

# Personal **BIBLE** Devotions

Volume One



Short, serious, thought-provoking personal devotions  
to increase your faith, knowledge and holiness

G. Brent Riggs

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The Bible warns us that the cares of this world can squeeze out our time for God. We see this very plainly today in our “need” for short devotional messages that only take a few minutes to digest. I’m often perplexed to hear how hard it is “to find time to study and pray” when people can find time for hours and hours a day of “screen time”.



So, if dwindling time for God is a problem, am I contributing to it by writing a book full of short devotional messages?

I had to ponder that seriously but, in the end, I think I’m just accepting reality... and hoping that even though the thoughts in this little book are short, they are substantive and serious.

It’s my hope that these quick devotionals will lead people to deepen and lengthen their time for God and His precious Word.

That’s why I’ve included questions and thoughts to meditate on at the end of each message.

I trust you’ll find these useful and a blessing for your personal growth, family time or Bible study groups.



## About the Author

Brent Riggs is an author, teacher, Pastor, artist, and businessman with many published titles and longtime presence online.

He is a married father of eight and loves the simple life of small-town Oklahoma.

You can find out more about him at **BrentRiggs.com** or **SeriousFaith.com**.

Brent's oil paintings and lessons can be found at **ThePaintingTeacher.com**

He created a personal Bible Verse Memorization Flashcard tool that all are welcome to use: **MemoryVerse.Cards**

## Some of My Other books

(all my books are at [www.brentriggs.com/stuff](http://www.brentriggs.com/stuff)):



### Terrorist To Evangelist

The True Story of Cornelius Kenneth McClinton

Born into abject poverty and lower working-class Belfast, Kenny McClinton became as hard-core as the life he was forced to live. From a violent, drunken father to abusive boys homes, from the Navy to a sadistic prison, from terrorism to salvation... this is Ken's remarkable and gut wrenching story of how the Lord rescued him from a life not worth living.



### Full Joy (1st John)

Living a Life Full of Joy No Matter What Life Throws At You

The Apostle John opens the book giving the reason for writing it: that we may have full joy. What a blessing to be able to evaluate our spiritual lives against such a straightforward and easy to understand set of truths. When your life lacks joy it may be because of fear, worldliness, disobedience or a lack of love. Turn to the book of 1st John and prayerfully ask God to reveal what could be stealing your joy.



### A Moment in the Word Volume One

In Business & Life

Short, challenging messages for personal growth, family devotionals or group study.



### It Matters What You Believe

Truth is Truth.

Truth is truth. The idea that "you believe what you want and I'll believe whatever I want" and both are equally valid is nonsense. Only when it comes to God do we accept such an absurd notion. There is Truth concerning God. It can be known. If it IS TRUE, then it is exclusive; and, by default, all other incompatible ideas are false. Life is short and unpredictable then comes forever. Doesn't it make sense to take some time to consider the Truth about eternity?



### Are You Really Saved?

Are you sure?

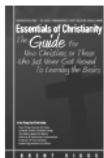
Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.



### SeriousFaith Questions & Answers - Vol. 1

The Guide Full of Christian Common Sense, Biblical No Nonsense & My Spiritual Two Cents

This guide teaches the new Christian there is a serious need today for serious answers to serious questions about the Bible & Christianity. Almost 500 pages of answers and advice!



### Essentials of Christianity

The Guide for New Christians or Those Who Just Never Got Around to Learning the Basics

For the new or uneducated Christian - the fundamentals of the Christian faith. A MUST KNOW collection of knowledge for all Believers.



### Knowing The Will Of God

The Guide That Teaches You How to Confidently Determine God's Will in Your Life

An incredibly useful topical guide to Bible Verses; Brent Riggs Bible messages, quotes and more; over 200 pages.



### Spiritual Growth - One Tweet At A Time

A book comprised entirely of Twitter submissions that will help you grow spiritually... one tweet at a time



### Serious Faith Treasure Reference

A Priceless List of Bible Topics and Promises

An incredibly useful topical guide to Bible Verses; Brent Riggs Bible messages, quotes and more; over 200 pages.



