. *Philos* is a love that is expressed as a deep affection for the object of that love. *Agape* is an unconditional love. It is based upon the integrity

of the one doing the loving—and it doesn't demand a response from the one being loved.

Agape is the love God has for us. The worthiness of the object is never in question. This is a love so powerful it is difficult for us to comprehend, but it is a love we can learn to understand and master as we grow in the Christian life.

This seems an impossible task—and it is—without the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. If this love were impossible, God would not tell us to have it for one another.

Joy in Loving Others

We aren't told to love others only after they've first loved us. When we choose to love others, we can't love them only when their actions meet our expectations. We don't truly love unconditionally until we see past their faults. We don't love certain things about them ... we love them. We can be disappointed in someone's actions and behavior, but that does not excuse us from loving them as God commands us. Loving as God instructs makes life so much better, peaceful and enjoyable.

Ultimately, *agape* love and *philos* love are mostly interchangeable in practice. When we embrace this concept of love we can begin to grow in God's grace and fulfill the purpose He had when He created us—His glory.

Everyone you know and love will let you down!

DON'T BE AMAZED when others don't do what you think they should. Everyone you know will let you down at one time or another. And you too will let everyone you know down at times. You must realize that everyone you know is a flawed human being with emotional scars, personality defects and occasional irrational behavior—and won't always meet your expectations.

We all have faults, but often we seem unable to tolerate imperfections in others. If any relationship we have is to thrive and grow, we have to give each other room to do so. When two sinners agree to be in a relationship, there should be the expectation that the other person's imperfections are eventually going to come out one way or another.

If we sever relationships whenever we're wronged, soon there won't be any relationships left. Ephesians 4:32 tells us to “... (forgive) each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” If God can love us in spite of our sin, how can we withhold the same love for others? Never forget that Jesus is the only person who will *never* let you down.

“Only when we are finding our ultimate satisfaction in God are we able to relate rightly to one another.”

Richard D. Phillips
& Sharon L. Phillips

The Key to Successful Relationships

Focus on Christ, not on yourself

Love is a mental attitude

Reducing friction in relationships

We have many types of relationships in our lives—family, friends, business, etc. The choices we make every day of our lives have an impact on all our relationships.

Family relationships might appear to be automatic and the most likely to be successful. Every one of us can find in our background a struggle to maintain a relationship with a relative or family member. Maybe that relationship was strengthened and/or repaired and is now successful—but for many the struggle continues.

Relationship Choices

Non-family relationships are all about choice. It may involve a stranger, someone at work or church. It may be through circumstances, such as a family member's marriage. But in the end, if any relationship is to continue, those involved must make a decision for it to flourish.

Interactions

Remember that we all interact with many people—we have relationships with only a few. Not every interaction is meant to be a relationship. When relationships develop, they will be unique. God has a purpose for putting a person in your path. His purpose may be a relationship or only an encounter. If you let the Holy Spirit lead you, every relationship you enter into will be ordained by God and a part of His plan for you. In some cases, it may also lead to a joyful and lasting experience.

Key Actions

There are key actions that tend to facilitate and strengthen relationships. Successful ones are built on mutual acceptance. Letting a per-

son be himself—the person God created—is important but isn't necessarily easy. We each want a relationship with someone who thinks and feels like we do.

We don't always have to agree with others, but we need to accept them for who they are. When our relationship with God is right, our relationships with others will also be right.



Working together is the engine that drives good relationships.

Mutual Expectations

Unmet expectations in relationships lead to hurt feelings and increased levels of stress. Both parties in a relationship need to make sure that their expectations are similar or are compatible.

Be careful with incompatible expectations because they will probably contribute to discontent even when they are well communicated. Honesty, communication and prayer are keys to establishing the required mutual expectations. This allows both parties to realize successes in the relationship.

Love in Action

In the Bible there is a beautiful description of love in 1 Corinthians 13. In this much quoted passage you will find qualities that a person needs to exhibit for love to be evident in a relationship.

Notice as you read this list that the qualities are outwardly focused. To love like Jesus did means we must consider the other person's needs and interests above our own desires. It is so easy to take a worldly view and desire to manipulate a relationship to be what we want it to be instead of allowing God to develop a relationship to be what He wants it to be. A relationship built on love will not only survive, it will flourish.

1 Corinthians 13—Love in Action

VIRTUE	APPLICATION	VERSE
<i>Is Patient</i>	Patience teaches perseverance, helping to propel us to maturity	Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything Jas 1:4
<i>Is Kind</i>	Showing kindness in love reflects God's will for us and results in a closer relationship with Him	Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you Eph 4:32
<i>Does not envy</i>	Forgoing envy in love allows us to be content and find true happiness within	I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances Phil 4:11
<i>Does not boast</i>	While traveling with God by our side, boasting is not an option, humility rules the day	My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice Ps 34:2
<i>Is not proud</i>	Pride is focusing on self and what we want, not on God and what He wants	He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble Prov 3:34
<i>Is not rude</i>	Rudeness, born of conceit and selfishness, is weak in the face of the humility inspired by God's grace	Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves Phil 2:3
<i>Not self-seeking</i>	Placing others before self awakens our humility and enhances our intimate walk with Christ	Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others 1 Cor 10:24
<i>Not easily angered</i>	Anger is an emotion that separates us from love. Love is God's anger management program	But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment Matt 5:22
<i>Keeps no record of wrongs</i>	Don't fling other's failures and weaknesses back in their faces; instead build up and edify	Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors Matt 6:12
<i>Does not delight in evil</i>	Turn away from any evil that hinders your walk with God	Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil 1 Thess 5:21–22
<i>Rejoices with the truth</i>	Truth provides the rock-solid foundation for love of others and of God	Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ Eph 4:15
<i>Always protects</i>	Our love of others affords us an understanding and appreciation of God's love and protection for us	Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress Jas 1:27
<i>Always trusts</i>	We can handle any difficulty with the sure knowledge that God has our back and will never fail us	In all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to his purpose Rom 8:28
<i>Always hopes</i>	God's promised hope is the spark that allows us to keep going when others despair	Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure 1 John 3:3
<i>Always perseveres</i>	Whether you can see results or not, remain steadfast in your pursuit of God	Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial...he will receive the crown of life Jas 1:12a
<i>Never fails</i>	The constancy of God's never-changing love brings perspective, strength and courage	As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love John 15:9

"Our relationship with our fellows and our relationship with God are so linked that we cannot disturb one without disturbing the other."

Roy Hession

Acceptance

IF GOD ACCEPTS us with all our faults and all our sins and still offers us eternal life through Jesus Christ, how can we not accept others for who they are?

None of us is perfect, and Romans says we're all sinners who have fallen short of the glory of God. So why should it surprise us that we run into other people that are sinners, too?

We all struggle with something, whether we're Christians or not; the difference is in whom we trust to guide us towards the righteousness to which we are called.

If you wait for someone to be who you think he should be before entering a relationship with him, you'll likely be in for a long wait!

Remember one of the nicest gifts you can ever give is the benefit of the doubt.

Respect & Encourage

BY RESPECTING THE opinions of others and encouraging them, you will be building a stronger relationship.

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3). In order to have quality relationships with others, we can't make everything about us.

When we spend our time and efforts working to better the lives of others, our own problems seem less severe. It certainly affords us opportunities to dwell on something else for a while.

Be the kind of person that others want to be around. There seem to be two types of people: those that make you feel better after having been around them and those where it's emotionally draining. Which will you be?

Avoid Hypersensitivity

SOMEONE WHO IS sensitive to the opinions, feelings and needs of others is a joy to be around. As Christians we should always be sensitive to others. But we should never be hypersensitive. When we are constantly offended, irritated, critical or angry at the comments and ideas of others, we are being hypersensitive. Hypersensitive people get their feelings hurt very easily by what they regard as criticism, slights or attacks—real or imagined.

Hypersensitive people cause others to "walk on eggshells" around them and to be afraid of what might set them off. Don't keep others at bay by being a ticking time bomb and making them uncomfortable or afraid to say what is on their mind.

"Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise" (Proverbs 19:20).

Love

LOVE SHOULD BE the motivation for anything we say or do no matter who we are dealing with. Love should be the guiding principle in all your relationships. Love is the all-encompassing trait that feeds every action of the Christian walk.

In 1 Corinthians 16:14, Paul is telling the church in Corinth to do everything in love. He is speaking of unconditional love. What's included in "everything?" Well ... everything.

Sometimes "speaking the truth in love" involves saying something another person might not want to hear, so take caution to say only what needs to be said and in a gentle way that does not cause anger (Proverbs 15:1).

And don't forget—some people simply need to be loved from a distance. You must not let others bring you down.

Humor

WE CAN NEVER fully be friends with someone with whom we never laugh. Humor is an intricate part of friendship. When two imperfect people spend time together, humor helps diffuse differences of opinion and binds friends together. When we laugh with friends, we build on our relationship.

Humor helps us handle the unexpected with grace, rather than being too serious all the time. Our souls need to come up for air once in a while, and the shortest distance between two people is laughter.

We were not created to bear the full weight of every little happenstance. It is not in our nature to be serious all the time. The person that causes you to laugh endears himself to you and is a joy to be around.

Having a sense of humor means being able to laugh at yourself—which indicates you are grounded in humility.

Know What You Can Control

"CONTROL" IS A tricky word. It represents different things to different people, with most connotations being somewhat negative. In the context of relationships, control is often thought to be synonymous with "power." Power struggles within relationships typically produce few solutions, but do produce plenty of anger and resentment.

The only person in control is God and that is as it should be; He is both sovereign and omnipotent. This should be a source of great comfort to the Christian. Whatever we can't control, He can. We can then rest with Paul's exhortation, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7).

Forgive

CONSIDERING ALL THAT God has forgiven us, even when we have disobeyed Him, how can we think of keeping forgiveness only for ourselves? We are to share this incredible gift with others, just as God shared it with us.

Ephesians 4:32 reminds us to forgive others as in Christ God forgave you. Forgiveness is not simply something we accept from God. It is something we're to share.

We, who are unworthy, have received a precious gift, and it is imperative that we forgive others. Jesus said, "... if you do not forgive men their sins (transgressions), your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:15).

Just as God has set us free with His forgiveness, so must we set others free with ours.

Don't Judge & Don't Attack

WE HAVE NEITHER the power, the facts, nor the insight God has to determine someone's heart or intentions. We only see the outward behavior. While we can certainly make judgments about whether something seems right or wrong, we don't know the path that person has walked to this point.

Only God knows the thoughts and intentions of someone else's heart (Hebrews 4:12). With our limited knowledge and perspective it is arrogance for us to judge someone else.

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Matthew 7:1-2).

We need to resist our inclination to ignore or excuse our own faults and amplify the faults of others.

Avoid Unrealistic Expectations

IN ANY RELATIONSHIP accept the other person for who he is. Don't try to change him, you can't. Trying to change another person or having unrealistic expectations about him is a recipe for failure or even worse, disaster.

All too often rather than just accepting others, we tend to put a list of expectations on them—we expect them to behave the way we think they should.

This is particularly true in marriage and other close or intimate relationships. Rather than focusing on what our own responsibilities are, we focus on the other person's performance. Expectations should be set on that person's legitimate responsibilities in the relationship. Don't ask someone to be someone they're not.

Does It Heal or Does it Hurt?

BECAUSE WE HAVE a sinful nature, our words and actions will occasionally affect those around us. Everyone has said or done something unwittingly that hurt another person, if not physically then certainly emotionally. We all say and do things that hurt others, but this should never be done willfully.

How do we choose to live in harmony with those around us? Our words and actions have the power to bring people closer to us or push them away. If we're encouraged to do everything in love, it stands to reason we will want to comfort and encourage those around us, to bear their burdens, weep with those who weep and celebrate with those who celebrate.

Continually ask yourself "Do my words and actions heal or hurt?"

Build Relationships

OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH others give us the opportunity to love and act as Christ has instructed us. We're not dealing with perfect, forgiving, omniscient human beings. We're dealing with flawed people with emotional baggage, just like ourselves.

But when we apply biblical principles to all of our relationships, it is amazing how much joy can be brought into our lives. And in difficult relationships, when we love as Christ loves, a multitude of sins will be covered.

Don't forget we interact with other believers to build up each other's faith. We interact with non-believers to carry out the Great Commission.

The degree to which we practice and hone our relationship building skills will directly affect the success of our mission.

Pray

STRUGGLES IN RELATIONSHIPS are inevitable, whether with family, friends or our spouses. We just aren't capable of handling all of our relationships perfectly.

All the TV talk shows, magazine articles and self-help books can't possibly address every need in every situation, whether they are Christian-based or not.

God took all the steps to reconcile our relationship with Him, and He has provided us everything we need to reconcile differences in our relationships with others. We have His Word, the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit and the power of prayer.

When we turn everything over to God in prayer we can have confidence that He will provide the answers to anything we face.

Managing Conflict

Healing & not hurting when seeking God's solution

Reconciliation is the goal

Conflicts are a normal part of everyday life. They are going to happen. They are unavoidable. While in these imperfect bodies in this imperfect world, there will be conflict. Learning how to deal with conflict God's way makes life so much better.

Conflicts often trigger strong feelings, emotions and even anger. Getting upset is not the way God wants us to deal with conflict. Lashing out and retaliating never solves anything; in fact it makes things worse. Reacting to others in anger is like throwing gasoline on a fire, often with the same explosive results (James 1:19; Proverbs 14:29).

Change Your Focus

Following Christ's example is paramount in any situation we encounter. Christ dealt with His friends by being compassionate, patient and understanding. He taught them and helped them understand what the Father expected of them.

We are a new creation in Christ and are to follow His example that "... you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work ..."

(Colossians 1:10). This includes reconciling ourselves to others when conflicts arise.

The Apostle Paul said a lot in Scripture about how to deal with those with whom we are in conflict.

Consider Romans 12:17-21 "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Talk about diffusing a situation quickly! When we respond with genuine love and kindness to someone who is angry with us, it often resolves difficult situations and brings peace and harmony to relationships (Proverbs 15:1).

Define the Problem

If you can accurately define the problem, you are well on the way to a solution. But often the superficial conflict you are talking about is not

Conflict is inevitable but knowing how to deal with it makes life much less painful

"There is such a big difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. It takes two to reconcile, so it is not always possible to be reconciled. But it takes only one to forgive. So if people do you wrong, forgive them, whether or not they ask for forgiveness."

Philip Graham Ryken

Conflict Analysis		
Concern	Useful	Harmful
Focus	Conflict focuses on issue	Conflict focuses on person
Information	Complete & honest information	Selective information
Issues	Raise & clarify issues	Bring up old issues
Blame	Accepts mutual blame	Blames others for problem
Feelings	Expresses both negative & positive feelings	Expresses only negative feelings
Perception	Focuses on similarities	Focuses on differences
Trend	De-escalating conflicts	Escalating conflicts
Change	Facilitates solutions	Minimizes change, increases conflict
Outcome	Both comfortable with solution	One wins, one loses; or both lose
Intimacy	Resolving conflict increases intimacy	Escalating conflict decreases intimacy

When conflict rears its ugly head, this chart can help smooth the way to conflict resolution.

A Blessed Way of Life

Do all the good you can
By all the means you can
In all the ways you can
In all the places you can
At all the times you can
To all the people you can
As long as ever you can.

John Wesley

the real issue. Try to burrow down and find out what the real problem is. Ask questions and try to seek out what is really bothering the other person? What do they really want?

Often facts alone, however real, cannot resolve some conflicts because the way people perceive those facts

is distorted by their emotions. When this happens you need to address the emotional component of how the other person is seeing the issue.

One of the best indicators for dealing with the other person's feelings is your willingness and ability to listen carefully. Intently listening to the other point of view will provide you with a more complete understanding of the true nature of the conflict and hasten resolution.

Addressing the Conflict

Since conflicts often involve perceived threats to one or both parties, the needs and goals of both parties should be respected and considered. The use of hurtful, damaging language and comments should be avoided. Listen, consider and respond to the things that really matter to the other person. Be sensitive and don't be defensive (James 1:19).

It's useful to summarize your understanding of the other person's view and to offer an opportunity for the other person to correct your understanding. Language along the lines of, "So, if I understand you correctly, you think ..." and "is there anything I've left out?" This can help pave the path to resolution of the problem.

All in Love

No matter how much you disagree with the other person, attack the issue—not the person. Remember, humor can play a powerful role in resolving conflicts. Seek a resolution, not a victory. The most important thing is to keep hurtful, damaging conflict to a minimum.

The common thread throughout the entire Bible is one of love and reconciliation. Trusting God will result in freedom, peace and joy (Psalm 37:3-8).

The Key to Moment-by-Moment Happiness

Part 1 – Keep your focus where it belongs

SOMETIMES THE ROUTE to happiness—both personal and spiritual—depends more on removing things from our lives, rather than adding to them. Learn to stop doing these three things:

1. Blaming – Take responsibility for your actions when things go wrong instead of blaming others. This isn't self-defeating, it's liberating. It allows you to concentrate on being better or smarter next time. And getting better or smarter can only make you happier.
2. Bragging – Genuine relationships make you happier, but those relationships are only created when you stop trying to impress everyone and start being yourself. It takes so much more energy and work pretending to be someone you're not.
3. Whining – Psychology has taught us that complaining about our problems actually makes us feel worse, not better. If something is wrong, don't waste time whining. That's like running on a treadmill; lots of effort, but going nowhere. Put that effort into finding solutions.

Your focus belongs upon Christ and His plan for your life. Deal with conflicts by looking to the situation and the solution rather than your ego and "winning at all costs." Always seek the solution that is the best at serving and honoring God.

Part 2 – Don't let others control your happiness

IT'S BEEN SAID that life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you respond to it. There's a lot of truth in that statement. Often we tend to be reactionary creatures, blaming events, other people or circumstances for our lack of happiness. Happiness is dependent on circumstances and is therefore unreliable. Joy is dependent on God and He is totally reliable no matter what the circumstance, even during intense suffering.

There is an expression that says, "hurt people hurt people." In other words, some folks try to make themselves feel better by trying to make others feel bad. A bully is nothing more than someone full of emotional pain trying to control others. He can only hurt you if you allow him to hurt you. Jesus would tell us to pray for these people rather than responding in anger.

As Christians, we have been bought with a price. We are no longer our own. We belong to God, and we need to constantly be mindful of who He says we are, not what others say. Our true identity is in Him. That fact alone should take the pressure off. Others can say what they want about us. Their accusations say much more about their own character than about yours. There are some people—even close relatives—that simply must be loved from a distance. Don't make yourself an easy target by crumbling under the weight of a bully's words.

A Covenant Couple

Believers should marry believers

Jesus is the pattern in marriage

God's plan for marriage is that two people, a man and a woman whom He has brought together, will become one. "But at the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Mark 10:6-9).

Marriage is a Covenant

The marriage covenant is intended by God to be a life-long relationship between a man and a woman totally committed to each other. In a Christian marriage the covenant is made before God and is intended as a picture of Christ and His Church.

Enter Satan's Evil

Satan watched the first marriage and exploited the relationship to cause Adam and Eve to fall. His strategy was and is to undermine marriage. Satan continues to attack this sacred covenant in different ways.

He tries to promote same-sex marriage, open marriage, addiction to pornography, infidelity or just living together and avoiding marriage altogether. Marriages made on earth and lived Satan's way guarantee frustration and a frantic search for happiness that is never found.

Dating or Courting

God designed marriage for two people to mutually support and encourage each other in their Christian walk. When dating or courting and marriage are carried out God's way, there is tremendous blessing and joy.

The important thing is the character and maturity of the couple. This is more important than the process of how they met or how they spend time together. With their focus on Christ, their integrity will remain intact.

The Bible warns us that believers should not marry unbelievers. You are not the exception. You can make every excuse why you are an

exception to God's unchanging rules, but you will bear the consequences (2 Corinthians 6:14).

Learning to Know Each Other

What does godly dating/courting look like? This is a time for a man and woman to learn about each other. It is vital that each sees what is in the soul of the other. Unless one has known a possible mate for some period of time, the future may present some totally unexpected surprises. The process of learning about someone is an exciting adventure, and to experience the joy of a relationship you must learn as much about each other as you can. Mutual respect and admiration are God's desire for a couple. This is preparation for a marriage blessed by God and a life of great joy and fulfillment.

Temptation is so Easy

You must overcome the temptations of the flesh. Dating/courting God's way means respect for yourself and for your dating partner. God's direct command is that sex is for a married husband and wife only. This command is designed for your protection, to give you something beautiful in the right way, at the right time and not something cheap and without commitment.

Developing self-control will give you capacity for a satisfying sexual life together; one that will last a lifetime. The intimacy of soul and spirit is the foundation of a long and joyful marriage and is the consummation of God's plan in marriage.

Two Sin Natures Coming Together

Marriage is combining two sin natures into an intimate relationship. We all bring flaws, weaknesses, habits and baggage into this relationship. No one exhibits personal flaws at first. It will take time, a period of adjustment and a feeling of safety before you both reveal your true selves. If you can't talk comfortably with this person about pretty much anything, you do not know each other well enough to think about marriage.



The journey through life is infinitely easier God's way.

If you have not seen any faults or shortcomings in this person, perhaps you need to evaluate your own maturity level before thinking of marriage. If you see faults that you cannot live with and plan on changing, you have found the wrong person, or you are the wrong person. Be honest with yourself and with God as you seek His guidance.

Focused on Christ

Is this a person who is growing in his or her relationship with the Lord? Will this person be able to encourage you in your spiritual walk? Realize

that God is going to see the two of you as one—you will share blessing and testing (Matthew 19:4-6). You will have the opportunity to worship God in unity and give Him great glory.

Honesty and Humility

Marriage demands honesty from both husband and wife. They should always speak the truth... in love. This requires humility foremost. There is no competition in a godly marriage, no keeping score about who does more. There is no holding grudges or bitterness. It boils down to being thoughtful, kind and respectful.

Mutual Respect

Both husband and wife should have mutual respect for each other. There should be wise leadership by a loving husband: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her..." (Ephesians 5:25). And willing submission by a loving wife "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22). When guided by integrity and humility of both parties there is a concentration on the needs of the other and putting the needs of your spouse above your own. Live in an understanding and gracious way.