### Sinners In The Hands of An Angry God

A Modern Rendition By Brent Riggs

[Visit the website](#) A modern version of one of the greatest sermons of all time. Sadly, and tragically, uncompromising preaching about HELL is unpopular today. They say "you shouldn't try to scare people into Hell." "Who says? Certainly not God, Jesus, or the Apostles. The Bible has far more to say about Hell than Heaven.



### Internet Pornography

The Guide That Teaches You How to Discover and Deal with a Porn Problem

Internet porn is destroying churches, marriages and individual lives. Find out how to discover porn, and then how to help someone deal with it.



### The Truth About Heaven Guide

A Guide That Dispels the Myths & Reveals the Magnificent Truth About Our Eternal Destination

What Every Christian Should Know About Their Eternal Home - A Guide That Dispels the Myths & Reveals the Magnificent Truth About Our Eternal Destination (Free eBook version)



### Life Without Debt

No Excuse, No Whining, You Aren't a Victim

How to get out of debt, how to stay out of debt; the truth about the credit industry; how to save money, how to reduce expense; timeless principles about personal finance.



### Godly Leadership

In Business & Life

Godly Leadership: As a former drill sergeant, a Bible teacher/pastor, and a manager/owner/executive of many businesses through the years, I have not only experienced the life of leadership but have seen firsthand how desperately more Godly leaders are needed. My goal is that when you have finished this little book, you will have a list of leadership principles that you can understand and apply practically to your life. Those who are in more traditional leadership roles like pastors, business owners, managers, and teachers will be able to apply the principles in their official capacity. Everyone else, whether you are leading a family, the unofficial leader of friends, the mentor or parent of a growing leader, or any number of other roles, can equally benefit from these leadership principles.

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## Choosing Friends

Proverbs 12:26 The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray. (NKJV)

A Christian should very carefully consider who they have as close friends. Like all things about this fallen world, it is our natural tendency to surround ourselves with those people who feed our fleshly appetites; be it ego, recognition, admiration, immorality or pleasure.

**We are sinful by nature** (Jer 17.9). We war in every area of our life against the natural inclination to please ourselves; and rationalize our behavior with a surface-coat of Godliness. We must not forget our superior ability to deceive ourselves and our expert skill at dressing up in sinfulness in righteous clothes.

### **Your friends either feed your appetite for self, or war side-by-side with you in pursuit of Godliness.**

Job's friends were not Godly and only served to cause more pain to the already suffering Job. Daniels friends were men of God who stood with him against a pagan society even to the point of death. Sometimes we surround ourselves with friends who give us a false sense of holiness or spirituality simply because their level of holiness and discipline is even less than ours. Beware of apathy, complacency and self-righteousness that comes from comparing yourself to anyone other than Christ (1Cor 10.12).

It is our natural tendency to think we can pull others up to a higher spiritual level. It is a fact of humanity, that we will always descend to the lowest common level of those we spend the most time with. That is why our closest and most intimate friend should be the Lord. He is the ultimate standard and the more time we spend with Him, the more He becomes our standard.

John 15:12-15 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. (NKJV)

As with all fleshly pleasure, **there is very real pleasure** in friends who will join us in our pursuit of wealth, status, recognition and the continual never-satisfied hunger for pleasure. We must learn to embrace the SUPERIOR SATISFACTION of Godly friends rather than feed our gluttony for self-satisfaction. Have you ever thought about the idea of:

## Superior satisfaction.

Super satisfaction typically involves foregoing short term, immediate gratification, for a superior satisfaction in something God says to wait for. Superior satisfaction means choosing what is best in God's eyes. Superior satisfaction means understanding what is truly valuable in light of eternity.

- There is pleasure in an abundance of leisure and sleep. There is superior satisfaction in disciplined time spent with God.
- There is (admittedly, though short term and guilt-producing) satisfaction in sexual immorality. But there is a superior satisfaction in moral purity.