A Great Marriage

Marriage is a kit. You get the parts at the wedding, and then build it day by day. It is a life-long process of discovering and pardoning each other's faults. It is a process of learning, trusting and loving more; all as you live in unity and glorify God. If you love someone and feel his love in return, trust God to shed light on your path. If God in His wisdom has given His blessing, have faith that He will provide for a joyful marriage.

Choosing a life partner

■ Has this person personally believed in Jesus Christ as his/her Savior?

■ Do you see evidence of this person walking with God on a daily basis? Did this person have an effective spiritual life before you met him/her?

■ Can you look back and see God's hand in bringing you together?

■ Have both of you developed insights and learned to deal with dysfunctions in your families or previous relationships? Do you see effective coping skills?

■ Are your close friends and family members comfortable with this person or are they warning you about certain things?

■ Look for someone who is open and honest. Do you have any reason to suspect this person is either lying or withholding full disclosure from you?

■ Does this person attempt to cut you off from friendships and family relationships? Are his/her own family relationships healthy or filled with reasons why he/she can't get along with certain people?

■ Are you making excuses to yourself or others about this person's behaviors or things he/she has said? Does this person forgive or hold grudges and bitterness?

■ Does this person respect you and have integrity? Is this person understanding and compassionate?

■ Does this person have irritating habits or obvious character flaws that you intend to change after you are married? Do not deceive yourself; the only person you change is yourself.

■ For a successful relationship, there should be more give than take.

■ Have you talked honestly about money and debt? Are your financial values and goals similar?

■ An ideal mate should have strong Christian characteristics: compassion, forgiveness, kindness, gentleness, humility, and above all, love.

*Marriage ...
designed in
heaven and
assembled on
earth—Follow
instructions
carefully*

"God intends and expects marriage to be a lifetime commitment between a man and a woman, based on the principles of biblical love. The relationship between Jesus Christ and His church is the supreme example of the committed love that a husband and wife are to follow in their relationship with each other."

John C. Broger

In marriage, Jesus is the pattern ...

For the husband

THE HUSBAND IS commanded to love his wife as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25-33). This is the ultimate sacrificial love since Jesus Christ gave His life to provide salvation to those who make up His Church. The husband is to love his wife as he loves his own body. He puts her needs, her safety, her security and her protection ahead of his own needs in godly leadership.

He nourishes and cherishes her as Christ does the church. The husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is to lead her gently with love. He graciously does the hard things for her as Christ has done the hardest thing for us in providing our salvation.

It means he goes out of his way to guide her, lovingly and protectively ... not in a domineering fashion. He focuses on her and loves her unconditionally. Obviously no human husband is a perfect leader or lover but the principle of the ideal standard and model in Christ remains.

In God's design, as children are born into the home, they should get a clear picture of Christ and His love as they watch their parents. Christ-likeness leads to unity and harmony in the home.

For the wife

THE HUSBAND IS the protector of his wife's soul; he makes it safe for her to respond to him. The soul of a woman longs to respond to loving leadership from her husband; she craves the security he provides.

The wife is commanded to submit to her husband (Ephesians 5:22-24; 1 Corinthians 11:3; Colossians 3:18). This does not mean she is inferior to her husband—they are co-equal partners.

Jesus is the greatest example of submitting to authority. He totally submitted to the Father's will. He was not inferior to the Father but coequal in every way. Nevertheless, He willingly did what the Father asked Him to do.

The wife is commanded to respect her husband. This means she lets him lead and does not belittle or undermine him when he is trying to provide leadership. Her husband is not a perfect leader, as God the Father was to Jesus Christ, but his imperfections don't absolve her of what she has been commanded by God.

The husband has the same responsibility Christ had. If he loves his wife as Christ loved the church, the wife should willingly follow his leadership and respect him.

The Biblical view on sex

God designed sex

His way is the perfect way

GOD'S COMMANDS REGARDING sex are quite simple. Sexual intimacy is designed by God for a married husband and wife only. No exceptions. Homosexuality, living together outside of marriage, a sexual affair outside of marriage: all are wrong! 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4; 1 Peter 2:11; Ephesians 4:19; Matthew 5:27-28; Hebrews 13:4, 1 Timothy 5:6; 1 Corinthians 7:3-4; Romans 1:26-27.

Why would God create something so pleasurable and then deny people that pleasure?

When we obey God's command and abstain from any sexual activity before or outside of marriage, we develop self-control. We learn to put our own lusts and desires aside and grow in integrity and virtue. We learn to think of another person's needs and desires, not just our own.

We will then have the personal virtue that will be so necessary to weather the highs and lows of any marriage. When we finally are joined as husband and wife, the sexual experience becomes an island of pleasure for the man and woman.

When two people have made a virtuous commitment and are both secure in the love they have for each other, they are free to mutually satisfy each other in sexual intimacy. They will have learned to first give satisfaction to their marriage partner rather than being self-centered in their desire. This strengthens the marriage bond.

Sex outside of marriage gives Satan a foothold on your life and draws you away from the true joy of walking with God.



Where "If it feels good, do it" fails ...

So what if you have already failed in this extremely important area? God specializes in forgiveness and restoration. As Jesus told the woman caught in adultery: "I do not condemn you, either. Go, from now on sin no more" (John 8:11b).

Maintaining a loving marriage

REFLECT CHRIST BY recognizing that a loving marriage is precious, yet frail. It is two flawed individuals coming together. Your marriage is second only to your relationship with Christ, but it is your most sacred human relationship here on earth. Just as you must guard your own mind and heart against the evils of this world, diligently protect your marriage the same way. Use your marital relationship to help keep each other focused on Christ with all the grace, mercy, love and forgiveness that it suggests.

REFLECT CHRIST BY being gentle and kind even in moments of disagreement. We all fail in many ways every day of our lives. It is for us who share love to find the grace to respond to such failures with understanding, patience, compassion and kindness. Give up the need to always "win," to always be "right." Be lovingly honest and open, especially in times of conflict. Don't cast that first stone!

REFLECT CHRIST BY refusing to nitpick. We are all works in progress. To habitually leap upon every opportunity to highlight each little infraction, every minor offense committed by your imperfect spouse, regardless of its size or import, is to virtually guarantee that your marriage will experience more than its fair share of distress and disappointment. We all fail in many little ways every day of our lives. It is for us who share love to find the grace to respond to such failures with understanding, patience, compassion and kindness.

REFLECT CHRIST BY committing to do everything you can to build and preserve your marriage. When tough times come, as they inevitably will, remain true to your wedding vows and what they represent. You are Christ's ambassador on earth, and it is your responsibility to serve Him in Spirit and in truth. Christ never goes back on His word and His love and neither should you. When your spouse fails or when you fail, don't let that failure cause you to stumble.

REFLECT CHRIST BY resisting the temptation to attack your spouse's character. Harsh words uttered in the heat of battle can never be effectively taken back. Each bitter word needlessly hurled at your spouse chips away relentlessly and destructively at the brick wall that once represented the solidarity and strength of your love. As difficult as it is, you must put away your verbal arsenal and speak kindly and lovingly to your spouse. We must selflessly sacrifice and give of ourselves with no expectation of return.

REFLECT CHRIST BY looking for ways to encourage and bolster your spouse. Never use a failure by your spouse as an excuse to change the rules that govern your relationship. We all fail on a daily basis and fall short of God's expectations. An eagerness to instantly leap on a spousal error as the pretext for radical change in the relationship is a sure sign of marital decay and contentiousness.

REFLECT CHRIST BY being willing to sincerely ask for forgiveness when you are wrong and be liberal in granting forgiveness when asked. Within a marriage there is scarcely a day goes by without one or the other or both of the spouses acting in a decidedly unloving way. Holding onto a grudge or hurt feelings can never build a stronger marriage. The willingness and ability to ask for and to grant forgiveness is fundamental to the success of marriage. In the absence of forgiveness, resentment will rule the day and bring nothing but pain and suffering within any marriage.

REFLECT CHRIST BY understanding that communication is important. We need to listen with our hearts as well as with our ears. It's very true that we can't listen and talk at the same time. Often during a misunderstanding we tend to be thinking ahead, preparing to ward off the next "assault," rather than actually listening to what our spouse is saying. Honestly examine the matter in contention by running it first through the filter of your heart to see a point of view other than your own.

REFLECT CHRIST BY remaining faithful to God in all you do. Don't cede responsibility for your own personal happiness to your spouse, and don't give your spouse the burden of supplying you with your identity. Your spouse is not responsible for your happiness or identity—that is your responsibility. All of this goes to say you cannot do all of this alone. The filling of the Holy Spirit means God is ready and able to help and will be by your side every step of the way. This is the first and foremost step toward creating a loving Christian marriage that will last a lifetime.

Family

The basic unit of all societies

Building a strong family

As the family goes, so goes society. The family was the first institution God established. Before nations, governments or even the church itself, God established the family as the basic building block of society. When families as a whole fall apart, so does the rest of society.

The First Family

The Bible shows us that long before “the church” was created in the New Testament, the God-ordained structure of the family was present in the Old Testament. We can see that all the way back to Adam’s family. Within every family, there was a hierarchy that was followed. Today, there are assigned roles for each family member for the family to work as it was designed.

God’s Design

A watch seems to be a simple instrument, but the inner workings are very complex. Every part inside is designed to work perfectly with every other part. Remove the tiniest of parts, and the entire thing stops. Every design has a designer, and God designed a world that hums with precision and structure. It has vast complex processes at work illustrating various interdependent relationships that must work together for order to be maintained. As with all of God’s creations, when man decides to “alter the design,” failure is inevitable.

God’s Instructions

Scripture is replete with instructions for the family. Eve was created to complete Adam. She not only completed him, but she also had the role of bearing children and being

a mother. Proverbs 31 describes a godly wife. Children are told to obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1 and Colossians 3:20). And the fifth commandment is, “Honor your father and your mother.”



Strong families are braided together in Christ.

Ephesians 5 indicates that men are to protect and provide for their family and lay down their lives both figuratively and, if necessary, literally.

Everyone Has a Role

The one word that applies to everyone in a family is one our culture frequently misinterprets: submission. What you see in Scripture is a hierarchy of submission: children to parents; wife to husband; husband to Jesus Christ. Christ, who submitted to the Father while He was on earth, is the pattern and example.

When each component of the family is acting as one, it works as God

intended. As the family functions as God designed, it reflects the relationship between Christ and the church. As this family matures and reflects the fullness of Christ, it becomes the strong building block of the church. Therefore, as the family goes, so goes the church.

The Church is the Model

When the members of the family act within their assigned roles, peace, love and harmony are the result. The family acts as a miniature church. Just as the members of the church make up the Body of Christ, acting within their assigned spiritual gifts and roles, the same goes for members of a family. When any one member acts outside of his God-given role, disunity and strife often result. This may cause a ripple effect on the rest of the family.

Spiritually unified and mature families help create unified and mature churches. Lifestyle evangelism begins at home. Parents should model the Christian life for their children so that they will interact with friends and acquaintances outside the home in a positive way. When you model Christ in your life at home it will overflow to your daily life outside the home. Your character will be exemplified by strong Christian principles.

Parents who are consistent in their Christian walk reflect the life of Christ and are positive role models for family, friends, community and the church. Regular Bible study and church attendance are keys to building strong successful families.

Parents in Charge

Proverbs 22:6 instructs parents to “Train a child in the way he should

go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” It is the parents’ responsibility to teach, train and admonish children concerning lifestyle and Christian values. Children imitate their parents so the family focus must be on God.

When children leave home for college or the working world, they will carry with them the values they learned at home. When it is time for them to start a family of their own, they’ll usually resort back to whatever was modeled for them by their parents in childhood. God’s Word does not return to Him void (Isaiah 55:11). If Scripture was honored, taught and practiced at home, that tradition will most likely continue.

Practical Steps to Strengthen Family Bonds

The first commandment God gave us should also be the first commandment in our homes. If the love and honor of God is above everything else, and every family member is obedient to their God-assigned roles, that family cannot help but be a godly influence and example to everyone they come in contact with.

If we’re able to love God above all others, it is that love that will help all others endure. Our love of God should be echoed across every aspect of our lives. Deuteronomy 6:7–9 teaches that Scripture should be a defining mark of our homes.

Verse 7 tells us to “Impress them (Scriptures) on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” The family’s daily routine should include time to teach and encourage children. Talking about God, reading Scripture and prayer will build up a family and create a positive atmosphere that will glorify God. A great place to do this is around the family dinner table. In addition to talking about the day’s events, you can unify the family around Christ.

Q If Christ was the center of my family, what would my family be like?

When Conflict Arises

As with any other human relationship, differences will arise. It’s inevitable. But if the family is rooted in love, differences can be resolved before they become conflicts. Families united in the pursuit of following God’s will and plan for their lives can overcome any storm they face in life.

Conflict often arises when one or more family members stray from their God-given role and let their sin nature take over. When this happens, the errant member(s) should return to the Word of God and gently be reminded of what their role is. Remember, speak the truth in love. And that doesn’t go only for the children, but the parents as well.

Love Expressed

Love should be seen, heard and felt. Children imitate what they see and what they hear. The parents should exhibit love for each other and towards their children by their actions. Mutual respect, kind words and doing for others are all acts of love. Show others that you love them. Love should fill our kitchens, bedrooms and living rooms. The family is the most consistent, dynamic theater of instruction for life because that’s exactly what God designed the family to be: a loving community of Christ-centered relationships, unconditional love, compassion and understanding.

Instant Insights

■ We often treat strangers and friends thoughtfully, with good manners and consideration—and turn around and treat those we love poorly. Our family members should be the recipients of our greatest consideration, compassion, understanding and love. Their needs should be placed above all other acquaintances.

An acronym might help remind us to always honor our families with love and respect. Before any ugliness leaves our mouths, we should pause and think on these things.

T.H.I.N.K. Before you speak!

True?—Are the words I’m about to utter actually true? Your words should convey principles that are valid and true, and be spoken in a loving way. Your anger, bitterness or disappointment doesn’t give you license to lie.

Helpful?—Am I saying this just to be hurtful or am I speaking the truth in a loving way, honestly intending to help?

Inspiring?—Will my words be encouraging and lift this person up or knock him down? Will he be glad he listened?

Necessary?—Will my words, as well as my actions, be relevant? Advice given in a loving manner will result in happiness and spiritual growth. Will my words do any good? Am I just venting at their expense? Even if not directed at them, is what I’m saying relevant to them at all?

Kind?—Will my words help or hurt? Are they tactful, thoughtful and kind? Words of kindness are an expression of your love and breed better understanding and less skepticism of your motivation during times of strife.

Raising Great Kids

Train up a child in the way he should go

Kids for God

**Giving
your children
strong roots
and big wings**

Each child is wonderfully unique. God has gifted each child differently and given each a certain bent in personality. Our challenge as responsible parents is to rear them according to God's mandates. Modeling the Lord by using His Word in our thoughts and actions is the only way for true success.

The Starting Point

Babies come in all sizes, shapes and colors. Some may be cuter or have more personality than others, but every one of them has a sin nature. They want things their way all the time and will do whatever it takes to get it. Parents must realize this to do their job of raising these tykes into successful adulthood.

Parents are the spiritual compass in the lives of their children. Subduing the self-will in a child and bringing him to genuine humility and love for the Lord is the parents' major goal in life.

Laying a Firm Foundation

The problem is not strong-willed or stubborn children. It's weak-willed parents. The Bible gives great guidance on raising children.

Keeping Christ at the center of your life, and daily feeding on His Word, both as a family and individually, are critical to the success of your home. As you grow in the Lord, you will exemplify it in your patience, diligence and love toward your children.

Bookends

The bookends for your efforts are love and discipline and in between is a loving balance of many things they must learn in order to live in a fallen world and serve God. You must love them and teach them to love also.

Love them unconditionally and look for opportunities to praise and encourage them. Kids must know their boundaries and have them enforced by the parent. Kindness and a sense of humor are also qualities which facilitate children getting along with others. Being able to laugh at oneself is a life imperative, preparing the children for life's awkward moments.



Preparing them for the real world.

In Revelation 3:19, the Lord declares, "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent." If a perfect and righteous God sees discipline as important in the lives of His children, should we, imperfect mortals, do less? Discipline for kids is always forward-looking, just like God's discipline for us. Discipline without love doesn't reflect God's example and

can even be abuse. A wise lady once said that you should never use your hands in disciplining your kids. Your hands should always represent love and your children should never fear them. Remember, all discipline is for guidance—to grow strong, stable children.

Christian Pillars of Character

There are many things children must learn as they grow up. The task of raising children is a process that takes years and there are no shortcuts to doing the job properly. Remember, the goal is to bring your children to Christian maturity and not to dependence on you.

When parents instill genuine humility, love and Christian values in their children, they will have an easier time adjusting to all of life's relationships and responsibilities. People will like and want to be around them. More importantly, they will like themselves—and be examples of what Christ's ambassadors should look like.

ABCs of Parenting



A is for Accountability. Hold your children accountable for their behavior.

B is for Boundaries. Set specific limits and make clear the consequences if those limits are exceeded.

C is for Consistency. Hold to the same principles and practices.

D is for Discipline. Never discipline in anger and make the punishment fit the infraction.

E is for Example. Set a good, honest and loving example. Parents are the primary role models for children.

F is for Forgiveness. Practice it and teach the importance of forgiving.

G is for Giving. Teach the joy of giving, not only to family and friends, but to others in need.

H is for Humor. Keep your sense of humor and promote laughter with your children.

I is for Imagination. Be creative and play with your children. Make up stories and songs with them.

J is for Justice. Be as fair as possible.

K is for Knowing. Know your children's friends and their parents. Get to know your children's teachers.

L is for Listening. Listen to your children. Their thoughts will give you insights.

M is for Morals. Be sure your own standard of conduct is sound.

N is for No. Use it and mean it.

O is for Outdoors. Provide as much outdoor activity as possible. Teach respect for nature.

P is for Praise. Praise, encourage and love. This will help engender a sense of legitimate pride and self-worth.

Q is for Questions. Pay close attention to your children's questions and give simple answers unless more detail is requested.

R is for Respect. Show respect, teach respect and earn respect.

S is for Source of Strength. Share your faith and beliefs with your children.

T is for Togetherness. Have special designated times to be together as a family, but also know when to let go.

U is for Uniqueness. Understand the uniqueness of each child and then help that child be who he or she is.

V is for Voice. Be mindful of your tone of voice. It can convey more to the child than the words spoken.

W is for Words. Choose them carefully and always keep your word.

X is for eXamine. Examine constantly and be aware as you guide your family.

Y is for You. Take care of yourself mentally, physically and spiritually. A happy parent helps a child to be happy.

Z is for Zowie! Who would have thought they could grow up so quickly!

The Bible Says

■ For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.

Gen 18:19

■ These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Deut 6:6-7

■ Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law.

Deut 32:46

■ I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden from of old—things we have heard and known, things our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.

Ps 78:2-4

■ Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother"—which is the first commandment with a promise—"that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Eph 6:1-4

"The fundamental task of parenting is shepherding the hearts of your children. Behavior is heart driven, therefore, correction, discipline and training—all parenting—must be addressed to the heart."

Ted Tripp

For true and lasting happiness your child must have a loving relationship with God—It is the only thing that will last forever

“We do not develop habits of genuine love automatically. We learn by watching effective role models—most specifically by observing how our parents express love for each other day in and day out.”

Josh McDowell

Christian Virtues

HAVING A LOVING relationship with God is vital to your child’s being able to realize the full measure of joy and happiness that God intends for him. That relationship fuels the development of the child’s character and molds his behavior, while at the same time providing the perfect framework for learning crucial coping skills that will serve him well for a lifetime.

Here are some of the attitudes and beliefs that characterize Christian virtue and propel the establishment of a loving relationship with God.

- ▶ God – God loves me and has designed a wonderful life of blessing for me.
- ▶ Trusting God – By trusting Jesus as my Savior, I can and will trust Him with my whole life and rely on Him for a lifetime.
- ▶ Love – I will love God, my family and others, and I will respect the individuality of all.
- ▶ Spirituality – I will live by godly principles and will apply them moment by moment.
- ▶ Worship – I will worship God in Spirit and in truth and seek Him in all I do.
- ▶ Prayer – I will start my day with prayer, pray throughout the day and end my day with prayer and thanksgiving.
- ▶ Accountability – I am accountable to God and will seek to please Him in all I do.
- ▶ Humility – God has blessed me in infinite ways, and I will give Him the glory for what He has gifted and allowed me to do in life.
- ▶ Charity – I will be of charitable spirit and give of myself to God, my family, my friends, my church, my community and my country.
- ▶ Obedience – I will serve God obediently, study His Word and follow His commands.
- ▶ Balance – I will live a life of balance, filled with meaning, purpose and definition.

Demeanor/Behavior

WELL-BEHAVED CHILDREN are a delight to be around. They will have more friends and will be building a future for themselves with other people.

- ▶ Apply the *Golden Rule* – “In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” Matthew 7:12.
- ▶ Use manners – Say “please,” “thank you” and “excuse me.” Use proper table manners, sit up straight, eat with your mouth closed, do not talk with food in your mouth. When greeting people give a firm handshake and look them in the eye.
- ▶ Be courteous – Show unconditional love towards all people, no matter how they treat you.
- ▶ Show respect for others and respect their opinions and privacy.
- ▶ Be honest – Don’t lie, cheat or steal.
- ▶ Admit mistakes. When you are wrong, apologize. Don’t make excuses. Apologize to those you have hurt or wronged.
- ▶ Value and use humor where appropriate. It often improves difficult situations.
- ▶ Avoid bad influences and learn to deal with temptation—simply say “No.”
- ▶ Be obedient – Obey rules and regulations, learning to obey principles that are in your best interest. Most of all, obey God’s mandates.
- ▶ Don’t whine, pout, sulk or mope. Don’t roll your eyes or use bad language.
- ▶ Don’t interrupt or argue with adults. Don’t talk back or sass adults.
- ▶ Don’t bully, hit, push or throw fits. Don’t tattletale.
- ▶ Don’t snoop or meddle in someone else’s business. If it doesn’t concern you, stay out of it.
- ▶ Don’t mess with other people’s property.
- ▶ Don’t act like a jerk.