- There is satisfaction in the acquisition of material wealth and status. There is superior satisfaction in the eternal investment of sacrifice for God's kingdom.
- There is satisfaction in having friends that fulfill our craving for pleasure, entertainment, ego, admiration or importance. But there is superior satisfaction in cultivating holy friendships that lead us to the cross, refine our desire for holiness and challenge us to new heights in our devotion to Christ.

**Who have your surrounded yourself with?** Do they cultivate the world, or God in your life? Who do you spend most of your time with? Does their company inevitably lead to the cross or to the flesh? Who do you call friend? Do they increase your holiness or your worldliness? Do your friends fulfill your "self" needs, or your righteous needs?

*Father, help us today to choose friends wisely. May we choose those friends who will help us to be more like your Son. May we be that type of friend to someone else. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Have you ever thought about why you have the friends you have? Do they lead you closer to God even when it hurts? Or do they feed your worldly pleasures?

**Application:** Choose to have close friends who challenge you spiritually, confront your sin, and hold you accountable in your walk with God.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Purity - The Return to the Beginning

Psalms 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. (NKJV)

**Fundamental purity** is in essence, God. God is the definition of purity. God is what all things are compared to in order to measure purity.

**Applied purity** occurs the moment we are saved. God imputes (adds; places; applies) the righteousness (purity) of Christ to us supernaturally. From that point on, He quite literally sees us a pure, worthy of salvation, worthy of coming into His presence.

**Practical purity** is the process of what the Bible calls "sanctification". It is the daily process of the Christian becoming more and more like Christ, who of course is Purity (God). It is the daily increase in our life of righteousness, Godliness and holiness... becoming more pure.

Let's look at false purity first; then closing this topic with the final return to complete purity by those who are saved. Two false forms of purity are comparative purity and deceitful purity.

- **Comparative purity** – This type of purity is a false purity, obtained by measuring purity against an impure standard such as other people, or society in general. This is the type of purity that deceives us into thinking we're "not that bad" compared to the other guy. It's the "at least I'm not as bad as the other guy" mentality.
  - Matthew 15:14 Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch." (NKJV)
  - Psalm 10:4 The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts. (NKJV)
  - Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? (NKJV)
- **Deceived purity** – this is purity perceived from ignorance or false teaching. We may sincerely seek a purity that is less than God's standard if we do not soak ourselves in His Word.
  - 2 Peter 2:1-2 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. (NKJV)
  - Hosea 4:6a My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. (NKJV)

The last two types of purity I want to define, describe where mankind started at creation, and the purity that will be restored to those who are genuinely saved by Christ:

- **Created purity** – this kind of purity is the purity that God creates from Himself. The original creation of the universe and man was pure until sin corrupted it.
  - Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (NKJV)
  - Genesis 1:10b And God saw that it was good. (NKJV)
  - Genesis 1:26a Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;" (NKJV)

- Genesis 1:31a Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. (NKJV)
- **Reestablished purity** – eventually the heavens and earth will be recreated and saved men will receive a glorified body recreated in eternal purity to exist with God. The theological term for this is “glorification”.
  - Romans 8:30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (NKJV)
  - Philippians 3:20-21 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. (NKJV)
  - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (NKJV)
  - Job 19:25-27 For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (NKJV)

Mankind was created in the image of God’s purity. Adam enjoyed perfect harmony, communication and fellowship with God. God’s plan is to bring us back to that state and glorify His Son through it. **Don't wait to meet Christ in eternity before you begin your journey back to purity!** We are to be walking that path now, every day increasing in righteousness; becoming more and more like the Pure One attempting to be indistinguishable from Him in holiness.

It will not happen overnight and there is not threshold that can be surpassed. In this life there will always be one more step closer to holiness and purity; until that Great Day when God will clothe us in perfect purity for all eternity.

*Father, create in us a longing for the Glorious Day when we will be made perfectly pure again. And until that day comes, instill in us an insatiable hunger to increase the level of our holiness each and every day through growing knowledge and obedience concerning You, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you long for heaven and the purity that will be ours someday? Is your life marked now by increasing purity and holiness?

**Application:** Meditate on heaven. Practice thinking about heaven as REAL and let it change your perspective on this life.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Proverbs 30 - The Original \*Stupid Is\*

### Part: 1

Proverbs 30:2 Surely I am more stupid than any man, And do not have the understanding of a man. (NKJV)

There are times when I feel like having that verse tattooed across my forehead backwards, so I can read it in the mirror every morning!

Remember the line in the movie "Forrest Gump": "Mama says stupid is as stupid does". Well Forrest's mama didn't make that up. Ol' Agur did a few thousand years ago. Mrs. Gump just put her own little twist on it.

Agur is the writer of Proverbs 30. Who is he? I have no clue. He was probably a student of King Solomon's. His name means "gatherer" or "collector" and nothing further about him is known other than his words in Proverbs.

Proverbs 30 is a great chapter, one of my favorites. The first six verses convey a deep understanding of man compared to God. It sets mankind in proper perspective when comparing ourselves to the Creator of the Universe.

### Proverbs 30:2-6

- 2 Surely I am more stupid than any man, And do not have the understanding of a man.

One sure sign of a man who is NOT very wise, is the to hear him pronounce how wise he is. As a person learns more and more about true wisdom, God's wisdom, they understand just how stupid they really are compared to God.

A true computer expert is the first to admit how little they actually know compared to ALL there is know about computers. A good doctor will be the first to say he can't possibly know everything about medicine. A good Bible teacher is quick to admit how little they actually know compared to all of Scripture.

The truly wise and knowledgeable are generally very humble about it because they realize the limitations of man's ability to know ALL about anything.

So Agur is beginning his discourse by stating that compared to God, he is stupid. Exactly the correct starting point for anyone who genuinely wishes to be wise.

- 3 I neither learned wisdom, Nor have knowledge of the Holy One.

The writer acknowledges that wisdom is only found in God. Despite his human attempts at gaining knowledge, it is all "stupidity" without God.

- (answers mine) 4 Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? (Not me!) Who has gathered the wind in His fists? (Not me!) Who has bound the waters in a garment? (Not me!) Who has established all the ends of the earth? (Not me!) What is His name, and what is His Son's name, If you know?

Agur echoes the sentiments of Job, Solomon, Isaiah and Paul by asking questions that cannot be answered without God revealing Himself to us. We can observe the results of WHO is doing these things (blowing wind, water boundaries, etc.), but we can never know Who is the cause unless Who reveals the answer.

What is His name? I AM. Who is His Son? The Lamb of God.



- 5 Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him.

After admitting his stupidity (compared to God), and recognizing the true source of wisdom (God and His Son), Agur now proclaims the certainty and sufficiency of true wisdom.

The Bible is the only book in the world that can get away with using all-inclusive words (every, all, none, never, etc.). Why? Because God is the only one who can back up such words. He knows everything, sees everything and commands everything. So He can accurately make all-inclusive statements.

EVERY word of God is pure. Each word can be trusted. God is the protector of those who put their trust into His pure words.

- 6 Do not add to His words, Lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar.

We are stupid compared to God. God is the source of all true wisdom. Every word from God is pure. We are not to add to, correct, revise or give alternate explanations for God's word. Every person who attempts to correct God, or tell Him that He left something out, will ultimately be found a liar.

- Do you want to be a wise person? Recognize your own utter stupidity without God. Turn to Him as your true source of knowledge. Only then will true wisdom be found.

*Holy One, help us to know the depths of our stupidity compared to Your knowledge. You are the only source of true wisdom. Every word from You is pure and true. Help us to trust in You only. In Jesus Name, amen.*

**Contemplation:** Where do you seek wisdom, if you seek it at all? Books? Preachers? Trends? Fads? Psychology? Self-help? Which of those groups or people have ascended to heaven, grasped the wind in their fist, bound the waters in their clothes, or set the limits of the ends of the earth?