Character Traits

POSITIVE CHARACTER TRAITS will follow your children all of their lives. They will be a natural extension of their Christian heritage and will honor both God and man.

- ▶ Attitude – Have an attitude of gratitude. Keep a positive mental attitude. Live a life of thankfulness focused on serving God.
- ▶ Integrity – Live a life of integrity always showing honor, decency, honesty, trustworthiness and uprightness.
- ▶ Thoughtfulness and kindness – Always be sensitive to the needs of others. Show compassion and empathy in your relationships with others. Reflect the grace that God shows to you moment by moment.
- ▶ Virtues, values and standards – Develop in the soul an unshakable set of virtues, values and standards that will guide you through life’s fiery trials. They should be so deeply ingrained that you don’t even have to think about them.
- ▶ Morals – Develop a moral compass and stick to it, even when compromise could be very easy.
- ▶ Respect – Show respect for other people. Respect your own and others’ property. Live a life of virtue so that others respect you—and you respect yourself.
- ▶ Responsibility – Be responsible with property, tasks and relationships. Don’t abuse any of them.
- ▶ Reliability – Be a reliable friend. Live up to your promises and commitments. Do not let people down.
- ▶ Resilience – Never let the bad stuff that happens to you get you down. Life can be hard and you can be knocked down over and over. The person who succeeds is the one who gets up one more time than he has been knocked down.
- ▶ Self-reliance – Be reliant on yourself and your actions. Don’t always expect others to come to your aid.
- ▶ Confidence – Be confident in who you are and what you stand for. Don’t let anybody put you down.
- ▶ Courage – Have moral courage in your faith, beliefs, actions and goals. If they are soundly based, they are right.

Life Skills

WHEN YOUR CHILDREN learn these life skills they will be prepared to deal with whatever comes their way and achieve a much happier life for themselves and the people with whom they have contact.

- ▶ Adversity/Pressure – Everyone has adversities and pressure in their lives. Learn to deal with them God’s way.
- ▶ Authority – Respect legitimate authority at all levels.
- ▶ Delay gratification – Think ahead. To have something tomorrow, you must give up something today.
- ▶ Decision making – Evaluate situations before making decisions. Go for the best decision in your long-term interests.
- ▶ Fairness – Play by the rules and be willing to share what you have with others.
- ▶ Goal setting – Set both short-term and long-term goals to help you achieve the best you can be.
- ▶ Priorities/Planning – Establish priorities in your life and then develop plans to achieve your goals.
- ▶ Listening – Good listening skills are invaluable. Learn to listen for the intent of what is being said as well as the actual words being used.
- ▶ Routine – Good routines become actions, actions become habits, habits become character and character becomes destiny.
- ▶ Self-discipline – When you use self-discipline you often remove the discipline that comes from others. It also develops strong character.
- ▶ Structure and boundaries – Determine reasonable boundaries for your age and abilities. Develop a structure that propels you toward your goals.
- ▶ Money – Learn the principles of money; spending, saving, investing and financial prudence.
- ▶ Realistic view of yourself – Don’t think more of yourself than you ought, and don’t think less of yourself than you ought.
- ▶ Challenges and weaknesses – Learn to deal with them. Develop your strong suits and strengthen your weak ones.

Marriage Upset & Divorce

God says marriage is forever

Maintaining a Christian perspective

In difficult times refocus a troubled marriage on Christ

Somehow, some way, at some point in time, every marriage becomes a struggle. How we respond to adversities during life's struggles is what most determines their outcome. This sinful world teaches the "eye for an eye" mentality. God, however, has a better plan.

It's Still About Worship

A marriage of love, unity and mutual understanding is not rooted in romance; it is rooted in worship. How we act and respond to our spouse is an act of worship to the Lord. Hopefully, they'll consider your response as such and follow suit, but ultimately, it doesn't matter what they do. You can only control what you do.

Follow God

As a follower of Jesus Christ, your identity, purpose and value are no longer defined by this world, and, therefore, neither is your marriage. Christians are to seek their significance from the Creator, not His creation. Your spouse is not equipped to fulfill your every need. Only God can do that. Only trouble can result from expecting that from your spouse.

Focus, Focus, Focus

Think about the Ten Commandments. The first four have to do with how we love and worship God. The last six are about how we deal with His creation—and people. As we've examined in this chapter, our horizontal or temporal relationships can't be strong until we've given proper priority to our vertical relationship with our Heavenly Father.

So what do you do now if your marriage is not God's ideal? If you are both believers, concentrate on building your own relationship with God and walking closely with Him.

Leave your spouse in God's hands to mold. Accept him/her as an imperfect person, just as you yourself are. Do not allow yourself to be bitter or to count up your spouse's grievances against you. Do not nag. Pray and let the Holy Spirit do the changing in your spouse.

Swallow That Bitter Pill

Even if you are the one wronged, if you react in bitterness and anger, you are just as out of fellowship with God as your spouse. If you filter your response through the Word of God, you will respond with understanding and love, rather than bitterness and anger. Hostility and nagging can be ignored. It's far more difficult to ignore a response genuinely steeped in love and understanding.



If your plans go astray look to God for His answers

An Unbeliever

If you have received Christ as your Savior, but your spouse remains an unbeliever, do not leave (1 Corinthians 7:12–17). Continue to love your spouse as God does. Pray continually and trust God to work in the life of your spouse. Many a marriage has been saved or improved by 1 Peter 3:1: "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without talk by the behavior of their wives"

Let God Work

Resolving a troubled marriage is very difficult, and it won't happen overnight. But God wants you to do your very best to keep His covenant of marriage. Stay in the Scriptures, seek godly advice, pray and, most importantly, stay focused on Christ. Be genuine about your own faith and your own failures. Be patient and let God do the work.

Kids Involved?

THE LIST BELOW makes the assumption that the parents have already divorced. If this is you, embrace and practice every point. If you're not there yet, but in trouble, let it serve as a warning. Don't ignore the life-altering effects of divorce on your kids.

- Most kids will initially go into denial when their parents divorce. They rationalize, "my parents will get back together." Some dream of their parents reuniting, even years after the divorce.
- Allow children time to grieve. Kids are unable to communicate grief the same as adults. Therefore, they may be sad, angry, frustrated or depressed but cannot express it.
- Don't make too many unnecessary changes. This includes moving into a new home, starting a new school, changing churches or new friends, etc.
- Don't make your kids become spies. It harms children emotionally when parents use them as spies, mediators or informants. They feel trapped in the middle.
- Allow your child to love the other parent and extended family. The child didn't get divorced from their mother or father—you did.
- Don't belittle the other parent. When a parent bashes or criticizes the other parent, it can emotionally destroy a child's self-worth. "If dad is a jerk, I must be one, too." Or "If mom is a witch, that's what I'll become."
- Allow your ex to see your kids. The children who do the best after a divorce are those who have a strong relationship with both parents.



First, do no harm

- Do not withhold visitation unless the child is being abused, neglected or otherwise mistreated.
- Do not lie. In an age-appropriate manner, tell the truth. The biggest reason kids blame themselves for the divorce is because they were not told the truth.
- Refrain from entering a new relationship too soon. Kids do not view your new love interest as a welcome addition to the family. Instead, he/she is seen as the person taking one parent away. Stress over stepchildren is a key reason second marriages fail.
- Keep your eyes on the Lord. Continue seeking God in all you do with prayer, Bible study and involvement in your church.

Already Divorced, Now What?

MARRIAGE IS A covenant, not merely a contract, and it's one that God designed (Malachi 2:14–15). He designed it, and He defines it. As with everything God created, man defiles it when he strays from that design. And when man strays, it is sin.

Divorce for a biblical reason (adultery) gives the right of remarriage. But a couple does not need to divorce. A couple can be separated because the wife or children are in danger, but this is not a biblical reason for divorce.

If a couple gets divorced because of drunkenness, drug abuse, spousal or child abuse,

this may be legitimate, but it does not give the right of remarriage.

So is divorce for a non-biblical reason a sin? Simply put, yes. It's sin because it is a direct disobedience to God's design. Is divorce the unforgivable sin? Of course not. The only unforgivable act is the lifelong rejection of Christ's offer of salvation. Everything else can be forgiven.

The one common thread throughout all of Scripture is how God is the Restorer of broken relationships. First, us to Him, and then between people. God is the ultimate Reconciler. So if you have been divorced (for a non-biblical reason) and remarried, what should you do?

The solution to this dilemma is the same as any other dilemma in life. Seek what God would have you to do.

Humbly acknowledge your sin to God. Hand in hand with your spouse approach God in prayer and ask His blessing upon your new union. The key to reconciliation with God, in this matter, is moving on with repentant humility and rededication to God's design. Then serve Him with all your heart, mind, soul and spirit.

God forgives.

"Staying married, therefore, is not mainly about staying in love. It is about keeping covenant. 'Till death do us part' or 'As long as we both shall live' is a sacred promise—the same kind Jesus made with His bride when He died for her."

John Piper

Problems, Problems, Problems

Dealing with disasters large and small

The Lord's path minimizes obstacles

Problems are just opportunities in work clothes

None likes to have problems. We dislike them so much that we hope to get through them as quickly as possible. In fact, we're often so busy getting out of a problem that we don't stop to ask if there's something we can learn through it.

There are people who teach that if you have problems and suffering in your life, you are not spiritual. But this is just not so. Jesus Himself said that in this life we will have problems:

"In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33b). Thankfully, He goes on to say, "But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33c). He didn't overcome the world for Himself; He did it for us, to make us rightful citizens of heaven. This earth is our temporary home, a home that comes with difficulties.

Problems Abound

We spend vast amounts of time, money and energy in an effort to live comfortably and securely. Most of us are in a frantic race towards that elusive goal of "happiness." Although we've heard that "money can't buy happiness," we still want to be the one to prove that saying wrong. Despite our most earnest attempts at a trouble-free life, problems often crop up. But why? There is a reason for our problems, and the Bible tells us what it is.

Fall of Adam

God originally created a perfect environment for man, a place of beauty and perfection. But it was transformed into a dangerous, sin-infested world because of mankind's fall from grace and the introduction into the world of a sinful nature. God has much more in mind for us than what this earth currently offers, and one day He will restore us to His eternal kingdom. On that

day the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord (Revelation 11:15).

Satan, Alive and Well

But right now, Satan is the "god of this age" (2 Corinthians 4:4). And that is one reason why we are surrounded by problems of every kind.

Satan has done much to influence the mindset and ideals of the world. Satan's negative influences run rampant in philosophies, politics, education and economics.

Satan's lies and deceptions are responsible for all of the false religions of the world, as well as the myriad of evil and destructive deeds and ideas that plague our world.

Misfortune and problems befall us because we live in a sinful, fallen world, one that is awaiting redemption (Romans 8:21-22).

Rebellion

Another reason we experience trials and problems in life is because of our own sinful and rebellious nature. When we rebel against God, our sinful behavior causes negative repercussions. Bad decisions may eventually lead to discipline, and often we have to live with the result of our bad decisions. Even then, God promises to work all things together for our good (Romans 8:28, 29).

Recovery

If we separate ourselves from God through our sins, He graciously calls us back to Himself. It is not that God is standing over us with a big "stick" waiting to punish us for our sins. He loves us too much to let us continue on our own path toward ruin (Proverbs 3:12; Hebrews 12:5b-6). When we turn back to God and acknowledge our sinful behavior, we will find forgiveness.



You can't outrun life's problems; you must learn to deal with them.

"Christ told his disciples not to be anxious about tomorrow, but he never said not to consider tomorrow. Intelligent problem solving demands careful consideration of the future effects of present solutions."

R.C. Sproul

Pain Caused by Others

Occasionally problems enter our life because someone else has sinned against us and caused us pain. Jesus can heal the hurt. He tells us to "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). Go to your Heavenly Father and ask Him to heal and comfort you.

Testing Turns Us to God

Satan, as the prince of this world, tries to deceive and distract us through the offer of comfort, prosperity and self-sufficiency. But when disease, disaster, poverty or other hardship comes, they jolt us off the tracks of self-dependence. In essence, our problems force us to look to the Lord because we realize we can't handle them on our own.

Sink or Swim

Once Peter stepped out of a boat and walked on water to meet Jesus. He was fine as long as he kept his eyes on the Lord. When he took his eyes off Jesus, he began to sink (Matthew 14:29-31). We need to keep our eyes on the source of every solution—Jesus. God's plan for you is larger than your current problems or any future problems—trust Him.

Transformation by Testing

God loves you too much to let you live a mediocre life of meaningless existence. His ultimate purpose is to continually transform you into the image of Christ. Testing is part of this process. Think of problems as an opportunity to apply what you know of God's Word and to grow in grace and to become more like Jesus.

The Perfect Example

Jesus was selfless, compassionate, fair and full of love. He even forgave those who tortured and crucified Him. He spoke the truth, even when it was not in His best interest to do so because He cared about peoples' souls more than their present condition. He loved the Father and connected with Him regularly through prayer. He chose to accept God's plan for His life even though it meant hunger, pain, humiliation and death.

Be Like Jesus

As you look at the life of God's Son, it might seem an unattainable goal to take on His nature, especially if your life up to this point has been spent centered on "self." But there is hope. Pain and trials connect us to Jesus in ways that fleeting pleasure never can. Problems turn us to God and force us to rely on Him instead of ourselves.

Dealing with Disaster

Vital

- ▶ Endure the shock
- ▶ Stabilize the situation as best you can
- ▶ Avoid discouragement from failure or setback in any category of your life—don't lose your focus
- ▶ Make consistent and prompt use of God's promises and doctrines
- ▶ Seek God in prayer at all times
- ▶ Continue unrelenting growth in your study of God's Word
- ▶ Determine the best solution

Important

- ▶ Gather relevant information
- ▶ Determine various options
- ▶ Select your best option and develop a plan
- ▶ Execute your plan
- ▶ Review your plan constantly and update as necessary
- ▶ Recognize that some situations simply don't have good solutions: then you must make the decision of least regret

Instant Insights

■ Expect problems and trouble when you go into the world. Face the situation as it is. Don't complain that it is unfair.

■ Always address problems seeking God's solution. Focus on the solution, not the problem, and don't blame others.

■ Analyze the problem's root causes, and honestly identify your part in it. What needs to happen to achieve your goals?

■ Give your problem to God. He will give back to you what you can handle. He will do the rest. Where appropriate, wait on the Lord. But be active while waiting.

■ Never allow failure to become fatal.

■ Many problems in life are the result of some sort of emotional reaction. Don't rely on emotions when seeking God's solution to any problem. God's solutions are based on truth.

■ Never forget that God is in charge, even in disasters.

■ Never address a problem by introducing another problem. When trying to solve a problem, don't add anger, vindictiveness, hostility, malice, etc.

■ Some problems can't be solved, they can only be managed.

■ Don't waste the trials and tribulations that God allows in your life. What God does not remove He intends for you to bear. God's pressures are to conform you to Christ.

■ Any problem you face has gone through God's hands first. He may not remove the problem, but He will provide all you need to get you through.

■ God has never promised that you will not have trials or problems, but He has promised to deliver you through them all.

Making Great Decisions

Turning problems into victories

**Good decisions lead to more future options
Bad decisions lead to limited future options**

Good decision-making is one of the most empowering tools in life, yet one of the most overlooked tools. The more good decisions we make, the more opportunities we will have to make more good decisions. The more bad decisions we make, the fewer options we will have in the future. Being wise means making decisions with the future long-term consequences in mind.

All Decisions Have Consequences

Some decisions are enormous and can change our lives forever. Others are trivial and have almost no impact on our lives. Sometimes things that we think are enormous turn out to be trivial, and things that we consider unimportant bring about life-shattering change. How can we know whether we are making a “big” decision or not?

God’s Great Gift

So, decision-making requires something. The Bible calls it wisdom. Whether it is a large or small choice, wisdom is the greatest gift and tool that God has given us to make right choices.

God has given us His Word, the BIBLE “Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth.” There is a wealth of information in the Bible on how to live the way God wants us to live. It also provides guidelines and principles we should follow. The depth of knowledge in the Bible and the great, never-ending wisdom it presents comes from the hand of God Himself and is universally true. God’s perfect wisdom never changes, and you can rely on it—always.

The Perfect User’s Manual

The Bible contains teaching through which all of our decision-making should be filtered. It is very important to choose a path that agrees with God’s will. When we choose any other path, we compromise our Christian integrity and limit our future opportunities. The Bible offers a wealth of information on living godly,

purposeful lives. Spending time in the Bible will make it easier to use this “manual” as a part of our decision-making processes.

Bad Decisions

Much of the pain we face in life is simply self-induced by our bad decisions. When we bypass the wonderful things that God wants to give us and instead grab hold of things that take our focus off Christ, we ultimately end up disappointed. Seeking our desires over God’s desires is always a bad decision.

Free Will at Work

Timing is a very important factor in decision-making. Waiting too long to decide can be worse than making the wrong choice. Deciding too quickly can also be worse than waiting for more guidance. Every decision produces results—Some are good, some are bad and some not immediately seen.

Sometimes we might wish God had furnished us with a crystal ball to take a little peek as to the consequences of our decisions. Fortunately, God does not show us the future or the path to the future. One of the most amazing things about God is that He gives us the freedom to make our own decisions, yet He does provide us with wisdom and guidance—as long as we’re willing to look to Him!

Faith is a Factor

The Bible states that without faith it is impossible to please God. If you really want to walk the road God has for you, making decisions based on faith is essential. Take God at His Word, trust Him for the outcome, and then press on with courage to a higher goal even if it seems out of your reach. Faith should play a major role in your decision making.

Intuition and Instinct

Intuition and instinct are also very powerful ... yet very dangerous, depending on whether your

intuition comes from your knowledge and faith in the Word of God, or from the world and the carnal ways of man. Focusing your life on God and seeking to please Him will allow you to trust your intuition and instinct as decision-making tools.

Good Decision, Bad Outcome

If you make a choice in accordance with biblical wisdom and godly principles but things don’t turn out the way you expected, don’t automatically think that you made the wrong choice. As a believer in Christ, you are often in opposition to the predominant ways of the world. Jesus warned us that the world hated Him and, as His disciples, we shouldn’t expect the world to applaud our every decision. Sometimes making a choice that honors God will bring us inconvenience or pain, but it also brings contentment and heavenly rewards.

God’s Tools at Work

The more we shift the focus of our lives from “self” to “God,” the better we are able to utilize all the tools the Lord has given us for making godly decisions. God has given us a powerful intellect which can be both a curse and a blessing when it comes to decision making. God expects us to “reason” using our intellect, but always in accordance with His standards of behavior for us.



Some decisions are harder than others!

God’s Praise

It is far better to wait for the applause in heaven than it is to enjoy the accolades of this world. The Bible says the world will soon pass away and be gone ... but that choices made for God’s glory endure. We will have all eternity to spend with God. Let us look forward in joyful anticipation to hear Him tell us, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21, 23). And we will hear it if we seek His guidance in decisions we make.

Decision points

Some decisions are simple and choices are obvious. Others are more difficult and often can be managed by using a disciplined process that often unleashes creativity.

- 1 Vision.** What is the vision of the best solution you are looking for? What is the primary objective or outcome that you seek? What are the secondary outcomes?
- 2 Information.** What is the situation? Gather all the information you can. Get all the relevant data. Seek wise council, take notes and write things down.
- 3 Plan** by brainstorming with all your information. Determine the best options and think things all the way through to their logical conclusion.
- 4 Execute** your plan. Make a list of action steps to take to achieve your goal. Try to anticipate what might happen along the way—any unintended consequences.
- 5 Review** your results. If things aren’t going the way you want or expect, make course corrections to achieve your desired outcome.

Everybody is in favor of progress—it’s the change they don’t like

“Who you are today is the result of choices you made yesterday. Who you will be tomorrow will be the result of choices you make today.”

Anonymous

Instant Insights

■ We make decisions every day of our lives. With every decision, we are choosing what kind of people we will be today and for the rest of our lives.

■ Many of our choices are either for God or against God. With each decision, we reinforce either strengths or weaknesses in our souls.

■ Sometimes in life there appear to be no good decisions; therefore, you must take the path of least regret and/or the path of the greater good.

■ All decisions have consequences, some inconsequential and some life-changing. Today we make our decisions; tomorrow our decisions make us.

■ You are free to make choices but you are not free to escape the consequences.

■ If God allows problems in your life, He has a reason for it. They cause spiritual growth. Don’t waste the trials and tribulations that God allows in your life.

■ There comes a time in which an issue becomes bigger than your distaste about confronting it.

■ Many decisions carry with them expectations. When those expectations are not met, frustration can result. Frustration is a function of expectations.

■ Be particularly careful when making decisions during a crisis situation.

■ A wise person will recognize and evaluate the importance of the subject he is dealing with *and* his own limitations in making a worthwhile appraisal of it.

■ Consider the panorama of the consequences of your decision. Which choice will give you the greatest long-term benefits in you life and service to God?

Divine Discipline

God disciplines in love to draw you back to Him

We're not always fast learners

Discipline is defined as the practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behavior. It is also described as using punishment to correct disobedience. The word discipline originates from the Latin *disciplina*, which is a form of the word disciple. A “disciple” is defined as the follower of a teaching. Biblically, disciples were the men and women who decided to learn from Jesus and follow Him, just as we are to do today! Divine discipline guides us to be more like Jesus. It trains us to avoid sinful living and enables us to develop and maintain a close personal relationship with our Heavenly Father.

The depth of our relationship with the Lord determines how much we are able to recognize and follow His guidance and realize His loving plan for our lives. His discipline in our lives is always forward looking, teaching and training us in righteousness, and growing us into men and women of wisdom and stature.

Why Discipline?

The goal and purpose of divine discipline is to assist us in being more Christ like. That goal might seem undesirable to some, considering the highly individualistic nature of our society. But the inescapable truth is that God wants us to be more like Jesus in every way. We are called to be His ambassadors on earth. Although we can lead empowered lives, Jesus should always be our leader. He illuminates the path we are to follow.

Why Are You So Special that You Receive God's Discipline?

The very fact that we receive this personal attention from God proves that He loves us dearly. God only disciplines believers. He sees us as His sons and daughters. As a loving parent, He corrects and trains us to help us grow in Christ's image. The Bible tells us “... the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son” (Hebrews 12:6).