**Application:** God is the only source of true wisdom. All other books, commentaries, seminars, teachers or churches are only as wise as the degree in which they proclaim exactly what God says.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Proverbs 30 - There Is a Generation

### Part: 2

Proverbs 30:12 There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, Yet is not washed from its filthiness. (NKJV)

Agur is the writer of Proverbs 30. Who is he? I have no clue. He was probably a student of King Solomon's. His name means "gatherer" or "collector" and nothing further about him is known other than his words in Proverbs.

In verses 11-15 of chapter 30 Agur speaks of a generation of people that aren't exactly model citizens and paragons of holiness. One wonders which society may have observed that would engender such thoughts. His own? Some other from a distant land?

During King Solomon's reign the nation of Israel was at its peak of power, prosperity and peace. Solomon however was also known for his oppressive tax system and massive government. I'm starting to see some parallels here... how about all you Americans, Europeans and other "developed" countries. Any of this sound familiar?

The social and political situation is obviously similar, let's see if the personal characteristics of that generation have anything in common with today's generation.

### Proverbs 30:11-15

- 11 There is a generation that curses its father, And does not bless its mother.

Agur speaks of a generation that does not honor their father and mother; that does not hold them in Godly reverence and respect. Naturally a lack of respect for immediate authority (parents) is going to lead to a disrespect for authority in general (teachers, employers, law enforcement, etc). Do we see this today?

Mothers and fathers cannot be held blameless either. Divorce, adultery, permissiveness, abuse and a general disintegration of the family all in the name of pursuing personal happiness has left a generation of kids who hardly have a reason to respect their parents (although this does not excuse them of it).

- 12 There is a generation that is pure in its own eyes, Yet is not washed from its filthiness.

Don't shove your religion down my throat. You can't legislate morality. Religion is a private matter. Separation of church and state (separate church from everything!). Don't judge me. Religious harassment. Religious bigotry. Religious intolerance. We hear every cliché in the world telling us not to "push" God on anybody.

The vast majority of the world considers itself "good" and to question that is to be "judgmental".

- 13 There is a generation—oh, how lofty are their eyes! And their eyelids are lifted up.

In so many words, these people really think they are just hot stuff. Go-getters, movers and shakers... they do it their way! God? Please. What does this generation need with God? We can take care of ourselves quite well, thank you very much. In fact, God is just an out-dated "crutch" for people who can handle life themselves!

- 14 There is a generation whose teeth are like swords, And whose fangs are like knives, To devour the poor from off the earth, And the needy from among men.

I have often told my children about the good old days when cartoons were innocent comedy, and sitcoms were generally harmless humor. Have you noticed the trend in entertainment today? Watch a few new cartoons or sitcoms. Besides off-color sexual innuendo, the most common humor is that of "cutting down" or "dissing" someone. In other words insults, rudeness, belittling and name calling... "getting the best of someone".

That's just the humorous part. What about politics, Hollywood, and sports? Trash-talkers, clownin', talking smack.... the art of the insult has been refined to a professional skill. Talk radio, gossip columns, tabloids and critics all have teeth like razors now... fangs are consider amateur.

- 15 The leech has two daughters - Give and Give!

Endless dissatisfaction and discontent... a generation who never has enough, never gets what "they deserve" and never quits wanting "more" no matter how much they have.

- It's a good thing ol' Agur was talking about some generation back then, and not us!
- So what's the use of pointing out the obvious similarities to our generation? Because it is important for us to recognize the enemy in order to combat the influence it has on us and our children. As well, it teaches us those things that God considers wicked. Also, God must consider it important to know and recognize because He put the observation in His Book of Books for us to study this morning!

*God of Hosts, thank You for Your Holy Word and the wisdom You have preserved for us. Help us to be a generation of holiness, or at least a holy individual trying to change a generation. In Jesus Name, amen.*

**Contemplation:** Does Agur's words accurately reflect the society you live in? Do you give it much thought? How much influence does society have on you and your family? What do you do to counteract that influence?

**Application:** We can't be passive about the spiritual climate in our society. We face a relentless onslaught of worldliness today. Like an army under fierce attack from an enemy force, we too face a spiritual war. Are you a well trained, loyal and diligent soldier?

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Proverbs 30 - Three or Four Things

### Part: 3

Proverbs 30:18 There are three things which are too wonderful for me, Yes, four which I do not understand: (NKJV)

Only three? Four? Agur must have been some kind of guy. In the next 60 seconds I can think of a hundred things that are too wonderful for me, and at least 4000 things I don't understand.

There is no **obvious** interpretation or meaning of these verses (for us that is, God certainly knows the exact meaning). Commentators are all over the place in their explanations. So I don't fancy any idea that I'm going to give some definitive observations about them. They are curious, thought provoking statements and its interesting to see what insight God gives to different readers. Each person's life experiences, biases, spiritual depth and emotions will evoke different reactions to these verses. So what follows, for what its worth, are just my own thoughts and not really some attempt to interpret them.

### Proverbs 30:18-19

- There are three things which are too wonderful for me, Yes, four which I do not understand:

Just the fact that Agur was a person who could still be awed and amazed at things he didn't understand speaks well of his character. We live in an age today where people are not amazed or wonder at much of anything. Kids don't wonder about much of anything because electronic entertainment has raised the bar of "sensation" so high that "boring" things like bugs, rainbows, mountains and autumn foliage produces nothing but yawns. Adults are not typically far behind.

This is a sad development because for the person with Godly eyes, there is hardly a second that goes by that something amazing, wonderful and unexplainable is not in view: a cloud, a caterpillar, young love, a snowflake, a flower, an airplane, art, music, beautiful woodwork, ants, electricity, technology....

God has given us a whole world to marvel at and amaze us with His creativity. There is absolutely no end to the wonder that awaits those who see God's hand in everything around us.

Also, just the fact that Agur admitted to not understanding these subtle things showed that he really thought about life and spent time observing it. Again, at the risk of sounding like a broken record, our entertainment mad society doesn't NEED to think deeply about life. We have endless resources of stimulation and entertainment to keep us occupied.

There are few traits that all four things have in common:

- None of these things leave a path, or trail
- None of them are mechanical; they have a flowing, unpredictable quality
- All of them are mysterious and beautiful in their own way
- The way of an eagle in the air

What makes an eagle so distinctive? In Agur's day, or now, it is seen as an example

of grace and power. It is a marvelous thing to watch an eagle, whether perched or flying. They almost seem to be other-worldly sometimes, masters of all they survey. Eagles are truly wonderful, amazing and it is hard to explain their majestic presence.

- The way of a serpent on a rock

I know snakes are scary. Most people don't stand around and enjoy watching them slither along. But you should sometime. It is truly amazing to see a creature with no legs, no appendages, no visible means of pushing or pulling itself glide effortlessly over any terrain, wet or dry. Snakes are an incredible example of extreme contrasts.

In reality, they are beautiful, beneficial, mostly passive creatures. With few exceptions, they are not aggressive and basically just want to be left alone. They are the "rodent police" and are actually very handy to have around if you want to get rid of mice (outside your house that is!).

Have you ever thought about why snakes seem so evil? They are just animals. There are many other animals much more dangerous and threatening. The obvious answer is because of the Old Serpent in Genesis that deceived Adam and Eve. That answers the question for Christians, or those knowledgeable of the Bible. But what about everyone else? There is almost a universal fear of snakes. And not just a fear... a sense that they are somehow evil. It's a wonder and mystery that these beautiful, graceful, resourceful creatures have such a notorious reputation.

Snakes are quite fascinating to observe. Even if they do give you the creeps.

- The way of a ship in the midst of the sea

The sea has always been the source of mystery, intrigue, legends and myths. A ship, any ship, no matter the size, is at the mercy of the power of the sea. Only God Himself can protect a ship against the overwhelming fury of the ocean. On the other hand, what is more beautiful than a ship sailing off into the sunset on calm beautiful waters.