Those who have consciously rejected salvation do not receive this direct attention from God. Yet, God continues to bless them (John

12:32). But they will not have the close, nurturing relationship we experience as His children.

Self-Induced Misery

We should not confuse self-induced misery with discipline from God. The Bible tells us if we sow the wind, we will reap the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7). A basic understanding of this principle has worked its way into the popular culture as

God's Loving Discipline

GOD'S DISCIPLINE IS forward looking—to bring us back to Him. The punishment for all our sins was paid for at the Cross, and Jesus doesn't pay for our sins twice.

When God looks at us now He sees the “new man.” When the believer is not functioning in the Spirit, God cannot provide the blessings and rewards He has for us.

The Holy Spirit is grieved or quenched when the believer sins and is not utilizing His power. The Father, not seeing anything rewardable then tries to get the attention of the believer—and that is when we are disciplined.

How do you know you're under divine discipline? Ask yourself some questions. Have you lost your joy in God? Has something in your life replaced God as your chief priority? Is there any on-going sin in your life? Are you living a lifestyle that you know is displeasing to God?

No matter how difficult, reach out to the Lord for the help you need to return to Him.

Sometimes God's discipline can be hard and leaves us hurting. Turn back to God, and He will show you His goodness. He is faithful to His Word.

If you confess sin, you are forgiven. The suffering you're going through may continue, but it will no longer be divine discipline but suffering for blessing.

God's discipline is always for our good. He knows all about us and He loves us. His discipline is designed to get us off the wrong way in life and back on to the road that leads to our joy and blessing.

the saying, “What goes around comes around.” God's commands are made to benefit us—not to keep us from having fun. Because He created us and He knows what is best for us. Thus, if we go our own way, we will reap negative results—or self-induced misery. In such cases, we sometimes blame God for our troubles. Predictably, that course makes the situation even worse. It is only when we recognize and acknowledge our fault that our relationship with God begins to mend. We need to accept responsibility for our own actions.

Three Stages of Discipline

Discipline from God is designed to lead us back to Him when we have gone our own way. Self-discipline will reduce the necessity for divine discipline. Discipline is first a tap on the shoulder—but it gets more intense if we do not respond.

The Bible tells us that, if we continue to sin, it can even lead to death. 1 Corinthians 11:30 says “That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.” Notice the three stages: weak, sick and asleep. Weak represents God's warning discipline; sick represents more intensive discipline; sleep is the final stage, representing death. If the believer does not respond over a prolonged time, God may finally take the believer home to be with Him. He will be in heaven but minus many of the rewards he might otherwise have received.

Discipline vs. Testing

Sometimes, God brings or allows testing in our lives. It's the difference between taking an exam in school ... and being sent to the principal's office. Testing helps us see how we are growing in our relationship with Him. You may ask, “How can I tell if the suffering is discipline or testing designed for spiritual growth?” Testing is tolerable because God is with us in testing (Isaiah 41:10). Discipline

is less so because we have cut ourselves off from God through sin.

A Portrait of Discipline

David suffered intense discipline for committing adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and for sending Uriah into battle to ensure his death once David found Bathsheba was pregnant with his child. The Bible calls David “a man after God's own heart,” yet his adultery and murder brought so much discipline upon him that God had to dole it out in increments.

David was miserable in his soul (Psalm 38) until he finally acknowledged his sin (2 Samuel 12:13). God showed mercy and David lived, but he still had to endure discipline. God was with him, and allowed his discipline to bring him growth and blessing through his suffering. Yet his life and the lives of his children were never the same.

We Belong to God

As a believer in Jesus, you no longer have to fear eternal punishment for your sins. The wrath of God towards you—for all the wrong you have done, all the rebellion in your heart and the selfish and prideful lifestyle you live—was poured out on Jesus. He took your place. He stood in front of you, facing a righteous and holy God, and bore your deserved punishment in agony on the cross.

We Are His Forever

Failure does not revoke our salvation. But we must not think that once we are saved we can do as we please. We have been purchased at a great price (1 Corinthians 6:20) and we belong to God. We are His children forever, but He will discipline us in love if we go our own way. Through divine discipline, God teaches us to say “no” to ungodliness.

You can be forever grateful that you have the Father's loving hand on your shoulder, training and guiding you.



God can get our attention anytime He wants.

7 reasons Christians suffer

- ▶ **Glorify God**
When others see how we keep our faith even when suffering, they may be encouraged
- ▶ **Spiritual Growth**
As we go through suffering with our eyes on God, our faith is strengthened
- ▶ **Blessing**
As we keep our faith even through undeserved suffering, God rewards us
- ▶ **Testing**
God's tests allow us to see how we are growing and serving Him
- ▶ **Bad Decisions**
All decisions have consequences, and bad decisions have bad consequences
- ▶ **Divine Discipline**
God may discipline us to bring us back to Him
- ▶ **Rejection of the Word/Lord**
Rejecting God or His Word will cause suffering

“God does not afflict His children willingly. He takes no delight in seeing our tears—or hearing our groans. But He does take delight in doing us good, making us holy, conforming us to His own image, and fitting us to dwell in His own presence.”

John Angell James

Suffering ... Successfully

Christians are not exempt from suffering

Bearing burdens with grace

Inevitably, suffering will enter our lives. It may be a devastating medical report, a spouse who leaves, rejection by a loved one, a friend's betrayal, loss of a job, financial difficulties—the list goes on.

Everyone on earth faces adversity and suffering as well as blessing and prosperity. But for the Christian there is a difference in how we handle adversity. We will know that *all* things—the good things and the bad things—have a purpose.

A Simple Reality

There is no way to avoid suffering. God never promised us a life free from trials and pain. And there is no technique that can take the hurt out of pain—except faith in God and His plan for you.

It's easy to get discouraged when things are going badly or when we are tempted by sin. But never lose hope, because even in the midst of trials, temptations, pain and suffering, God is at work in your life.

A Vital Decision

When you are given a heavy burden to bear, you must make a decision. You can either turn to God and His strength, or turn from Him.

When you choose God, He will transform your pain and use it to teach, strengthen, encourage and bless you. If you choose to turn from God, you may even blame Him for your troubles, turn to your own solutions, retreat in defeat and despair and even spin out of control.

Perfect Hope

Jesus plainly tells us that in this world, we will have trouble. But He also says to be of good cheer because He has overcome the world.

God's purpose for you on this planet is to sanctify you through the power of the Holy Spirit and continually conform you to the image of Jesus Christ. We are to follow Christ, to become more like Him.

When others suffer

AN IMPORTANT THING to remember about suffering is that when it is not happening to you, you need to know how to respond and minister to those who are experiencing it.

When a believer is suffering deeply, often it's best not to blithely quote Scriptures to them or deliver soulful platitudes. You may mean well, but the truth is they already know these things. In most cases the best thing to do is just be with them as they suffer. None of us knows why or the exact reason another person is going through a particular trial, only God does.

God Knows

God is acutely aware of every instance of suffering in your life. He allows this suffering to mold, shape and mature you in your faith. One of the most common things people think when they are enduring suffering

is that God has forgotten them or is uncaring about the trials they are going through. Nothing could be further from the truth. God will never abandon you in suffering. He is faithful and grace giving, providing help and comfort to those who suffer.

There is a Bible verse that assures us that God will never give us more than we can handle (1 Corinthians 10:13). Problems can seem overwhelming but the Apostle Paul assures us that it was when he was weak that he was strong. God uses "impossible situations" to draw us closer to Him.

God Sustains You

Everyone has storms in this life. God is the only sure anchor. The very same God that sustained Christ sustains you. Get on the right side of God. It is the only safe place to be.

God promises us He will walk with us through the fiery trials of life; He does not say anything about providing a way around them every time. But God is always our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble.

If we endure suffering as Christ did, we can be confident that our suffering will be a powerful testimony to others. It will result in peace and joy for us and the glorification of God.

Causes for Suffering



God's protection never leaves us—He is always there.

Bad Decisions

- ▶ Rejection of God
- ▶ Rejection of God's Word
- ▶ Rejection of authority
- ▶ Justice (crime)

Relationships

- ▶ Family issues
- ▶ Marriage issues
- ▶ Relatives and friends
- ▶ Workmates

Health Issues

- ▶ Yourself
- ▶ Loved one

Circumstances beyond our control

- ▶ Financial/Job Issues
- ▶ Loss of job
- ▶ Unfair treatment
- ▶ Cut in pay
- ▶ Overlooked for promotion

Life Short-Circuits

- ▶ Mental issues
- ▶ Emotional issues
- ▶ Unresolved guilt reaction to sin and suppressing sin in the self-conscious
- ▶ Emotional short-circuit during time of crisis

Calamities

- ▶ Privation
- ▶ Natural disasters
- ▶ Weather
- ▶ War

Growing in Christ

Instant Insights



■ There is no suffering that is not temporary. All suffering eventually comes to an end for the believer.

■ God has known from eternity past, every moment of your life including suffering and has made perfect provision to see you through it.

■ Never, never ever blame God when you are suffering. You can cling more tightly to God or you can turn away from Him. The choice is yours.

■ Much of our suffering is nothing more than the consequences of our disobedience or bad choices.

■ Pain is an opportunity to grow spiritually—to manifest Christ's power in our life.

■ Face reality—accept things as they are and then deal with them. Remember, God can protect you through any disaster.

■ Consider framing the situation with these words "in five years, will this matter?"

■ If God doesn't remove an affliction He is using it for His purpose—and your benefit. Some of our afflictions are for the benefit of others. God did not remove the afflictions of Christ or Paul—so He may not remove yours. Christ's death on the cross was to benefit us.

■ Many things that come into our lives are not good, but God is using every one of them to work for good. Don't miss the opportunity for growth presented to you by these trials and tribulations.

■ When you suffer because of the sins of someone else, realize that God is allowing it to happen for a reason.

■ Whatever suffering you go through, use it to glorify God.

The Bible Says



■ 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 Pet 1:6–7

■ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

1 Pet 5:10

■ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Heb 12:3

■ Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;

Rom 5:3

■ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Rom 8:18

■ Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

Jas 1:2–3

■ You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

1 Thess 1:6

■ For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.

1 Pet 2:19

■ It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

1 Pet 3:17

Tears at night—
joy in the morning

"Try to exclude the possibility of suffering ... and you find that you have excluded life itself."

C. S. Lewis

Tackling Temptation

Satan's weapon of choice

The Lord will catch you if you fall

The Lord repeatedly reminded His disciples that temptation is a very real and great danger. He did not see temptation as a minor interruption or—as we sometimes do—as something we gladly succumb to. He saw it as a threat to spiritual well-being. He warned of the tremendous danger of temptation and challenged His disciples to be constantly alert to the things by which they were tempted.

Desires Are Not Sin

Having God-given desires and needs is not evil. Our bodies crave pleasures of all kinds, whether its physical intimacy, food or entertainment. Feeling good is not a bad thing, but it can lead to doing bad things to feel good.

How We Are Tempted

It's very important to understand that being tempted to sin is not a sin. We are tempted when our desires from our sin nature override our desire to live a life of obedience to God. We take our eyes off God and turn them on self, placing our desire ahead of His.

Faith is Tested

When we start moving forward in the Christian life, God will allow our faith to be tested, yet He will never solicit us to sin. He will always provide an avenue of escape that allows us to

overcome the temptation. Rather than helping us to avoid the temptation, He provides a way to work through it, teaching us to endure. Endurance is a key element in dealing with both temptations and trials. God tests us in order to strengthen us, reveal our character, identify our weaknesses and guide us to where we desire to live a life of obedience to Him. When we pass a test, we take a step forward to stronger faith. When we pass the next test, we come to an even stronger form of faith. As our faith grows, we are able to overcome the adversities that life throws at us.

God is Always Faithful to Us

No matter how difficult our temptations, God is faithful. In eternity past, He knew every temptation that would ever crop up and designed solutions before the problems even existed in our lives. And in doing so, God set a limit on every temptation that we will ever face.

Satan's Temptations

Satan offers temptation in colors we like. He studies and analyzes us and brings just the things that are beautiful to our particular area of weakness in the sin nature.

When we face these different temptations in their lovely hues, we have to keep something in mind: there is a reason for it all. God is allow-

ing this temptation, and it does have a divine purpose.

Start Here First

The first step in facing and overcoming temptation is to anticipate temptation by constant prayer. In praying for deliverance from temptation, we are acknowledging that in our flesh we are powerless to resist, but God is able and willing to deliver us.

“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

When confronted with a specific temptation, it's important to recognize it and seek God's strength and guidance. Choosing both God's strength and God's Scripture was Jesus' answer to temptation. It is

a solution that we too can use to both acknowledge temptation and summon God to help us.

Everyone is Tempted

However difficult our particular temptations may seem, they are no more difficult than anyone else's. We all have a tendency to think that no one has ever been tempted as greatly as we have or that no one has ever sinned as terribly as we have. But that is simply not true. All our temptations are typical human temptations.

Trials Now a Joy

“Consider it pure (all) joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2-4).

The Bible Says

■ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

Heb 4:15

■ No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

1 Cor 10:13

■ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Heb 2:18

■ Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.

Matt 26:41

■ 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, 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.

Jas 1:13-15

■ Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

1 Cor 15:58

■ Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

1 Pet 5:8-9

Temptation usually comes in through a door that has deliberately been left open

“Confront and conquer temptation at the beginning, not at the end. In other words, the best and most effective tactic against temptation is to deal with it from a position of strength, before it has an opportunity to weaken you. Better to take steps up front to eliminate temptation altogether (if possible), than to deal with it later when your defenses are down.”

Sam Storms

3 sources of temptation

World	Flesh	Satan
The world consists of numerous distractions from the truth of God. The majority of today's media, including popular music, the Internet, movies, television, radio, books, magazines and newspapers, present a worldview that is often totally anti-God. This can be very subtle and we don't even realize that we are walking away from God.	The Bible refers to your flesh as the “sinful nature” that wants to dominate your life. As you grow in Bible truth and allow the Holy Spirit to renew your mind, you will learn to walk through the power of the Holy Spirit letting Him lead and fill your life.	Satan and his fallen angels present a very real threat. Everything evil came from the hand of Satan, and he still seeks to dominate believers and destroy the work of Christ in your life. He tries, and often succeeds, to cause believers to waver in their relationship and walk with God.

Terminating Temptation	
Temptation's steps	Power defense
Enticement	Commit to always doing the right thing. Don't even flirt with sin. You will lose every time. Don't make it convenient to sin. Don't think or go to places where you are tempted.
Sin nature thinking	Never underestimate the power of evil. Flirting with temptation is dangerous. Never compromise those character traits and principles that you hold to be inviolate.
Increased desire	Recognize that the persuasive flatteries of temptation with your imagination and enticing fantasies will lead to compromising your walk with the Lord.
Will/Choice	Don't succumb to smooth rationalizations. When considering sin, realize you will be marred by it. 1 Cor 6:18 says to flee immorality. RUN AWAY is a great tactic.
Decision	Consider the costly consequences of sin. But also, consider the advantages of not sinning. Seek God in prayer and consider His way as the alternative to sin.
Recovery	Should you succumb to sin remember God is always ready for you to turn back to Him. Acknowledge your failure and restore your walk with the Lord.

Banishing Fear Forever

Worry is a burden God never intended for us to bear

Anxiety vs. Trust

Fear is defined as an unpleasant emotion aroused by the perception or threat of danger, evil or pain. Anxiety is mental distress caused by fear. Worry and anxiety have the power to paralyze, immobilize and imprison anyone who gives in to them.

The Source of Fear

Fear often comes from a lack of faith and trust in God. When we believe that He is in control of all things, we will find it harder to fear the future or the unknown. Placing our trust in the hands of a loving God will lead to peace (the opposite of fear and anxiety).

Some Fears Are Good

A healthy fear of dangerous situations or people is wise. The nagging feelings we often feel are God protecting us. Don't ignore these feelings as they can protect us physically, spiritually and emotionally. At the same time, don't let caution ruin your life.

Fear Not

Jesus doesn't just suggest that we not worry or fear, He commands it! "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). He knows the harm that fear does to us mentally and even physically. When we succumb to fear, it is an affront to His presence in our lives.

Fear of man, fear of the future, fear of circumstances and fear of the unknown are common to all of us. They are places where we find ourselves immobilized, imagining possible consequences. Resist the temptation to worry at the onset and you will avoid getting "stuck."

"No Fear" Living

Living without fear is only possible through a personal trust relationship with God. God is trustworthy and is able to handle all our concerns and problems. We are His children and He loves us.

God is in Charge

God went to extraordinary lengths to provide a future for us in which we don't need to fear or worry. Jesus died an agonizing death in our place so that we don't have to fear judgment or separation from God. You've been adopted into a family that promises a royal inheritance. He is your loving Father.

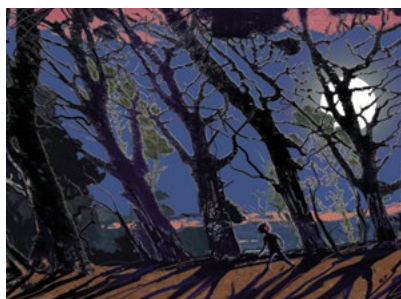
When you were a child, you delighted in the wonder of the world—not concerned or worried. God intends the same for you as an adult. The Bible says that perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love (1 John 4:18). You are loved perfectly by God, so there is no reason to fear.

Putting it into Practice

Meditate on the truth of who you are in Christ and to Whom you belong. Read the Gospels and see how Jesus overcame the trials of everyday life. Focus on eternity, even if your present is a bit of a mess. Keep your eyes on Jesus. The Apostle Peter was able to walk on water as long as he kept his eyes on his Savior.

Prayer

There are so many wonderful Scriptures in the Bible to give you courage and help you overcome your fears. These Scriptures are not just words on a page but they are promises from God. Remember, you are always in God's hands and nothing touches you that God doesn't allow. Keep your eyes on Christ and not on circumstances.



Faith banishes fear, but you must believe it and apply it to make it work.

Neutralizing fear and stress

WE LIVE IN a world designed to rob us of inner peace, to drive us crazy with frustration, turmoil and fear. What we need is the ability to relax and rest under this pressure.

It just so happens that what we need is exactly what God wants us to have. Jesus wants you to trust Him, stand strong on your faith and accept His grace when faced with fears.

A certain future

Because God has provided a future for us—His perfect future—it's a terrible waste if we spend time worrying about all the pressures of day-to-day living. When circumstances become difficult, stressful and even seem to be out of control—God is aware of every second of our lives. God knows. God cares. And God accomplishes His goals—when we don't get in the way. This is why we must grow in His Word, so we know what to do when stressful times come.

It's one thing to say all that. It's another thing entirely to actually do it. We can agree with words on paper, confess they are true, but how do we go from the head to the heart—often seeming to be the world's longest distance! Unless we claim them through faith, we will never be able to utilize them.

God's rest

God does not always deliver through strength or power or speed; He delivers through His Spirit. This is not to say that we will not be afraid. In fact, it is our fears that should constantly drive us to Jesus Christ. As we keep on believing, we enter a new realm of life, the realm of applied faith.

This place of rest is not in the world; it is not outside of us. The refuge God has designed for us—

the place where we can be refreshed and strengthened for the battles of life—is in our souls, and is activated only by faith.

God's deliverance

True rest of soul and spirit is found only in the presence of God. Rest cannot be found in escaping from our problems. There comes a time when we must face our problems and stand on our own—a time when we cannot lean on anyone but God. God has provided in His Word a solution for every problem we will ever face; we enter His rest when we apply His truth.

The surest way to overcome fear is prayer; turn to God. There's nothing wrong with "Lord, help me!" Jesus didn't hesitate to offer His hand when Peter needed it when he began to sink in the Sea of Galilee. And that same strong arm is ready to carry you when you ask for it. Courage and wisdom are yours for the asking. That's one of the benefits of being a child of the King of kings.

Putting it into practice

When we find ourselves tempted to be anxious, we should simply go to God, communicating our needs and desires and give Him thanks for the situation and for the solutions He has already provided. Then we can have peace. This is not just any peace, but the peace of God.

The peace of God reflects His control of all circumstances. This peace is above and beyond all comprehension, above all human reason and beyond all human ability to grasp.

When the peace of God comes into our souls, we have an absolutely secure place to rest and find refreshment even in the midst of the storm.

The Bible Says

■ God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.
Ps 46:1-3

■ The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.
Ps 34:17

■ So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.
Isa 41:10

■ Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
Phil 4:6-7

■ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.
2 Cor 4:8-9

■ I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.
Ps 4:8

■ For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."
Rom 8:15

■ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened."
1 Pet 3:14

*Faith or fear—
Your choice
will change
your life*

"Fear is a self-imposed prison that will keep you from becoming what God intends for you to be. You must move against it with the weapons of faith and love."

Rick Warren

Dealing With Depression

Self-absorption, temporary unhappiness, or clinical depression

God intends for us to be content

Depression is one of the leading causes of suffering, emotionally and spiritually. Both believers and unbelievers can suffer from depression. Depression can come from many directions. It can occur: 1) when anger gets turned inward; 2) when a loss brings deep sadness; 3) when helplessness, powerlessness and hopelessness rule; 4) when we are engulfed with a sense of worthlessness, guilt or lack of meaning in life; 5) when physiological factors such as chronic illness or pain exist; or 6) when a spiritual issue has been left unresolved.

of the ability to even function normally. Having a relationship with Jesus Christ can help us through times of depression, as can godly counselors who can provide guidance as to treatment and actions.



You need not bear the weight of the world alone—God is always there.

Focused on Self

Often, unhappiness is caused by a focus on “self.” Although we don’t usually realize it, we focus a lot of our energies on “me.” As a result, when things don’t go the way we think they should, we end up unhappy and usually with a severe case of the “poor me” attitude—I’m not getting what I should have. No one understands me.

Our thought life spirals downward when our sole focus is seeking happiness and satisfaction for ourselves. When our focus is on Christ, the “poor me” attitude automatically disappears and is replaced with a wonderful peace.

Focusing on one’s self rather than God can bring disastrous results and contribute to depression. Allowing negativity or self-pity to rule our lives are common spiritual issues that masquerade as “secular” maladies. These issues can be tools of Satan that contribute to depression. A constant feeling of “victimization” keeps us from taking responsibility for our own actions—a decidedly unhealthy spiritual outcome!

Spiritual Issues

Feeling unloved or worthless is a severe attack of Satan to drag us down and keep us from becoming what God wants us to be. God created us to be in a relationship with Him. The Lord Jesus demonstrates His love and care for us through His grace and compassion for us every day of our lives. Acknowledging this great love gives us a feeling of worth, value, power and a bold confidence to face all life’s challenges.

Unhappiness

Everyone goes through periods of unhappiness. For many people, it is short-lived and often caused by a specific circumstance. For some, depression can grow severe and debilitating enough to rob sufferers

Common Symptoms of Depression

- ✓ Trouble sleeping. Either too much or too little sleep
- ✓ Loss of appetite or overeating
- ✓ Low energy
- ✓ Fatigue or feeling tired all the time
- ✓ Significant weight loss over an extended period of time
- ✓ Trouble concentrating
- ✓ Irritability
- ✓ Feelings of isolation and not being as involved with family and friends
- ✓ Loss of interest in favorite activities
- ✓ Constant sadness
- ✓ Thoughts of death or suicide

Even the Lord had moments of grief and great unhappiness

“Fits of depression come over most of us. Usually cheerful as we may be, we must at intervals be cast down. The strong are not always vigorous, the wise not always ready, the brave not always courageous, and the joyous not always happy.”

C. H. Spurgeon

Anger Turned Inward

We all have moments of anger, especially when we face an unmet need, frustration over an unfulfilled expectation or a violation of a promise. When frustrations are left unattended, they can fester and evolve into deep hurt, anger, and ultimately, depression. Christians often suffer this type of depression because they feel they should not be angry or express anger in any way.

There is a healthy, Christ-like way of expressing our hurt and frustration. We find biblical examples in the Psalms and the book of Job of godly men who were not afraid to express their anger, and the Lord helped them work through it and to find victory. Christ can help us deal with our anger in a positive and effective way. Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, said, “In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold” (Ephesians 4:26–27).

Sadness

Everyone, at some time, will suffer significant loss, whether it is of a family member, a friend, a pet, a possession or a relationship. The resulting pain often brings sorrow and depression. 1 Thessalonians 4:13 acknowledges our human need to grieve loss but forbids us the despair and sorrow faced by those without faith in God and the resurrection: “... we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.”

Helplessness and Hopelessness

The more helpless and powerless we feel, the more likely we are to experience an inability to cope with life and then we may experience hopelessness and depression. We see in Paul’s words in 2 Timothy 1:7: “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.”

We are in God’s Image

The deep, underlying belief that we have about ourselves plays a large part in our self-perception. If we believe,

for instance, that we are not as good as someone else, it is both an emotional and spiritual issue that affects us negatively. We are made in the image of God. When we come to realize our deep worth in God and that God has a specific plan for us, depression will often ease.

The lower one’s self-esteem, the greater one’s guilt and sense of worthlessness will be. When a person feels that life has little or no meaning, depression begins to grow. God shows us through His love that we all have worth and value in His sight. We are children of God. When we personally know and experience this, our depression will begin to lift.

Physiological Factors

There are many studies that show depression connected to some chemical or physical conditions such as low blood sugar, thyroid issues, or other chemical imbalances. This is why antidepressant medication is often recommended. It is meant to get the body’s chemicals back in balance. Sometimes medication may only have to be taken for a short period; once order is restored in the person’s life, there is no longer a need for medication. Other long-term conditions may require medication for someone’s entire life.

Answered by God

For us to effectively deal with depression, we must recognize that we were created to be in a relationship with God. We must realize that God loves us and accept the gift of His love. We must strengthen our relationship with Him through prayer. Our healing begins when we take all of our concerns to Him. He already knows them; He just wants us to connect with Him by talking to Him about them.

After these times of intimate conversation with God, yield to His guidance so that you can know the next steps you should take. God may lead you to talk to a Christian counselor or seek professional help for treatment of physiological factors that cause depression.

A quick review

Self-Absorption	Temporary Unhappiness	Low-Level Depression	Clinical Depression
Some people seem to constantly focus only on themselves. Everything in life is about them. In addition, our sin nature exaggerates things and makes them larger than they really are. This lifestyle robs us of precious time that could be used in being a blessing and an encouragement to others.	We all suffer temporary unhappiness at times. It may be the loss of a loved one, sickness or watching those we love go through suffering or difficult times. Remember, everything has a season; blessings—and suffering and trials. No matter the cause of current unhappiness, this, too, shall pass.	Often, outside circumstances contribute to low-level depression, along with our own self-absorption, temporary physical, emotional or mental problems. This may be a time to consider counseling or professional help.	This goes beyond occasional low-level depression and is far more serious. There are significant, life-interrupting things going on that must be addressed. God has equipped certain people with the wisdom and skill to diagnose and treat clinical depression, and, if you find your life wandering into this area, seek professional help.

Getting a Grip on Grief

Trusting God's sovereign decisions

Mourn for a day, rejoice for a lifetime

Grief is a feeling of deep sorrow that is a normal reaction to loss. It is a distressing and painful emotion that we face when we lose someone or something that is valued or significant to us. We often think in terms of losing a loved one, but grief can also come from loss of fame, fortune or position in life. We may lose a home or a job and end up reeling or completely devastated. The absence of who or what was lost creates a feeling of incompleteness until we find healing and wholeness once again.

Jesus Wept

Grief may express itself with feelings of emptiness, helplessness, anger, guilt, fear or sadness. Grief is an emotion and a normal result of experiencing loss. We can rest assured that grief is nothing out of the ordinary; we know that even Jesus Christ expressed grief. "Jesus wept" (John 11:35) is known as the shortest verse in the Bible. More importantly, this is a picture of Jesus' sorrow. Jesus also wept for Jerusalem (Luke 19: 41-44); He knew it would be destroyed because of unbelief. We know grief is normal for we are told to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2) and to weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15).

Keep Your Eyes on Christ

How we process grief depends on where we find our inner strength. If we rely on God and His strength, we can endure anything we might face. Our loss will serve as a reminder to focus on Christ. We must remember that we are defined by our relationship with Him, not by things or people. God is the provider of the inner strength that we need to rest upon. As

our Father, God wants us to focus upon Him and His love for us and His purpose for our lives—even in the midst of grief.

Jesus Knows Our Sorrows

Jesus lived among us as a man and suffered as we suffer. He knows our sorrows and knows how to comfort us. If we look to Him, we will find that His presence in our lives will enable us to endure any loss. Christ will meet us at our point of need; He understands perfectly the pain you feel. He knows the comfort that you need as you pass through your time of grief and, He will bring you through the dark and into the light once again.



I will turn their mourning into gladness: I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow (Jer 31:13b).

In God's Hands

Part of suffering loss and the mourning process is feeling abandoned and lost, not knowing what to do or how you will survive your loss. That familiar person or thing is gone, but you're still here wondering where to go or what to do next. You may not know what is next, but you can know that God has a perfect plan for your life. He is under no obligation to tell you His plans—but you are under obligation to trust in Him. And you can trust Him completely. He loves you, and as His child, He has a plan for you, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him ..." (Romans 8:28a).

Just as a seed must die in order to germinate and spring into life as a plant—so also when someone, some relationship or some opportunity in our life dies, we find that something new blossoms in its place. God will faithfully fill the empty void of your loss if you let Him.

Joy Even with Pain

Sometimes pain is laced with joy. Even though you mourn the loss of loved ones because you miss them, at the same time you know that you can celebrate the death of a believer because he is in heaven, safe in the arms of his loving Savior. God will provide for you just as He promised Israel, "... the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair" (Isaiah 61:3b).

How Long Does Grief Last?

How long should the grieving process take? There are no hard and fast rules. For some, grief may not set in for months, once the shock has worn off and the loss becomes real. For others, it is immediate. But either way it should end. Ecclesiastes tells us there is an appointed time for everything: a time to weep, a time to mourn and a time to heal.

We need to heed Paul who tells us in Philippians 3:13b that we should be "... Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead." God gives us one day at a time and we need our energy to live for today. If we are living in the past, we cannot appropriate what God has for us today.

God the Comforter

God's ministering comfort will help you to move on and regain your

rightful place in life, a place of joy and satisfaction in Him. A clear sign that you are not progressing normally through the grieving process is failure to get on with your life. The truth is that the most important things in life are not our jobs, our belongings or even our relationships with people. The things that truly matter are those things that last forever, which come from a loving Father who will never leave you nor forsake you.

God Will See You Through

You will become bitter and disillusioned if you blame God for your loss. He is your only hope of surviving grief and finding a joy-filled life. No one in heaven or on earth understands grieving and loss like God does. God sacrificed His Son for us as an unblemished substitute for our sins. Loss brings the Cross sharply into focus and helps us to consider things that are eternal. We remember that our time on this earth is not very long compared to eternity and that our relationship with God is one of the few things that will endure into the next life.

As the beautiful hymn by Helen Lemmel says, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace."

Normal Grief vs. Abnormal Grief

FEELING SORROW OVER the loss of a friend or family member is natural. In fact, it's healthy.

However, some people allow grief to dominate and darken the rest of their lives. Instead of moving on, they nurse their self-imposed misery for months or even years, making their grief a substitute for the loved one who died.

This type of lingering, obsessive grief is abnormal and is very unhealthy.

Fortunately, those who believe in Jesus Christ do not need to grieve as those "who

have no hope." Sure, we'll be saddened by a loved one's passing and there will be a hole in our world.

But we know that the death of a fellow believer, even if it was sudden and unexpected, is not a tragedy because that person is now experiencing the unfathomable joy of being in the Lord's presence.

We can go on living—joyfully—because we know with confidence that our contentment depends on understanding the love and fairness of God.

The Bible Says

■ I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

Lam 3:19-24

■ But those who suffer he delivers in their suffering; he speaks to them in their affliction.

Job 36:15

■ I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you saw my affliction and knew the anguish of my soul.

Ps 31:7

■ Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

Rom 12:12

■ Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders. My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word.

Ps 119:27-28

■ But you, O Sovereign LORD, deal well with me for your name's sake; out of the goodness of your love, deliver me.

Ps 109:21

■ For you, O LORD, have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling ...

Ps 116:8

■ My soul is in anguish. How long, O LORD, how long? Turn, O LORD, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love.

Ps 6:3-4

"When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer."

Corrie Ten Boom

Conquering Guilt

An immobilizing sin that can destroy

Leaving the past behind

As a Christian, you are a member of God's family, and you no longer need to relate to guilt the way you did before you accepted Christ as your Savior. Guilt does not have to be a part of your life after you become a member of God's royal kingdom.

Laying Aside Guilt

Once you consciously choose to put your hand in Christ's hand, everything changes. All punishment of sin is applied to the sacrificial Lamb; Jesus has canceled the verdict and guilt of your sin. You are declared righteous by God and are no longer counted guilty of sin.

Jesus died on the cross some two thousand years ago—He did so for all sin—past, present and future. “Guilt and Shame” are words that no longer apply to you, for all eternity. Take a moment and consider the enormity of that statement. All shame, guilt and disgrace have been covered by the blood of the spotless Lamb—Jesus.

A New Word

From now on, a new word is used to describe what happens when you realize that you have done something wrong—conviction. You are no longer under condemnation for your sins, yet God's presence within you may well convict you when you sin.

Being under conviction for having done something wrong means that the Holy Spirit is bringing the problem to your attention. Your action should then be to go to God, admit the offense and use biblical wisdom and His insight to turn away from the wrongdoing and to turn back to Him. Confessing your sins and asking the Lord to change your heart will return you to intimate fellowship with Him.

A Big Difference Between Words

The main difference between guilt and conviction is the end result. Guilt is destructive—bringing shame and remorse. Conviction is constructive as God's Spirit always gives you hope for the future. The giver of guilt, Satan,

doesn't care about your growth in the family of God; he just wants you to suffer punishment. Conviction leads you to change from the inside out, to become more like Jesus.

God Uses Guilt to Convict

Conviction from the Holy Spirit can be a rather unpleasant feeling. Paul described it as an alarming urgency, a sense of needing to right a wrong. Sin breaks our fellowship with Christ; conviction stimulates us to restore that fellowship.

Examine yourself, agreeing with God that you have violated some part of His moral law. Turn back to Him for restoration and strength to repair the damage. Then move on as this is His way to deal with conviction of sin in your life.

Conviction brings joy as you realize that God is treating you as an adopted son or daughter,

When Self-Criticism Becomes Destructive

SELF-EVALUATION IS SOMETHING we all need to engage in from time to time. This helps us to see if we are moving forward in God's plan for our life. This is the process of examining our life objectively—not subjectively. That is the key difference. We evaluate our progress from God's point of view.

When we start looking at our life from our point of view we become subjective and too often start using our standards instead of God's to determine our progress.

If we keep following this downward path, we get into self-criticism, and this can lead to self-loathing. This is very wrong and can become very dangerous. We somehow think that our sins and failures are bigger than the overriding grace of God.

Stop this kind of thinking as soon as it comes up! God has you in His plan, and He wants you to use His tools in your everyday life. One of His tools is to purge the guilt in your life. Live as you really are—a child of the King. Utilize His assets and give your guilt to Him. He has already handled it, and now wants you to walk in His perfection.

perfectly loved. We have nothing to fear. Conviction sends you straight to the Father's throne in heaven—a place where mercy and grace are always extended to you. We need to remember that we always have access to God through Christ our High Priest.

God's Leading

Allowing God to help us deal with consequences of wrong actions is not always easy. God may lead you to go to the wronged party to confess what you have done or make some kind of restitution for your offense. Never fear the leading of the Holy Spirit; it is given out of grace and truth to move our walk closer to Him.

Satan's Strategy vs. Freedom in Christ

Getting a believer to wallow around in the mire of shame and false guilt is a tested and proven strategy of the enemy. “Satan” means accuser, and his primary means of crippling and immobilizing a Christian is to blast him with guilt and condemnation.

The Arrogance of Guilt

Unrepentant guilt is a form of arrogance because we are in essence saying that our sin trumps the grace of God. God's mercy and forgiveness

are enough to cover all sin. Period. The enemy tries to get us to focus on sin. But Christ tells us that God has removed our sins—past, present and future—as far as the east is from the west.

Can anyone measure the distance from the east to the west? Of course not. God's mercy is just as immeasurable. Christ tells you to forget the past and move forward, to press on to the greater things He has for you. Your old life is dead and buried. You have gone from the rags of fallen humanity to the riches of the Eternal King.

Your Choice

We can choose to live in the “country” of guilt and regret, but understand that we are not citizens there. Don't willingly live in a land of spiritual poverty when, in Christ, you have been given freedom and the abundant life. Christ has gone to great lengths to make you a citizen of heaven. Don't insult Him by staying in the pig pen of guilt. You are a child of the King.

If we understand that in God's eyes we are no longer guilty and that He has forgiven us, we can move on with our lives. The past is forgotten and the future is bright and filled with hope.

Relax and live in the freedom that God has given you.

God's solution to guilt

- ▶ There are times when guilt is appropriate because the Holy Spirit convicts you that you have turned from God (through sin). When that is the case, turn back to God—acknowledge your failure, return your focus to God and start serving Him again
- ▶ Yes, you've sinned, before and after salvation. Jesus paid the penalty for your sins—every single one: past, present and future
- ▶ God loves you perfectly, eternally and without reservation and He

has declared you righteous, holy and pure

- ▶ Believe God. Let God's love pour over you
- ▶ Let *His* love override *your* emotions
- ▶ Thank Him for His perfect plan for your life
- ▶ Keep your eyes on Christ and not on yourself and keep moving forward

The Bible Says

■ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

Eph 1:7-8

■ Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD”—and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Ps 32:5

■ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

■ ... and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Heb 10:21-23

■ Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O LORD.

Ps 25:7

■ I, even I, am he who blots out transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.

Isa 43:25

■ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

Ps 51:1-2

■ For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.

Heb 8:12

■ I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

1 John 2:12

Prolonged, unrepentant guilt is the sin of placing our arrogance above the grace of God

“Perhaps you have been ensnared by a sinful habit that you will not abandon, and your guilt is so overwhelming you are ashamed to approach Christ. Whatever the reason for your broken intimacy with God, there is good news. Jesus waits to embrace you now in the arms of unconditional, divine love.”

Charles Stanley

Loneliness

The ultimate poverty

God is *always* there for you

God Himself stated in Scripture that it is not good for man to be alone. Don't miss the significance of that. Even Adam+God was still not the complete picture! Man needed something more, not because he was lacking or flawed, but because God created man for living in a community of fellowship. We are ordained to be with other human beings as well as with God Himself.

Loneliness is Painful

There are lots of lonely people in this world. Loneliness causes people to feel empty, isolated and unwanted. People who are lonely want human contact, but their state of mind or their situation makes it difficult for them to interact and connect with other people.

Whatever the particular reason for their loneliness, it is extremely painful to be trapped in it. Jesus is the answer. He seeks to draw us to Himself, a place where we can feel complete—instead, all too often, we seek to fill the emptiness with things like food, money or sex. But only Christ can truly satisfy us or fill the void.

Situations Can Cause Loneliness

Loneliness often occurs when we have major changes in our life's circumstance: moving to a new location, going away to college or entering the military. The death of a loved one, divorce or marital problems can lead to feelings of loneliness, as can a long-term illness.

Most of our lives, we are not alone, but we feel alone and isolated. We can be in a room full of people and still be lonely. Even married people or people active in a church face times of great loneliness. This can lead to chronic loneliness. God anticipated this, and that is one reason He commands us to "Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up ..." (1 Thessalonians 5:11a).

Lack of Confidence

Loneliness is a state of mind, one that is often self-imposed. People who lack self-confidence

often believe that they are unworthy of attention or respect. Loneliness can serve as a measure of protection that people use to avoid the sometimes risky and painful practice of connecting with others after suffering a painful loss. The danger of this is that people who spend too much time away from others can develop a distorted view of reality which can lead to depression or even self-inflicted harm.

It is not healthy for us to remain in such a state for long. God created us for Himself and for each other: to live, learn, laugh and love together.

Fear of Life

Fear and guilt are great crippers. Both can give people reason for choosing to live apart from others. Health problems can force isolation when people are not physically capable of getting up and out into the world.

Technology Can Hurt

Modern technology has ushered us into an era of electronic communication unlike any other and is a force behind the epidemic of loneliness in our culture. Ironically, even though we are connected via email, social media, cell phones and the like, we are lonelier than ever before.

Low Self-Esteem

Loneliness can also be attributed to internal factors such as low self-esteem. Understanding God's endless love for you is the ultimate source of self-esteem. Remember, He sent His only Son to die for you. As a believer you are indwelt by God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. And your true citizenship is in heaven—a place where Jesus is preparing an eternal home for you where you will never feel lonely or out of place (John 14:2). That is better than any fame or fortune this life has to offer!

You Matter to God

If you feel alone, there is only one person who can bring you true victory. Jesus Christ came to enable your adoption into the royal family of



We have all felt the sting of rejection.

Dealing with rejection

WE HAVE ALL been rejected. Jesus Himself experienced untold rejection and loneliness while He was on earth.

Jesus boldly spoke and told the world exactly what God wanted Him to do, and many people walked away from Him or dismissed Him. He had people follow Him for a while, but when it got too risky or uncomfortable to be with Him, they chose to leave or reject Him. Even His closest friends left Him when He was in the most need of their support.

Just because Jesus was both God and man didn't exempt Him from feeling the sting of rejection. He desired the support and love of His disciples, too. So He does understand the pain of being rejected by others, especially when close friends are the ones rejecting you.

Three simple rules

1. Don't base your happiness on acceptance by others.
2. You will always be rejected by someone or group—place your rejection in God's hands.
3. Remember, your happiness comes from Christ—this is where you'll find perfect peace, love and acceptance.

We would do well to follow Him and study that love letter from God known as the Bible. For in it is all the encouragement we need when we are rejected by others.

God. He promises the believer, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20b).

Get into the Word

Studying the Bible is so important to not only our spiritual growth but also to our satisfaction and happiness in life; it is where we come to understand our significance in God's eyes. Through the Scriptures we come to understand how much He loves us. You can be content with what you have because God has said "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

Loneliness vs. Solitude

While it's not good to be alone all the time, it is necessary to take time to be alone with God. Many people fear being alone and fill their schedules so that there is never a time when they have to be by themselves with their thoughts and meditations.

Spending time alone with God every day is just as important as involving others in our lives. Having a quiet place for prayer and reflection can enable us to spend time in God's presence. He will guide us and encourage us as we stay in close communion with Him on our Christian journey.

Go God's Way

God wants you to spend time with Him in prayer and intimate fellowship. Jesus often got up very early in the morning while it was still dark and went to a solitary place where He prayed (Mark 1:35).

He understood that to receive the Father's strength and guidance for every step, He needed regular, intimate moments with Him free from distractions. Do the same. Take time with God and He will fill the emptiness and guide you in your relationships with others as well.

You can choose to walk away from God, but He will never leave you. Others may reject you but God never will.

The Bible Says

■ The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

Deut 31:8

■ 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.

Ps 23:4

■ Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.

Ps 25:4–5

■ Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.

Ps 25:16

■ Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.

Ps 27:10

■ My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.

Ps 62:1–2

■ He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

Ps 91:1

■ My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

John 17:20–23

Climbing out of loneliness even when it seems there is no way out

"Like Elijah, Jeremiah, Jesus, or Paul, you may be experiencing intense loneliness ... Elijah and Jeremiah were overwhelmed with their loneliness. Jesus and Paul were not. The difference is Elijah and Jeremiah felt sorry for themselves while Jesus and Paul sought refuge in God."

Martha Peace

God's Promises to You

Letting God's promises shine on you

Safe in the hand of God

The promises of God are an incredibly powerful part of the Christian life. His promises empower the believer. They provide us with comfort, confidence, happiness, stability and total peace in the daily Christian walk.

God is Always There

No matter what life throws at us—problems, adversities, pressures, trials, tribulations, pain or sorrow—we can enjoy "... the peace of God, which transcends all understanding..." (Philippians 4:7). He is always with us.