Ever been on the sea? It can be quite intimidating. Nothing but water as far as the eye can see, day after day. You can't just snap your fingers and be on land. Only God knows the way of a ship in the midst of the sea. You are truly in God's hands out in the middle of the ocean.

- And the way of a man with a virgin.

What is more mysterious, powerful and amazing than the first experience of love and intimacy between a man and woman? It is a moment that comes and goes once for each person never to be the "first" again. The power of love and physical attraction is one of mankind's most real forces. It truly is something that cannot be understood by mere mortals.

- Well that's all interesting, but so what? For me, as I really spend time pondering these things, it's a refreshing reminder that life is much more than what is six feet in front of me, and that every day can be a day of wonder and amazement at the beauty and mystery of God's creation. It is a reinforcement that God has so much more in store for us and that the mysteries of life are firmly within His grasp and control.

- These verses also help me to realize that I don't have to understand everything, know everything and have life all figured out. God is doing quite well taking care of things all by Himself.
- Great & Amazing God, what wonder and mystery You have blessed us with. Help us to marvel at the mysteries of life, and take comfort in knowing that You understand them all and they exist for Your glory. In Jesus Name, amen.

**Contemplation:** Does anything amaze you anymore other than the latest blockbuster movie, theme park or entertainment extravaganza? How about the breeze? An ant? A bird? A flower? The clouds? Are you teaching your family to be amazed at God's creation, or man's concoctions? Do your kids yawn in boredom at a beautiful sunset, a landscape or autumn leaves even while adjusting their portable CD player and finishing a handheld electronic game on your vacation to the mountains?

**Application:** It's a simple equation. If you constantly over-stimulate yourself with what the world has to offer, you will not be amazed, marveled or awed at the wonders of God. Nor will your kids or family. Entertainment is passive and does not engage the deep thinking processes of your mind (abstract thinking). Learn to examine and wonder at God's creation, think about it, be amazed by it, learn about it... God has given us a lifetime of stimulating and fulfilling discovery. We just have to want it.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Proverbs 30 - Butter and Blood

### Part: 4

Proverbs 30:32-33 If you have been foolish in exalting yourself, Or if you have devised evil, put your hand on your mouth. For as the churning of milk produces butter, And wringing the nose produces blood, So the forcing of wrath produces strife. (NKJV)

For alot of people, being right is the end all, be all. They know they are right, and they are going to fight it out until everyone else knows they are right. Wouldn't it be nice if we were only talking about non-Christians, but who among us hasn't witnessed a fellow Christian who will not quit until their point is proven, no matter what it is obviously doing to the relationship?

**And what if you really are right? SO WHAT!** There are many other things more important. (I'm not talking about morality or essential doctrinal issues. I'm addressing common disagreements, opinions, offenses and minor conflicts; typical day-to-day stuff)

Is being right more important than restoring your relationship with your spouse? Is being right more important than being a good example for a weaker Christian? Is being right more important than showing respect and deference? Is being right more important than bringing peace to a situation?

"Yeah, maybe.. but I'm right! I mean I'm REALLY right! Am I just supposed to standby and let everyone think I'm wrong? That's not fair!" **Oh, get over yourself.**

Being right is not really the issue anyway when it comes to a person who is always right, and worse, won't stop until everyone agrees they are right. The real issue is pride, immaturity and insecurity.

Pride that causes a person to shrivel at the thought of someone not esteeming them as highly as they should. Pride that someone might not be convinced of the "rightness" of your opinion. Pride that someone else may get off the hook about something they were wrong about. Pride that just eats a person alive who can't have their say for all to hear.

### Don't sweat the small stuff.

That is one of the best pieces of advice any person will ever learn. For one thing, if you are a person who doesn't constantly battle every single point, **when you do speak up**, people listen.