Total Peace in Adversity

To achieve God's peace we must apply His promises with faith. The Bible says, "... without faith it is impossible to please God, ..." (Hebrews 11:6). We must mix our faith with God's promises in order to find



The promises of God will keep you safely in His protecting hands.

God's promises are really much more than promises

WHILE EACH OF God's promises stands alone, when they are combined, they are woven into a beautiful tapestry of impenetrable principles and doctrines that display the very character, power and love of God.

meaning in our life and enter into His rest. We must grow in His Word, learning the truths of Scripture and applying them diligently.

Rely on God—Always

It's easy to get discouraged when things are going badly or you are facing temptations. But don't lose heart. God is at work in your life even if you're in a situation that seems hopeless. Seeking God's truth through His Word is the way to stabilize your life and bring you perfect peace and harmony.

Keep your eyes on Jesus no matter how difficult your circumstances. Waiting on the Lord, knowing and applying His promises, is the best path you can take. God gives strength when we are weary as we seek Him during times of difficulty. He promises to give us the strength to endure any situation we face in life.

Power Promises

Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous (believer) fall.

Ps 55:22

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

Deut 31:6

Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.

Ps 27:14

When I am afraid, I will trust in you.

Ps 56:3

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Isa 41:10

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Heb 4:16

I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

Ps 16:8

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Prov 3:5-6

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak ... but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.

Isa 40:29, 31a

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.

Rom 8:28

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Rom 8:38-39

COMFORT

"If I could hear Christ praying for me in the next room, I would not fear a million enemies. Yet distance makes no difference. He is praying for me."

Robert Murray M'Cheyne

You are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you.

How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. 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.

The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. So shout for joy, O heavens; rejoice O earth; burst into song, O mountains! For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.

My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken. I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights. How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation.

Ps 3:3, Ps 16:11, Ps 31:19, Ps 36:7, Ps 23:4; Isa 40:28b, Isa 49:13; Ps 62:1-2; Heb 3:18-19; Dan 4:3

CONFIDENCE

"In the midst of an ever-changing world, the good news is that the life of faith is anchored by the power, provisions, and promises of God. Circumstances may change, but the future is as sure as the character of God Himself. No matter what happens, those who trust in God hope in His word."

Scott Hafemann

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. But remain the same, and your years will never end. He said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.

For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.

So that Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! We are now a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Heb 13:8, Heb 1:12b; John 6:35; Eph 1:7-8; 2 Cor 1:5; 1 Tim 1:16b; 2 Cor 1:3-4; 1 John 5:14-15; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 Pet 2:9

ENCOURAGEMENT

"One of God's primary means of encouraging Christians everywhere is with truth—truth revealed by the Holy Spirit. The repository of that truth is the Bible."

Gene Getz

O LORD God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O LORD, and your faithfulness surrounds you.

Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God.

The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song. My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations.

Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Therefore be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go. The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

Ps 89:8, Ps 63:7-8, Ps 139:8-10, Ps 86:10, Ps 28:7, Ps 121:2-3, Ps 145:13; Isa 40:31; Josh 1:9b; Deut 31:8a

FEAR

“If the Lord be with us, we have no cause of fear. His eye is upon us, His arm over us, His ear open to our prayer—His grace sufficient, His promise unchangeable.”

John Newton

When I am afraid, I will trust in God. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me? The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?

Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The LORD, the LORD, is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God.

He will strengthen you and help you; He will uphold you with his righteous right hand. Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble; when you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.

Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared. He said “I am the LORD, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, ‘Do not fear; I will help you.’ ” Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm. Therefore, I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

Ps 56:3–4, Ps 27:1; Isa 12:2; 2 Tim 1:7; Isa 41:10; Prov 3:23–26; Isa 41:13; John 14:27b; Prov 1:33; Ps 4:8

PROTECTION

“Christ’s life outwardly was one of the most troubled lives that was ever lived: tempest and tumult, tumult and tempest, the waves breaking over it all the time. But the inner life was a sea of glass. The great calm was always there.”

Henry Drummond

The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior—from violent men he will save me. I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies. In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame. Rescue me and deliver me in your righteousness; turn your ear to me and save me. Be my rock of refuge, to which I can always go; give the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.

Deliver me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of evil and cruel men. For you have been my hope, O Sovereign LORD, my confidence since my youth. From birth I have relied on you; you brought me forth from my mother’s womb. I will ever praise you. O my Strength, I sing praise to you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God.

The LORD watches over you—the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore. The Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. The Lord will rescue you from every evil attack and will bring you safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

2 Sam 22:2–4; Ps 71:1–6, Ps 59:17, Ps 121:5–8; 2 Thess 3:3; 2 Tim 4:18

GUIDANCE

“Hence the emotion, mind and will remain in a spiritual man but are subject entirely to the guidance of the intuition. The emotion now rejoices solely in what the spirit likes, loves only what the spirit directs, feels merely what the spirit permits. It has become its life: when the spirit stirs, emotion responds.”

Watchman Nee

Since you LORD are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me. Free me from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light. Your word is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path.

Therefore trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. For the law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

The LORD is the sure foundation for our times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; He will guide us in the way of wisdom and lead us along straight paths. Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways. Therefore preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. Call to him and he will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know. For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.

Ps 31:3–4, Ps 36:9, Ps 119:105; Prov 3:5–6; Ps 19:7–9; Prov 9:10; Isa 33:6a; Prov 4:11; Ps 128:1; Prov 3:21–22; Jer 33:3

GUILT

“We tend to draw up our old sins, that we tend to live under a vague sense of guilt ... we are not nearly as vigorous in appropriating God’s forgiveness as He is in extending it. Consequently, instead of living in the sunshine of God’s forgiveness through Christ, we tend to live under an overcast sky of guilt most of the time.”

Jerry Bridges

Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion. He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

But the LORD, the LORD, is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. The LORD redeems his servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. Therefore those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin; for I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer.

Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me! He has heard my cry for mercy; the LORD accepts my prayer. He will not turn his face from you if you return to him. For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime;

Ps 103:2–4, Ps 103:10; Exod 34:6b; Ps 34:22, Ps 103:12, Ps 34:5, Ps 51:1–3, Ps 66:18–20, Ps 6:9; 2 Chr 30:9c; Ps 30:5a

HOPE

“Do not look to your hope, but to Christ, the source of your hope.”

C.H. Spurgeon

You are my lamp, O LORD; the LORD turns my darkness into light. It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. He gives me his shield of victory; he stoops down to make me great. He broadens the path beneath me, so that my ankles do not turn.

For the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you. 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. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? The eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.

We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you. Surely goodness and love will follow us all the days of our life, and we will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

2 Sam 22:29, 2 Sam 22:33, 2 Sam 22:36–37; 1 Chr 28:9b; Rom 8:28–32; Ps 33:18–22, Ps 23:6

MORE HOPE

“One’s ability to find hope in a seemingly hopeless situation is directly related to the ability to see God’s hand in that situation. If you are despairing ... you are probably not focusing on what God intends to do in your life, and for His Kingdom as a result of it.”

Lou Priolo

Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes us stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that we may know the hope to which he has called us, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Ps 37:4–6; 2 Cor 1:20–22; Eph 1:18–19a, Eph 1:11–14; Heb 10:23

PATIENCE

“Our Lord has many weak children in his family, many dull pupils in his school, many raw soldiers in his army, many lame sheep in his flock. Yet he bears with them all, and casts none away. Happy is that Christian who has learned to do likewise with his brethren.”

J. C. Ryle

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. The LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD, because the works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy. They are steadfast forever and ever, done in faithfulness and uprightness.

The eyes of all look to you God, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.

So then, I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”

I will set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope,

God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work, that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

2 Pet 3:9a; Isa 30:18; Ps 27:14, Ps 111:7–8, Ps 145:15–16, Ps 91:2, Ps 16:8; Acts 2:26; 2 Cor 9:8; Col 1:10–12

PEACE

“God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.”

C. S. Lewis

The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God my Savior! The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. You (God) will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.

Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, who came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. And through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Therefore, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Grace and peace are yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord who said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Ps 18:46, Ps 29:11, Ps 91:4, Ps 91:1; Isa 26:3–4; Rom 5:1; Eph 2:17–18; Col 3:15; 2 Pet 1:2; John 14:27; Phil 4:6–7

REASSURANCE

“If ... a person feels peace and knows that it results from faith that Christ satisfied divine justice for him and converted his soul and united him to the Saviour, the peace he feels is genuine since it rests on the truth of God.”

John Gerstner

When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

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. For 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.

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Titus 3:4–7; 1 Pet 1:3–5a; John 3:16; 1 John 5:11, 1 John 5:20; Rom 8:38–39; Col 3:4

STRESS

“Our yesterdays present irreparable things to us; it is true that we have lost opportunities which will never return, but God can transform this destructive anxiety into a constructive thoughtfulness for the future. Let the past sleep, but let it sleep on the bosom of Christ. Leave the irreparable past in His hands, and step out into the irresistible future with Him.”

Oswald Chambers

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. 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. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him. For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.

Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.

Jas 1:12; 1 Pet. 1:6–9, 1 Pet 2:21; Ps 18:30, Ps 84:11–12; Dan 2:20, Dan 2:21b–22

TROUBLE

“God will never allow any action against you that is not in accord with His will for you. And His will is always directed to our good.”

Jerry Bridges

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

In the day of my trouble I will call to you, for you will answer me.

Because you are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble.

“Because he loves me,” says the LORD, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation.”

The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him. He is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.

For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth.

Ps. 46:1–3, Ps 86:7, Ps 91:14–16; Neh 1:7; Ps 9:9–10; Dan 6:26–27

WORRY

“I am no longer anxious about anything, as I realize the Lord is able to carry out His will, and His will is mine. It makes no matter where He places me, or how. That is rather for Him to consider than for me; for in the easiest positions He must give me His grace, and in the most difficult, His grace is sufficient.”

Hudson Taylor

Now I know that the LORD saves his anointed; he answers him from his holy heaven with the saving power of his right hand. Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall. He said, “I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.” In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. He will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

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.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. If we endure, we will also reign with him.

If you make the Most High your dwelling then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near you. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

Ps 20:6, Ps 55:22; Isa 46:4b; Ps 127:2; Isa 40:29; Phil 4:19; Rom 8:28; 1 Pet 5:6–7; Phil 4:6–7; 2 Tim 2:12a; Ps 91:9–11

Amazing Prophecies

Accuracy guaranteed

The Lord knows the end from the beginning

God's prophecies are the only ones that count

The overarching story of the Bible is how God redeems fallen man, restores a perfect relationship with man and establishes the rulership of the earth to the glorified Son. In the end, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord!

Prophecy is a major theme of God's Word. In fact, 271 of the 1189 chapters in the Bible deal with prophecy. That is almost one-fourth of the Bible.

God revealed many of His plans to prophets in the Old Testament, and they became His spokesmen to the people. Prophets spoke not only to their own generation, but also predicted events in the distant future.

What Prophecy Is

Prophecy is the revelation of God presented through a human being filled with the Holy Spirit. God has laid out many of His plans for the ages of history. He has informed us of significant historical events that will take place. In some instances He has given us many details. In other cases very few. Interestingly, some prophecies have both a short-term and a long-term fulfillment. We can always have faith in the fact that God holds tomorrow in His hands.

All True Prophecy is From God

No true prophecy ever originated from the will of man. The message of a prophet may have been spoken, or it may have been written. This is summarized in 2 Peter 1:21 "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

Literal Fulfillment

The Bible is filled with prophecies that have been literally and specifically fulfilled. Included are the many prophecies of the first coming of Christ, the rise and fall of nations, as well as the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jewish nation.

It also contains many unfulfilled prophecies that will be fulfilled in the future. These

prophecies pertain to the Tribulation, Millennium and the eternal future.

God's prophecies aren't "symbolic, allegorical or figurative." They are literal and they are real. They will happen.

Major and Minor Prophets

God spoke to many different men to reveal His coherent and consistent plan for all of history. All prophets add different pieces to the puzzle and even though they are writing in different times and eras, their prophecies are all in unison.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament, there are several "books of the prophets" which are generally separated into two groups—the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets. This does not mean that any prophet is less important than any other. Simply, the books the minor prophets wrote are shorter. In addition to these there are several individuals whom God calls prophets, and a few of whom He says, "They will be prophesying" or "He will prophesy ..." and other similar expressions.

Prophecies of Judgment

Often the prophecy predicted judgment unless the people would repent and provided hope of blessing if the warning was heeded. Many events occurred shortly after they were prophesied, for example, Elijah's prediction of drought (1 Kings 17:1). Other events came about after a time of warning and a chance to repent. These were often judgments of nations by other nations. A "near" or soon fulfilled prophecy (such as a battle won or lost as God had predicted) validated the prophet as a true messenger from God.

When that prophet prophesied further into the future his words (which were really God's words) could be trusted. Many Old Testament prophets, men such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel and the many "minor" prophets had no idea when the prophesied events revealed to them by the Holy Spirit would come to pass.

When we read of prophesied events that have happened historically, it is easy to see how God has worked and fulfilled them.

When we read prophecies that are not yet fulfilled, such as those regarding the end of the world, it can seem less clear just how God will work it all out. But they will come to pass just as surely as those that have been fulfilled.

Enter False Prophets

Many false prophets have arisen and attempted to promote their "false prophecies" and to influence people according to their own sinful desires. Their false messages were often expressed as having come to them from God. God knowing that this would happen told Moses to write in Deuteronomy 18:20-22 "... 'But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death.' You say to yourselves, 'How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?' If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him."

God Still Has Total Control

God has control over every aspect of life including the future. We may become discouraged when current world circumstances seem to show that Satan's evil world system is winning. But never forget that God is using even what is evil for His ultimate goal. When we see the specific prophecies God has already fulfilled and how He has used people and nations and circumstances to do His bidding when they thought they were following their own ways, we find great comfort and hope.

No Prophecy Fulfilled Amid the Time of The Church

In the time of the Church today, no

prophecies are fulfilled, nor are there any new prophecies—all we need to know is already in the completed Scriptures. We have historical trends for the church mentioned by Jesus in the Epistles such as warning against false teachers, warnings



God has provided us with "sneak peeks" down the corridors of time.

of persecution, of some abandoning the faith, increasing evil and opposition to truth. But there is nothing prophesied that will be fulfilled in our present time.

The Church Not Mentioned in the Old Testament

Interestingly, the Church is not specifically mentioned in the Old Testament. In fact, Old Testament prophecies jump over the Church to predict the first then the second advent of Jesus Christ. Our present time was a mystery, one in which Christ began to reveal to His disciples during His time on earth. The next prophetic event then will be the Rapture of the Church.

DID YOU KNOW?

■ There are roughly 2,000 prophecies in the Bible, including about 300 specific to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

■ While there are both obvious and subtle prophecies, most are detailed and specific.

■ No other religion has specific, repeated and unfulfilling fulfillment of prophecies many years prior to events over which the predictor had no control.

■ Many prophecies have both a near-term fulfillment and a far-term fulfillment, often times centuries apart.

■ Fulfilled prophecy is a powerfully strong argument in favor of the Bible's claim to be divine rather than merely human in origin.

■ Objection: Jesus manipulated events to fulfill prophecy. Answer: (a) Many prophecies were out of His control (ancestry, place of birth, time of birth). (b) It would have been impossible to manipulate all the people (including disciples as well as enemies) to make it appear that He was the Messiah. (c) There is no evidence that Jesus was deceitful or manipulative. Very simply His miracles confirmed Jesus to be the Messiah.

"Understanding God's promises for the future provides a solid foundation to which you can anchor your hope—a sturdy shield with which you can deflect your doubts and fears about tomorrow."

John MacArthur

Prophecies of Messiah

Prophecies predicted His first coming

They say He is coming again

Over 48 Old Testament prophecies about the first coming of Messiah were fulfilled in Jesus Christ

Throughout the Old Testament, various writers, working under God's inspiration over a 1,500-year period, foretold of a Messiah who would be sent by God to save the world from sin and oppression.

Fulfilled by Jesus Christ

History clearly shows that these prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus Christ, God's Son, whom God sent because "... 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). John, one of Jesus' disciples, went on to record that "... God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:17).

Jesus Rejected

The Old Testament provided more than 48 distinct prophecies about the first coming of Messiah, all of which came true centuries later in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. There are many more prophecies regarding His Second Coming. But, at the time of Jesus' life and ministry, most leaders of the Jewish nation failed to recognize Him as the Messiah they had been anticipating. They had been looking for a political/military leader who would liberate them from the oppression of the Roman Empire. They also wanted their Messiah to endorse their lengthy lists of man-made standards that they arrogantly believed were pleasing to God.

Ultimate Victory

But Jesus was not a political or military leader, nor did He endorse legalistic, performance-based religion. Instead, He was a man of peace and compassion, focused on liberating the people from the oppression of sin. He spoke out against the sinful hypocrisies that kept the Jewish leaders of that day in spiritual bondage. They detested Him for that and attempted (in vain) to provoke Him at every turn. They thought they silenced Him for good when they manipulated the Romans to crucify Him—but



Messiah fulfills every prophecy of His first coming. The sequel—His return—is yet to come.

His death and resurrection had been foretold in the very same Old Testament they purported to know so well. His death led to ultimate victory: everlasting life for all who trust in Him.

Total Confidence in Christ

History clearly shows that Christ is the only person who fulfills every one of those messianic prophecies. Ever since His time on earth, Christians have been able to look confidently at the historical record to verify what they believe. That Jesus Christ, God's Son, came to earth voluntarily to suffer and die for our sins; to rise from the grave, and to ascend to heaven to prepare a place for all who trust in Him for salvation.

By comparing Old Testament prophecies with their fulfillment in Christ (as recorded centuries later in New Testament accounts) Christians have great confidence and assurance that Jesus Christ is, indeed, the promised Messiah.

Staggering statistics

It would be easy to explain away the fulfillment of any one prophecy by itself. But in light of the fact that Jesus Christ single-handedly fulfilled more than 48 specific Old Testament prophecies about the first coming of Messiah, mathematicians have calculated that:

- The probability of the Messiah being born of the tribe of Judah, as prophesied in Gen 49:10, is 1 in 12.
- The probability of the Messiah being born in the town of Bethlehem, as predicted in Mic 5:2, is 1 in 200.
- The probability of the Messiah being betrayed by a friend, as prophesied in Ps 41:9, is 1 in 12.
- The probability of the Messiah being betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, as prophesied in Zech 11:12, is 1 in 50.
- The probability of just the above four prophecies being fulfilled in one person is 1 in 1,440,000!
- The probability of all of the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah being fulfilled in the life of one person is 1 in 10 followed by 156 zeros!
- The prophecies fulfilled by Jesus Christ are overwhelming evidence that the Scriptures were divinely inspired by God; that we can trust what God's Word says for today and for the future; and that Jesus is, indeed, the Messiah promised by God. If He alone fulfills all those Old Testament prophecies, then we can know that He alone is God's Son, our Savior and Lord.

Messianic Prophecies Fulfilled

PROPHECY	SUBJECT	FULFILLMENT
Dan 9:25	Time for Jesus' birth	Luke 2:1-2
Gen 49:8-10	From the tribe of Judah	Heb 7:14
Isa 9:7	The line of David	Matt 1:1
Mic 5:2-5	Born in Bethlehem	Matt 2:1-6
Isa 7:13-14	Born of a virgin	Luke 1:26-35
Ps 72:10-11	Kings will worship Him	Matt 2:1-11
Hos 11:1	Fled to, called from Egypt	Matt 2:13-21
Mal 3:1	Preceded by a herald	Luke 7:24-27
Ps 2:7	Declared the Son of God	Matt 3:16-17
Zech 9:9	Triumphal entry on a donkey	Mark 11:1-11
Isa 35:5	Begins earthly ministry	Matt 11:4-5
Ps 41:9	Betrayed by a friend	Matt 26:23
Zech 11:12-13	Betrayed for 30 pieces of silver	Matt 26:15
Ps 35:11	Accused by false witnesses	Mark 14:55-61
Isa 50:6	Beaten and mocked	Matt 27:26-30
Deut 21:23	Hung on a tree	Gal 3:13
Ps 22:16	Hands and feet pierced	Matt 27:35
Ps 69:20-22	Given sour wine and gall	Matt 27:34, 48
Ps 22:18	Soldiers gambled for His garment	John 19:23-24
Ps 109:4	Prays for His enemies	Luke 23:34
Zech 12:10	His body would be pierced	John 19:34-37
Ps 34:20	No bones broken	John 19:31-36
Isa 53:9	Buried with the rich	Matt 27:57-60
Isa 53:7	Will be the Passover Lamb	John 1:29-36
Ps 16:8-11	Will be raised from the dead	Mark 16:6-7
Ps 68:18	Will ascend to God's right hand	Mark 16:19

"Jesus Christ is the source and main subject of Bible prophecy. The most dramatic prophecies in all the Bible point to the Messiah—the Savior who would both suffer and reign."

Tim LaHaye

The Rapture

Gone without a trace

Believers swept up to heaven—unbelievers left behind

The ultimate Christian experience

There are few promises of God more thrilling to Christians than the promise that in a blink of an eye every believer will be swept up to heaven to be with the Lord forever—and they will receive a body exactly like that of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Unlike the Old Testament saints, those in Christ are a unique group of believers and are already citizens of heaven. Beginning at the day of Pentecost, all believers are placed in union with Christ at salvation and are betrothed to Him. Just as He was resurrected and ascended into heaven, so also will be His Body, the Church.

The Last Generation of the Church

God promises to rescue all those in Christ from the coming wrath of the Tribulation, and this is through our glorious transformation called “the Rapture.” Whether living or dead, every believer will be raptured into heaven.

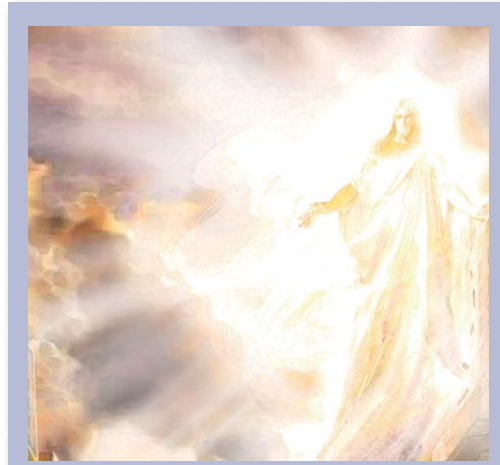
I Tell You a Mystery

While the word “Rapture” does not occur in the Bible, it is a description of an event that changes the world.

The English word “Rapture” comes from the Latin word *rapare* which means to “take away” or “suddenly remove” or “snatch out.” The Latin word comes from the Greek word *harpazō* which is the word that describes God taking up the Church from earth to heaven.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:16–18 it says “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

1 Corinthians 15:51–52 states it this way, “Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.



The miraculous event where we are caught up in the clouds to be with the Lord forever.

For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”

No More Death

The resurrected are promised that their new eternal life will be one of great joy, peace and freedom. Not only from the trials of this world, the sadness of illness, the horrors of tragedy and death but also freedom from sin that causes so much pain to ourselves and others in this life.

“... God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:3b–4).

The Last Generation

The last generation of the church will not go through the seven-year Tribulation. The Tribulation (also known as Daniel’s 70th week) is appointed to Israel, not the church.

Rather Christ’s betrothed are seen in heaven while the Tribulation is occurring on earth. As the bride of Christ she prepares herself for

Two Separate and Distinct Events	
The Rapture	The Second Coming
Is a mystery (something which is hidden in the OT) (1 Cor 15:51)	Subject of extended prophecy in OT and NT (Jude 14)
A private event, only believers are involved (Heb 9:28; Acts 1:11)	A public event, every eye shall see Him (Rev 1:7)
Can happen at any time, no prophecy needs to be fulfilled	Preceded by signs (Matt 24:29–31; Mark 13:14–26, 29; Acts 2:19–21; Rev 1:7; 19:11)
Christ meets believers in the air (1 Thess 4:16–17)	Christ returns to earth with believers (Zech 14:4)
Believers go to heaven (John 14:2–3; 1 Thess 4:17)	Believers come back to earth with Christ (1 Thess 3:13; Col 3:4; 2 Thess 4:13; Zech 14:5)
The Tribulation begins	The Millennial reign of Christ begins
Believers rewarded at Judgment Seat of Christ for heavenly rewards (2 Cor 5:10; Rev 22:12)	Unbelievers judged. Baptism of fire (Matt 25:31, 32, 46)
Source of comfort to believers (1 Thess 4:18)	Source of terror to unbelievers (Rev 6:15–17)
No recorded changes in nature	Many changes in nature (Isa 35)
World (people) not judged	World (people) judged (Jude 15)
Unconditional covenants to Israel are not fulfilled	Unconditional covenants are fulfilled
No dealing with Satan	Satan bound 1,000 years (Rev 20:2)

her marriage to the Lamb, dressing in her wedding garments, which are the righteous acts of the saints.

This is much like the ancient Jewish model of betrothal and marriage. The groom would go and prepare a place in his father’s house for his bride and then bring her to it. They would remain there for seven days

after which they would come out for the wedding feast.

The marriage of the Lamb occurs in heaven, then the bride returns to earth with Him when He comes to save those of Israel before the end of the Tribulation (Revelation 19:7–9, 14). He then ushers in the Millennium.

A Wonderfully, Marvelous Resurrection Body

Believers will receive a brand new body called a resurrection body. This body will be perfect and have none of the flaws of our current body. It will bear a resemblance to our physical body but with far greater glory.

In some very exciting way, our resurrection bodies will have an atomic structure capable of doing the things Christ did in His resurrection body. As it says in 1 Corinthians 15, “this mortal must put on immortality” and, the amazing body we receive will be made for living forever in the eternal state.

There is no need to fear if there is no body to be resurrected, whether buried or destroyed by fire or any other means, all physical remains return to the dust of the earth from which they were created and God knows the exact location of every particle of the old physical form (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

Our Amazing New Bodies

- Patterned on Christ’s body
- Perfect
- Spiritual
- Imperishable
- Powerful
- Dynamic
- Flesh & bones
- No physical barriers
- Able to eat
- Need no rest

“The rapture of the Church is one of the most compelling and exciting prophetic events in the Bible.”

Tim LaHaye

A Panorama of Last Days

Antichrist reigns

Too late for disaster planning

The Tribulation is a seven-year period, which is also known as “Daniel’s 70th Week” (Daniel 9:24–27). The prophet Daniel was given a revelation from God that told of 70 weeks of years that were prophesied for his people, the Jews.

The Tribulation is God’s last attempt to draw His people to Him. It will be a time of intense spiritual and physical pressure such as the world has never seen before—and never will again.



Even during the Tribulation, God will protect His people.

The first 69 weeks were fulfilled when Jesus Christ rode into Jerusalem the week before the cross. The 70th week will be the last seven years of the Age of Israel which will last from the Rapture to the Second Advent. The exact order of these events is open to interpretation and will only be fully known as they unfold. The summary of these Tribulation events that will occur is found in Revelation 6–19.

Setting the Stage

NO ONE KNOWS when the end of the world, as we know it, is coming but we do know it is surely coming. When we see wars, famines, plagues, earthquakes and other natural disasters around us, it is easy to think we may be near the end times. The next prophetic event is the Rapture or the resurrection to heaven of all Church Age believers. There may be indicators that the stage is being set, such as the regathering of Israel to their land, rebuilding a Jewish temple in Jerusalem, increased hostility towards Israel and advances to a one-world government. These trends may come and go in history. Speculation may be rampant, but, when the Antichrist is actually revealed, there will be no mistake. But we will no longer be here on earth to see it!

24 Elders

IN REVELATION chapters 4 and 5, God gives us a glimpse of what is going on in heaven! We see Jesus Christ on His throne, with 4 angels attending and praising Him. He is surrounded by 24 elders on their own thrones. Who are they? We are not told directly, but since they have crowns, are dressed in white, and have been redeemed, most scholars believe they are resurrected Church Age believers. Jesus Christ is holding a scroll which is sealed with seven seals. This represents the rulership of the earth. All of heaven, angels and redeemed people, are praising Him and saying that He alone is worthy to open the seals on the scroll—that is to take back the rulership of the world from Satan.

144,000 Jewish Evangelists

SOON AFTER THE RAPTURE, God will call and use 144,000 ethnic Jews who recognize Jesus as the Messiah as evangelists in the Tribulation. God will call 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes. Consider how miraculous this is since most Jews now have no idea what tribe they are from! This group will be sent out to bring both Jewish and Gentile unbelievers to Jesus Christ. The 144,000 Jewish evangelists are “sealed,” which means they have divine and angelic protection from persecution by the Antichrist. Millions “... a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language ...” (Revelation 7:9) will come to faith in Christ.

Antichrist

THE TRIBULATION IS an epic struggle between good and evil, surpassing the imagination of any movie maker today. In Revelation we meet two beasts through whom Satan carries out his evil schemes.

The first beast often called the Antichrist (1 John 2:18) has many different names in Scripture, but they all refer to the same person. He is called the ruler or prince who is to come, the man of sin and son of perdition, and the one who makes desolate. This first beast will be a ruler of a Gentile nation who will conquer 3 nations, 7 more will surrender to him, and eventually he will bring about “world peace” by becoming the dictator of the world (Daniel 7:23). Satan and the two beasts make up Satan’s counterfeit and unholy trinity.

The False Prophet

THE SECOND BEAST will come out of the earth, Revelation 13:11. In Revelation 16:13 this beast is referred to as the false prophet. He will be given all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and he makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast. He will be able to perform great and miraculous signs. Because of the signs, he will be given power to deceive the inhabitants of the earth. He will order an image be made in honor of the first beast, and he will be given power to give breath to the image so that it will be able to speak. All who refuse to worship the image will be killed. He will also cause a mark to be placed on the head or hand of everyone, and they will not be able to buy or sell without the mark.

Treaty with the Beast

WHEN THE ANTICHRIST signs the seven-year peace agreement with Israel, the seven-year Tribulation starts. This agreement is called a peace treaty. Daniel 9:27 gives us a description of this agreement. This passage shows us there will be a temple in the Tribulation, possibly the beast will build it as part of the early peace treaty. Many will be deceived, thinking true peace has been achieved with this treaty. After 3½ years the beast does something in the temple that totally defiles it and breaks the treaty which was a sham all along. He then takes over the temple. There is now no separation of religion and state because the beast has taken absolute control.

Two Witnesses

DURING THE TRIBULATION, God will send two witnesses to serve Him in Jerusalem. Scripture does not say who they are, but it is widely believed they are Moses and Elijah sent back to earth. They will prophesy 3½ years. They have the power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood and to strike the earth with plagues. These two witnesses will be given power for miracles—they will devour by fire those who try to silence them. When their time is completed, God will allow them to be killed as martyrs. The world will be ecstatic at their deaths. But God will raise His slain witnesses to life, and they will be carried off to heaven—an event that will be seen by the entire world.

Four Horsemen

THESE FOUR HORSEMEN are introduced in the first four seal judgments. The 1st horse is white. This rider represents the Antichrist, who will be given his crown by a world that elects him to bring about peace and safety during a time of chaos. The 2nd horseman rides a fiery red horse; he will bring warfare which destroys the false world peace which the Antichrist established. The 3rd horseman, riding a black horse, represents horrible worldwide famine and economic inflation during this time. The 4th horse is a pale horse. Its rider is named Death and Hades (the grave). This horseman is symbolic of death and devastation. One fourth of the world’s population will die from sword, famine, pestilence and wild beasts.

Martyrs

DURING THE TRIBULATION many people, both Jews and Gentiles, will put their faith in Jesus Christ. Many of these followers of Jesus will suffer and die for their new-found faith. They are victims of the evil world system set up by the beast, but for all eternity they will be rewarded for their faithfulness. This is described in Revelation 20:4: “I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the Word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

7-Year Tribulation Timeline

Unfolding Events

- The Rapture of Christ’s Church
- 1st Seal White Horse
- 2nd Seal Red Horse
- 3rd Seal Black Horse
- 4th Seal Pale Horse
- 5th Seal
- 6th Seal
- 7th Seal
- 1st Trumpet
- 2nd Trumpet
- 3rd Trumpet

Historical Overview

- All of God’s people disappear from earth
- Antichrist appears as a False Messiah
- War breaks out on earth
- World famine & economic crises
- ¼ world population killed by war, famine, beasts
- Believers martyred worldwide
- Earthquakes, worldwide convulsions
- Introduces Trumpet Judgments. Angels warn world not to accept the Mark of the Beast (666)
- 144,000 Jewish evangelists worldwide revival
- ½ of trees & vegetation burned up
- ½ of ships, fish and oceans destroyed
- ½ of rivers & streams destroyed (fresh water)

The Red Dragon

REVELATION 12:3-17 gives us another glimpse into heaven with an overview of Satan's rebellion. We see Satan depicted as a great red dragon. His 7 heads and 10 horns are symbolic of great wisdom and power. He and his fallen angels are at war with Michael and the elect angels, as well as with the woman (Israel) and the Seed of the woman (Jesus Christ). This war began with the prehistoric fall of Satan, intensified after Christ's victory on the cross and culminates in Satan and his fallen angels being cast out of heaven in the Tribulation. Then on the earth Satan will empower the beasts and make his final bid as ruler of the world in defiant opposition to God. His attacks on Israel and on believers intensify throughout the Tribulation.

Trumpet Judgments

THE SEVEN TRUMPET JUDGMENTS are launched by the opening of the seventh seal. • 1st—hail and fire will fall on the earth and one third of earth's plant life is burned up. • 2nd—a heavenly body, perhaps a meteor, will strike the earth destroying one-third each of sea creatures and ships on the sea. • 3rd—a burning star falls from heaven and one-third of the fresh water lakes and streams become polluted and many die. • 4th—one-third of the sun, moon and stars are darkened. • 5th—tormenting demons are released from the abyss for five months. • 6th—four demons released to kill one-third of mankind with an army of 200 million. • 7th—begins bowl judgments. The 7th trumpet calls forth the seven angels with the seven bowls of God's wrath.

200-Million-Man Army

THIS ARMY IS PART of the sixth bowl judgment. Revelation 9:16 refers to an army of 200 million soldiers: "The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number."

This is a prediction that an army of 200 million soldiers will be led by four demons who have been released from imprisonment beneath the Euphrates River just for this purpose. They are given fire and smoke and brimstone which will kill one-third of mankind. Some Bible scholars believe this is a demon army but this is not stated—we know it is led by four demons.

Israel During the Tribulation

DURING THE MID-POINT of the Tribulation, believing Jews will flee from Israel to hide in the mountainous wilderness east of Jerusalem. This is commanded by Jesus in Matthew 24:15-25. They are to go quickly, not stopping to pack, once they see the temple desecrated. Here they will be protected from the beast and Satan during the last half of the Tribulation. This wilderness is most likely the present day Jordan. Daniel 11:41 tells us Jordan will be desolate (a wilderness) and not controlled by the beast during the Great Tribulation. In Isaiah 63:1 the Lord is shown coming from "Bozrah" the region where Petra is located. The Lord is said to defeat His enemies there, perhaps just before the final battle of Armageddon.

Woe Judgments

THE THREE WOES are the final judgments that God pronounces on the earth which will lead to a time of repentance for many people. The three woes will be a time of great misery and affliction. • 1st woe is revealed after the fifth trumpet judgment. The woe involves locust-like creatures that can sting like a scorpion. This is likely figurative. • 2nd woe is revealed after the sixth trumpet judgment when four fallen angels are released. These angels, along with an army totaling 200 million, are released to kill a third of mankind. • 3rd woe is revealed after the seventh trumpet judgment. This series of judgments is the greatest horror the people of earth have ever seen.

The Seal Judgments

THE OPENING OF the scroll represents Jesus Christ taking back the rulership of the world from Satan and brings the angelic warfare from heaven to earth. Enemies of Jesus Christ will be finally and totally judged. As each seal is opened, judgment comes onto the earth (Revelation 6). The first four of the seven seal judgments are the same as the four horsemen of the apocalypse. • 1st seal—the Antichrist is let loose upon the world • 2nd seal—great wars begin and peace is lost • 3rd seal—famine breaks out • 4th seal—plague, further famine and warfare • 5th seal—more of God's vengeance • 6th seal—a devastating earthquake occurs, causing massive upheaval and terrible devastation.

666—The Mark of the Beast

THE MARK OF the beast is a sign of allegiance to the Antichrist's rulership of the world. Revelation 13:15-18: "He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. He also forces everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666." We do not know what the mark will be. Believers who do not receive the mark, will be persecuted unto death.

Bowl Judgments

THE BOWL JUDGMENTS are progressively more intense and devastating as the end time approaches. Below are the bowl judgments, as described in Revelation 16. • 1st bowl—there will be horrible sores on those with the mark of the beast. • 2nd bowl—the sea turns to blood and everything in the sea dies. • 3rd bowl—all the waters on the earth become blood. • 4th bowl—the sun burns and scorches people. • 5th bowl—brings complete darkness over Antichrist's kingdom. • 6th bowl—the Euphrates dries up, the kings of the East come and the scene is set for the battle of Armageddon. • 7th bowl—produces a great earthquake; cities of nations fall; a huge hailstorm occurs.

The Great Prostitute

WHENEVER ISRAEL WORSHIPPED idols and false gods rather than the one true God, prophets would denounce them as adulteresses and prostitutes. The great prostitute of Revelation 17 represents the false religious system set up by the beasts in the Tribulation. It is a religion built on lies. It directly opposes true Christianity. Yet it tries to imitate God's system while mocking it. One of the first lies will be whatever Satan says to try to explain away the Rapture of millions of people. This religious system will all be a part of the worldwide economic and government system set up by the beasts. Those who do not accept the lies and continue to worship the true God will suffer greatly and many will die by persecution.

Armageddon

THE WORD "ARMAGEDDON" only occurs in Revelation 16:16, "Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon." This speaks of the kings who are loyal to the Antichrist gathering together for a final assault on Israel. At Armageddon "... the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his (God's) wrath" (Revelation 16:19b) will be delivered. The battle will begin just prior to the second advent of Jesus Christ who will return to earth and defeat the beast in the Battle of Armageddon. After the destruction of the beast's armies, Jesus Christ will establish His promised Kingdom, and He will reign for 1,000 years. After this victory Satan will be put into the "bottomless pit" or abyss for 1,000 years.

The Messiah Returns

THE MESSIAH, JESUS CHRIST, will return at the end of the Tribulation. Everyone will see the Second Coming—"I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself knows. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations" (Revelation 19:11-15). The earth will then become a literal utopia of peace and prosperity.

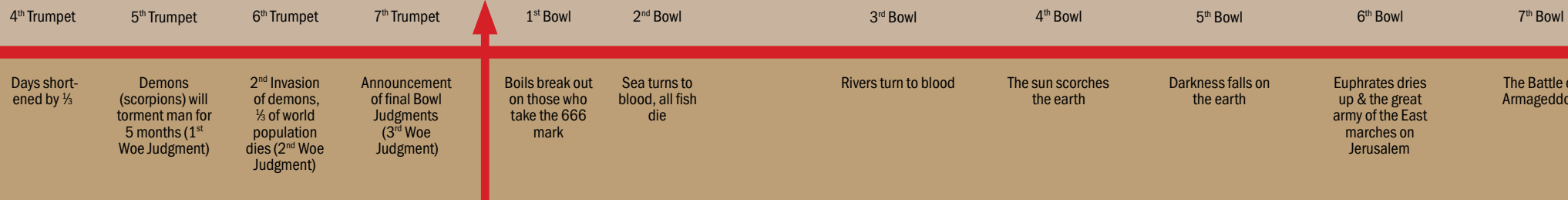
Satan Incarcerated

AFTER JESUS' TRIUMPHANT return and victory over His enemies, an angel will come down out of heaven with the keys to the Abyss and with a great chain in his hand. He will seize Satan, bind him up and throw him into the Abyss for 1,000 years. After the 1,000 years are over, Satan will be set free from his prison for a short time, and he will go out and deceive the nations one last time. People will join him in this last rebellion against God, but fire will come down from heaven and destroy them all. Satan will be thrown into a lake of burning sulfur where the beast and the false prophet are. Satan who was initially defeated at the Cross will be forever defeated and will no longer be able to deceive anyone.

Middle of Tribulation (3½ Years)

Unfolding Events

Historical Overview



The Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth to rule & reign for 1,000 years of perfect environment

The Lord Returns to Reign and Rule

The Millennium begins

Perfect environment and peace on earth

At the end of the Tribulation, when it looks as though the remnant of believing Jews, as well as the entire world, will be destroyed, Jesus Christ will return to earth with great power and glory. He will be seen by every person, and all will worship Him. He will reclaim earth for His own kingdom!

Prophecy Fulfilled

The prophecies regarding Jesus that were not fulfilled at His first advent will be accomplished. He will throw the Antichrist and the false prophet into the Lake of Fire. By the sword in His mouth, He will destroy the great armies; the birds will feast on their bodies (Revelation 19:21). He will bind Satan for 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1-7).

The Bride Returns

As the Church we will be clothed in white linen, riding white horses as we return with Him to earth. We will share in Christ's victory and rule under Him (Revelation 5:10). The believers who died in the Tribulation will be resurrected, given special places of honor, and rule with Christ (Revelation 20:4).

His angels will rescue all believers still alive and gather them up (Isaiah 11:11-12). These Tribulational believers will stay on the earth in their human bodies. This means there will be an interesting mix of resurrected and mortal people. There will be no unbelievers on earth at the beginning of the Millennium.

The Tribulational saints who have endured so much cannot lose their salvation, but in their human bodies will still have a sin nature. They

will have many children who will also be born with sin natures.

These children and their children, going on for 1,000 literal years, will each need to decide whether to believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior or not. There will be no atheists; Jesus is there visibly reigning! Satan will not be there to tempt anyone.



Finally, a perfect world under the rule of the King of kings and Lord of lords—Jesus Christ.

Christ Rejected

Surprisingly, many offspring will choose to go their own way and reject the finished work of Christ on the cross. Death will be unusual, so first-hand reports of the Tribulation and the tremendous rescue by Jesus Christ will be common. Jesus Himself is ruling with perfect righteousness and justice!

Perfect Environment

The environment under the rule of Jesus Christ will be perfect. Animals are no longer under the curse and bondage that began at the fall of man in the garden of Eden; no animals are fierce or carnivorous (Hosea 2:18, Isaiah 11:6-8). There is no sickness or death except as divine punishment (Isaiah 65:20-22).

The Perfect Sovereign

Jesus Christ will be the sovereign ruler over all the earth. Peace and prosperity for all are the norm. Jerusalem will be "lifted up" or enlarged as the geography of Israel is changed. At this time all the covenants to Israel will be fulfilled: Israel will occupy the entire land promised to Abraham; David's Son will reign

forever.

All Israel will worship in the new temple; no worship of any other idol or god will be tolerated. Jewish priests will offer sacrifices in the spectacular new temple (Haggai 2:6-9); these will commemorate what has been done by the King of kings and Lord of lords—Jesus Christ.

The Last Rebellion in History

As impossible as it seems, even with perfect environment, a perfect Ruler in the Person of Jesus Christ, and the removal of Satan as a direct source of temptation and testing, people will continue to rebel against God. At the end of the Millennium, Satan will be released from his prison and allowed to go out once more to deceive the people from all corners of the earth and gather them for one final battle against God. In numbers they will be like the sand of the seashore. They will march across the breadth of the earth and surround the camp of God's people, but fire will come down from heaven and destroy them.

This rebellion of Satan will be his last. He will be thrown into the Lake of Fire at the end of the Millennium. This is also the time of the Great White Throne Judgment when all unbelievers are resurrected and receive their sentence of eternal condemnation in the literal Lake of Fire which God has already prepared. This marks the end of the Millennium and the beginning of eternity.

Millennium vs. Eternity

The present world is renovated	The heavens and earth are created anew
Limited to 1,000 literal years	Never ending
Satan is bound and removed from earth for 1,000 years	Satan eternally punished
Glorious temple present with sacrifices offered by priests	No temple mentioned
Jesus Christ reigning on earth	Jesus Christ reigns from new heavens and new earth
Final judgment of sin and evil has not yet taken place	Final judgment of sin and evil is complete
Many people have mortal bodies with sin natures	All people have resurrection bodies
Revolt and death are still possible	Rebellion and death are impossible

There is a big difference between the Millennium and Eternity. The Millennium is still in earthly time—Eternity is not.

Prophecies of Christ's Second Coming

PROPHECY	SUBJECT
Deut 30:3	God's people regathered
Psa 2:6-9	Lord's inheritance and rulership
Psa 50:3-6	God judges in righteousness
Psa 96:10-13	Rules & reigns in righteousness
Psa 110:1-7	The Warrior defeats all enemies
Isa 11:11-12	The Righteous King
Ezek 37:21-22	Regathers and restores
Dan 7:13-14	Christ's kingdom is everlasting
Mic 4:6-7	The Lord rules forever
Hag 2:6-7	All nations united in glory
Zech 12:9-10	Jerusalem's enemies destroyed
Zech 14:3-4	Geography will change
Matt 10:23	Believers flee; Messiah returns
Matt 16:27-28	Messiah returns in glory
Matt 19:28	All things renewed
Matt 24:27	Christ's coming like lightning
Matt 24:36-50	The day and hour unknown
Matt 24:30	Messiah coming on clouds
Mark 13:26	Christ coming in power and glory
Col 3:4	Jesus and His people return together
John 14:3	God's people with Him forever
Rev 1:7	Every eye will see Him
Acts 3:20-21	God restores all things
2 Thess 2:8	Jesus defeats Satan
Psa 68:18	Jesus ascends to God's right hand

Life on earth as you never dreamed it could be

"Jesus will come bathed in radiant splendor, enveloped within an atmosphere of indescribable brilliance, surrounded by the ear-piercing praise of angels and saints. Scintillating light shining from His eyes. Irresistible power pouring from His hands. None will deny His beauty or escape its transforming energy."

Sam Storms

Judgment Seat of Christ vs. Great White Throne Judgment

We will all stand before the all-knowing God—one by one

You will stand before the Throne of Christ—but you hold the key to which throne you will stand before

“Judgment for the believer is a place and time of surpassing joy—receiving eternal rewards of ‘Gold, silver and precious stones.’ Judgment for the unbeliever is the entrance into everlasting torment and separation from God.”

Anonymous

Great White Throne Unbelievers’ Final Judgment

This judgment takes place at the end of human history before eternity begins. This is after the Millennium, after Satan is thrown into the lake of fire. Hebrews 9:27 states: “... it is appointed for men to die once, and after this the judgment.”

Two Books

Revelation 20:11–15: “Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Only Those Who Reject Christ

At the throne, books will be opened. Only unbelievers will be there; they will not be found in the Book of Life since they have chosen to trust in themselves and their works for their eternal destiny.

A Terrible Reality

There is no avoiding reality any longer. It is immensely tragic when the person who has never trusted in Jesus Christ must finally receive the penalty for his sins.

As he stands before our righteous and just God, who provided a way for him to avoid this judgment altogether, he will wait in vain as his name is not found in the Book of Life. During his life on earth, he ignored and rejected the free gift offered, and now that decision is irreversible for all eternity.

Some may ask how can a loving God cast His own creatures into the lake of fire? A better question is why would anyone choose hell over a loving God?

God will never separate His love from His justice and righteousness. God will never force a person to believe; He gave us the gift of free will. He wants our love for Him to be genuine. We are each free to choose—our way or God’s way. Either way, God has told us in advance what the result of our choice will be.

So tragic, and so avoidable!



Destination Hell

Judgment Seat of Christ Believers’ Eternal Rewards

Destination Heaven



Believers reap the joy of their love of God

Your attitudes, your service to God, your prayers, your walk in fellowship with Him each day not only bring true joy to your life on earth but will glorify your Savior forever.

When you are looking into the loving eyes of your Savior, will you truly think you did all you could for Him during the time He gave you on earth?

An Eternally Perfect Place

The good news is that no believer will live with eternal regret or shame. You will be in a perfect place. The bad news is you can’t go back and live your life over again. “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12).

Sins Never Mentioned

Believers will never be condemned for their sins. Jesus Christ took that judgment on Himself. The eternal life possessed from the moment of faith in Christ is a gift from God that cannot be taken away. At the Judgment Seat of Christ (sometimes called the Bema seat), which takes place in heaven after the Rapture of the Church, your sins will not be mentioned. What then?

Rewarded for Good Works

We will each individually stand before God to give an account of what we did with our life, to be evaluated for our faithfulness in performing the good works which God prepared for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). It says in 2 Corinthians 5:9–10: “So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”

God will examine the works we have done on earth—some will endure like gold, silver and precious

stones, and others will be burned up like wood, hay and stubble.

There will be differences in rewards and in responsibilities for all eternity based on to what extent we have served and obeyed God in these few short years on earth after our salvation. Some believers will receive great rewards; others very limited.

What are Good Works?

Just what kind of works will endure and bring us lasting rewards? It really boils down to this—living by the Spirit. For the fruit of the Spirit is love in action—joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

God gives us many opportunities to serve Him—trust and obey God in all things, love one another, encourage each other, speak the truth in love to all you meet, forgive each other, please God in all you do.

Since God knows your heart and mind as you are doing things for Him, He will evaluate you not on just what you do but on your attitude and motivation while you are doing it.

Incredible Eternal Rewards

THE FOUNDATION OF our faith is the completed work of Christ. As Christians, when we are walking in the Spirit and serving the Lord, we are building a structure of eternal rewards in heaven upon that foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11–15). Besides basking in the presence of God forever, the Bible describes additional rewards as follows.

Mansions and Crowns

Incorruptible Crown	1 Cor 9:24–25
Crown of Rejoicing	1 Thess 2:19
Crown of Righteousness	2 Tim 4:7–8
Crown of Life	Jas 1:12; Rev 2:10
Crown of Glory	1 Pet 5:2–4

Eternity—Heaven or Hell

New heavens and new earth

It lasts forever and ever and ever

Your eternal future—is in your hands

For believers in the Lord Jesus Christ what a glorious promise eternity is! All things have been made new—there is no more sickness, no pain, no sorrow, no death, no sin—just eternal joy as all the old things have passed away (Revelation 21:4). It's living an everlasting life in the eternal city of God!

Never-Ending Life

Eternity is a concept that is difficult to understand; never ending (time-wise, as we understand time), no limits to its height or depth or width (space-wise, as we understand space), life never ceases and there is no death.

What could we possibly do that would keep us contented and occupied forever? We don't have the details, but we do have God's promise: "... No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Satan's Final Defeat

At the end of the Millennium when Satan is released from the abyss where he had been bound, his final attempt to "be like the Most High" is defeated and the Great White Throne Judgment of mankind is completed. The final, eternal abodes of the righteous and the unrighteous are revealed.

A Whole New Universe

At the end of the Millennium Jesus Christ will completely destroy the present heaven and the earth (the entire universe) and create an incredible, new and eternal, never-ending heaven and earth.

The Everlasting Perfect Light

The new city has no temple because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. Also, they provide all the light and there is no sun or moon. "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city" (Revelation 22:1-2a).

To be there with God is totally indescribable. There will be no sun, no rain, and no night in the new heaven and earth (Revelation 21:23-25). He is the Light! Everything is being made new (Revelation 21:5). All of us will have resurrection bodies that are recognizable and yet do not have the limits of this earthly body.



The eternal destiny of every person is based upon the work of Jesus Christ at the Cross.

A New Dimension of Travel

We will be able to travel in dimensions we don't even know nor understand now, and yet still eat and drink and have substance (Luke 24:30-36). We will be with those we love, and most of all we will be with our Savior and worship Him in perfection. "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind" (Isaiah 65:17).

Praise and Serve

We will all have a desire to praise, worship and serve God. How will we do this? God has not revealed specifically, but by understanding His character we may form some assumptions. Even in the Garden of Eden, God gave Adam work. This was not tedious but exhilarating for him. "No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads" (Revelation 22:3-4).

Supreme Happiness

We know we will be honored to serve our Savior, and whatever we are given to do will bring glory to Him. There will be differences in status of believers for all eternity, based on the level of rewards awarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ for their "gold, silver and precious stone" works on earth. However, there will be no regret—no matter what position we have, we will be supremely happy.

A Focus on Forever

When God reveals things about heaven in the Bible, He does it to challenge us and give us hope. God tells us to consider heaven our home, not the earth. Even here and now, we are to focus on what will be eternal: "... and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:18b-21).

Now or Later

Why put so much effort into accumulating things that will only burn up and be eternally forgotten? It says in 2 Peter 3:11b-13: "... what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to

live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."

Eternal Comfort

A heavenly perspective comforts us in suffering: "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

The New Jerusalem

"I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (Revelation 21:2). Here will be the focal point and worship center of the new heaven and earth. It will be immense: 1,500 miles high, 1,500 miles wide and 1,500 miles deep—and extremely beautiful. There will be no temple there, but Jesus Christ will rule and all nations will come to worship. The tree of life will be there, as well as the river of life.

Believers in Current Heaven

Today the new heaven does not exist. All believers who die go directly to the "old" heaven, where Jesus has promised to prepare a place for all who have placed their faith in His saving work on the cross (John 14:2-3). Old Testament believers are also in heaven (Hebrews 11:10, 16).

The Greatest Contrast Ever

There could not be a greater contrast for all eternity than between eternal life in heaven and eternal life in hell. Everything heaven is, hell is the extreme opposite. Where Jesus is continuously present in heaven, hell is total separation from God.

Hell is a very real place, and you do not want to go there!

None of us can make our own reality. Many people insist on rewriting God's Word to suit their own concepts and desires for what they consider to be fair and just.

Maybe we would rather believe that everyone will go to heaven because God must be good. Many further reason that a good God would not make a literal hell either.

But God has given us His Word to clearly explain the free gift of salvation offered to each person. He is sovereign; the plan is His. More than that, He judged His beloved Son on our behalf. Knowing this, why would anyone leave this free gift unclaimed?

Jesus says there is a hell, and in hell there will be continuous weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:12), indicating eternal personal despair without relief. The punishment of the unbeliever is described as everlasting, unquenchable fire (Matthew 25:41; 3:12).

Hell is described as a lake of fire where the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever (Revelation 14:10-11). Not only is the suffering physical but psychological forever, described as disgrace and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2b). Revelation 20:10 describes a lake of fire and brimstone where there is torment day and night forever.

The Bible indicates there are degrees of punishment for people in hell. It is based on their deeds and the extent of the revelation of God they were given which they rejected.

They have chosen to reject what God wanted to give them, and now eternal hell is the result.

"Eternity to the godly is a day that has no sunset; eternity to the wicked is a night that has no sunrise."

Thomas Watson

A Simple Plea

If, after reading this book you haven't made a decision to trust in the Lord for your eternal future—Consider this ...

As you explored this book, perhaps you recognized that you may not yet have embraced God's plan on a personal level. In fact, you may have sensed God whispering to you. Now what are you going to do about it?

God loves you so much that He reached out to you through His Son, Jesus Christ: "For 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). Christ's purpose was "... that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

But if this was Christ's purpose, why do so many people fail to experience the full, meaningful life Jesus talked about? Because people have departed from God's path and chosen their own way—a way that falls far short of God's plan for us. Paul summed it up in Romans 3:23: "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." As a result of our sin, too many people exist in separation from God, which is the same as spiritual death: "For the wages of sin is death ..." we're told in Romans 6:23a.

Fortunately, God doesn't want us separated from Him, today or in eternity. So He provided a way—a Savior—to bridge the chasm of spiritual death. Christ willingly went to the cross to pay the death penalty for our sin and separation: "... God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Jesus then conquered death by rising from the dead so that we can enjoy eternal life with Him in heaven: "... but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23b).

Many people today mistakenly think that there are multiple paths to God. Others believe that we "earn" our

way into heaven simply by being good or doing good. But both of these views are contrary to the Scriptures. Jesus Himself made it clear that placing our faith in Him is the only way to God: "... I am the way, the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The Bible also teaches that we are saved only by God's grace (an undeserved gift from Him) "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9).

But it isn't enough to simply know, on an intellectual level, these provisions of God's plan. His Word tells us that we must individually believe in Jesus Christ as God's Son and place our faith in Him as our personal Savior: "... to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

That amazing promise is as true today as it was when Jesus walked among us! God wants you to know Him personally and enjoy Him today and forever. You can respond to His invitation through a simple, sincere prayer like this one:

"Heavenly Father, I have sinned and chosen to go my own way instead of Your way. Thank you for sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross for my sins. I'm trusting in Christ as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for making me part of Your family, for the many blessings you have just bestowed on me and for the gift of eternal life. Help me to be the kind of person You want me to be. Amen."

If this prayer expresses your heart's desire, we encourage you to pray it today. Don't miss out on the meaningful, eternal life God has in store for you!

The most terrifying words in Scripture

For those who choose to reject God and His total love for them, there are consequences. God does not want anyone to go to hell, but if you reject what He has done for you at the Cross, there is but one eternal future for you.

All who choose to reject the work of Christ will stand before God and they will hear these words:

"Depart from me, I never knew you."

The Bible says those people will then be cast into utter darkness for all eternity.



The future starts right now ...

We consider it an honor and privilege that God has allowed us to get together with you on this incredible journey into Biblical Christianity.

It is our prayer that you have enjoyed this book, but more importantly—that it has changed your life. And that you now know Christ in a difference-making way and that He will become preeminent in your life.

As you start on your Christian journey we encourage you to begin taking the steps mentioned in this book.

PRAY REGULARLY. Ask God for His guidance and direction in your life. Seek His will in all you do and go to Him with your requests.

BIBLE STUDY. Read your Bible regularly and start enjoying the richness and truths that will guide your life in a deep relationship with God.

LET THE SPIRIT LEAD. The Holy Spirit knows your needs better than you do. Seek His wisdom and power as you journey on your Christian path.

JOIN WITH OTHER BELIEVERS. Start searching for a Christ-centered Church where you can join other believers in the passionate pursuit of God.

THANK GOD. Praise Him for His many gifts to you and for His loving grace in your life. Thank Him for meeting your needs and transforming your life through prayer.

SHARE CHRIST. Be on the lookout for opportunities to share Christ with others. Tell them what Christ has done in your life.

KEEP YOUR EYES ON CHRIST. In all things, moment by moment, keep your eyes on Christ and seek to do His will in every aspect of your life.

Now, on to the future ...

God's Reassurance

We know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to his purpose.

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

*Romans 8:28-39
(Selected)
Matthew 28:19-20*

Emergency Prayer Numbers

Emergency numbers may be dialed direct. No operator assistance is necessary.

When in sorrow call John 14
When people fail you call Psalm 27
If you want to be fruitful call John 15
When you have sinned call Psalm 51
When you worry call Matthew 6:19-34

When you are in danger call Psalm 91
When God seems far away call Psalm 139
When your faith needs strengthening call Hebrews 11
When you are lonely and fearful call Psalm 23
When you grow bitter and critical call 1 Corinthians 13

For Paul's secret to happiness call Colossians 3:12-17
For understanding of Christianity call 2 Corinthians 5:15-19
When you feel down and out call Romans 8:31
When you want peace and rest call Matthew 11:25-30
When the world seems bigger than God call Psalm 90

When you want Christian assurance call Romans 8:1-30
When you leave home for labor or travel call Psalm 121
When your prayers grow narrow or selfish call Psalm 67
For a great invention/opportunity call Isaiah 55
When you want courage for a task call Joshua 1

For how to get along with fellow men call Romans 12
When you think of investments and returns call Mark 10
If you are depressed call Psalm 27
If your wallet is empty call Psalm 37
If you are losing confidence in people call 1 Corinthians 13

If people seem unkind call John 15
If discouraged about your work call Psalm 126
If you find the world growing small and yourself great call Psalm 19

Alternate numbers:

For dealing with fear call Psalm 34:7
For security call Psalm 121:3
For assurance call Mark 8:35
For reassurance call Psalm 145:18

About Pure & Simple Ministries

Some 3,500 years ago Moses led the Children of Israel out of Egypt. They took a three week journey and managed to stretch it out to 40 years. They wandered in confusion and disarray the entire time.

And today, far too many Christians spend their entire lives wandering aimlessly or with little direction and not enjoying the wonderful strength, power and joy of the Christian life

Several years ago a small group of dedicated Christians became concerned about this situation. They united to establish and develop a ministry to provide sound, accurate teaching of foundational Christian truths to new and advancing believers.

This book is the result of their vision.

We seek to pursue our mission in collaboration and partnership with churches, missionaries, evangelists, Christian organizations and other organizations who share our vision.

We believe the local church is the primary means through which believers grow. This ministry seeks to supplement, not replace, the regular teaching and worship in the local church. We believe this partnership will strengthen the local church.

Pure & Simple Ministries is a non-denominational, 501(c)(3) registered non-profit independent ministry, guided by a Board of Trustees and supported by the gifts of individuals, churches, ministries and other organizations.

The focus of the ministry is the person of Jesus Christ. We seek to have all our materials biblically based, with sound doctrine, and a clear message exalting the name, the work and the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Statement of Faith

WE BELIEVE that the Scriptures, both Old and New Testament, are the inspired, infallible and inerrant Word of God, the complete revelation of His will for the salvation of humankind, and the divine and final authority for all Christian faith and life. (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:21; Hebrews 4:12; Psalm 19:7-8; Matthew 5:17-18)

WE BELIEVE that there is one living and true God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing in three Persons... the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. (Deuteronomy 6:4; Genesis 1:26; 3:22; Jeremiah 10:10; Psalm 33:6-9; Matthew 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; 1 Timothy 1:17)

WE BELIEVE in God the Father, infinite, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power and love; that He concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of humanity; that He hears and answers prayer; and that He saves from sin and death all who come to Him through Jesus Christ. (John 3:16; 4:14; 1 John 4:8; Jeremiah 32:17-19; Romans 5:8; 11:33-36)

WE BELIEVE in God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, having been conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary; that He lived a sinless life and died on the cross, shedding His blood as the only acceptable sacrifice for our sins; that He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, where at the right hand of God He now sits as our High Priest and Advocate; and that His literal and personal return to earth in power and glory is imminent. (John 1:1-3; 20:28-29; Hebrews 1:1-3; 1 Timothy 3:16; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 1:18-23; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 2:9-10, 17; 4:14-16; 10:10-12; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; Revelation 1:8; 5:8-14)

WE BELIEVE in God the Holy Spirit, sent from the Father and the Son, whose ministry is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ; to convict humanity of their sin; to effect spiritual rebirth in the repentant sinner; and to indwell, sanctify, guide, instruct and empower the believer for godly living and service. (John 14:16-17, 26; 16:7-15; 1 Corinthians 2:9-16; 3:16; Acts 1:8)

WE BELIEVE that humanity was created in the image of God but fell into sin, and are now sinners by nature and choice, under condemnation, separated from God and spiritually dead. (Genesis 1:26-27; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:23; 5:12, 18-19; John 3:17-18)

WE BELIEVE that salvation is a free gift from God; that a sinner is saved by grace through faith alone, wholly apart from any human merit; that all who believe in Jesus Christ and His atoning work on the cross, will be saved. (Acts 4:12; John 1:12; Romans 1:16; 3:21-26; 6:23; 10:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-7)

WE BELIEVE in the bodily resurrection of the dead, of the believer to a glorified, eternal life in heaven with the Lord and of the unbeliever to judgment and eternal punishment. (Acts 24:14-15; 1 Cor 15:20-22; 51-58; 1 Thess 4:13-18; Heb 9:27; 2 Cor 5:10; Matt 25:31-46; Rev 20:10-22:7)

WE BELIEVE in the one true Church consisting of born-again believers regardless of creed, race, gender, social class or nationality who have been regenerated by their faith in Christ and united together in the body of Christ of which He is the head; who assemble together in local fellowships for worship and edification and whose primary mission is to reach out to the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ; and to make disciples, teaching them everything He commanded. (Hebrews 10:24-25; Romans 12:4-10; Ephesians 1:22-23; Matthew 28:19-20)

WE BELIEVE that water baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances for believers, commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ, and are intended to be observed by the Church during this present age. (Matthew 26:26-28; 28:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

There is still more work to be done

*We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.
We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:20)*

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST brings life, hope, joy and peace wherever it is proclaimed. But there are still so many throughout the world who need to hear this truth.

People are being saved, educated, equipped and encouraged by *The Perfect Journey*. And it's made possible by the prayers, gifts, efforts and work of people like you.

We invite you to join us in getting the Good News of Jesus Christ to as many people as possible and helping

them find the freedom, grace and love that is in Christ Jesus.

Working together we have the privilege of bringing the most important thing in the universe—the Word of God—to people.

Together we can tell and show the whole world that the Cross really does make a difference!

Here are some ways you can help.

Pray

- Pray for those who have come to Christ because of this book
- Pray for all of God's people and the ministries that seek to serve God in Spirit and Truth
- Pray for open doors and the outreach of Pure & Simple Ministries

Financial Support

- Should the Holy Spirit lead you to make a financial contribution, you can do it two ways:
- Go to our secure website and click the "Donate" tab
- Copy this page and mail in your contribution.

Get Involved

- To partner with Pure & Simple Ministries to make this book available to more people:
- Go to our website and click on the "Partnership" tab.
- Or check the box on the reply vehicle below.

I want to help spread the Good News of Jesus Christ

Yes, I would like to help others join in *The Perfect Journey*. Please send me _____ books.

Here is my gift of \$ _____ to help get *The Perfect Journey* out to others.

Please charge my bank card in the amount of \$ _____.

Visa MasterCard Discover American Express

Acct. # - - Exp. Date _____ | _____

Name on bank card _____ Security Code _____

Signature _____

Please send more information on how I/my organization can partner with you in helping more people join us on *The Perfect Journey*.

Name

Ministry/Organization

Address

City State Zip

Email Address Phone Number

Financial Policy

Pure & Simple Ministries is a grace oriented ministry. We operate on contributions believing that God will continue to meet our financial needs.

Your donation to Pure & Simple Ministries will help advance the message of a new, everlasting life in Christ. Then help launch new believers on a life of hope based on sound Bible teaching and principles.

Christianity Pure & Simple Ministries is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent of the law.