Life is so much more pleasant and stress-free when you don't feel like you have to right every wrong, prove every point, voice very opinion and defend every offense. It's a hard skill to learn, but one that is very liberating. It is truly a freedom to not feel like you have to convince the whole world you are right, especially if you're one of those special people who are "always right".

Are you a person who argues alot and just can't let something go until you have proven your point? Especially when you believe you are right? Then don't be surprised at the turmoil and carnage in your relationships.

When you churn milk, this tumultuous motion makes butter. It takes something light, soft and fluid and hardens it. It changes the nature of the milk. When you punch someone in the nose, guess what? You get blood and broken bones.

When you fight over every little thing, always have to be right and won't give up until you prove your point... don't be surprised when your relationships change into something hardened and broken.

*Loving Father, You're the only one who is right all the time. Help us to get over our need to protect our precious self-image and learn not to sweat the small stuff. Give us the wisdom to know there are many things more important than being right all the time. In Jesus Name, amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you feel the need to correct every wrong? When you feel you are "right", does that make you feel justified to prove it? Say your truly are right about some situation with another person, can you name others things that might be more important than being right that would cause you to forego proving your point?

**Application:** Being right is not the end all be all. Relationships, peace, character and holiness are all more important. The urge to battle out minor offenses and disagreements "because I'm right" has nothing to do with being right, and everything to do with being prideful.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## The Treasure Measure

Matt 6. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Treasure. It resurrects memories of boyhood adventures and maps with an "X marks the spot". It creates images of swashbuckling pirates, Aladdin and the Arabian Knights or sunken ships buried for centuries at sea.

**What if you really were to find treasure, real treasure?** Humor me. Let's say you just bought that quiet piece of land out east of the city where you're going to build a modest country home so you can get away from the busy chaos of the urban rat race.

You've got several acres so you decide to build a barn and put in a garden. One sunny, breezy, carefree day you're plowing up the ground where you will do your first planting. You jab a shovel into the ground to make your first corn row and... "clank!"... you strike something solid in the ground.

Curiously, you dig up a box about the size of small television; made of heavy wood and held together with antique steel corners and edges. The box is secured with an old fashioned cast iron lock, so you take a hammer and beat the rust-weakened metal hinges until they finally break loose.

Well by now your curiosity has grown to great excitement because obviously someone has gone to great trouble to hide something apparently valuable; and its been waiting to be discovered for quite a long time. What could it be? Loot? A robber's stash? Exhilarating thoughts of fortune and wealth course through you as open the box to discover..... gold coins, jewels and heirlooms! **You're life will never be the same.**

### Jackpot. Bingo. You just won the lottery.

Well, there's no doubt that a discovery like that would thrill us, and yes, change our lives. For some it would become the consuming focus of their life. Would you believe me if I told you that there is treasure beyond comparison waiting to be discovered on your "land" right now?

"Oh right", you say. This is one of those cute Christian analogies, right? Yes. **If that is all you make of it.** But if you are ready, God can open your spiritual eyes to His treasure that makes a treasure chest of gold seem as worthless as yesterday's trash in comparison.

### Let's take a look at some Godly treasure:

- Psalms 119. 162 I rejoice at Your word, As one who finds great treasure.
  - God's Word is boundless treasure. When you pick up your Bible, is it more valuable to you than holding handfuls of hundred dollar bills? The Bible is not just a good book. It's not even "just" a treasure. It is a GREAT treasure. Just as discovering a cave full of gold would change your life and arrest your attention, God's Word should consume your life as a great treasure.
- 2 Cor 4.7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.
  - Who has what treasure, in what earthen vessels? The treasure here is salvation. And it is delivered to humankind by frail, expendable, common people so that God will receive all the glory for it. Is salvation a treasure to you? Is it valuable enough that you share it with everyone you meet? There is plenty of this treasure to go around for anyone willing to share it, and anyone will to receive it.

- Luke 18.22 So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."
  - Was Jesus saying the rich young ruler's money would go to heaven and wait for him? Yes, in a sense. His earthly treasure was keeping him from Christ. By giving it up, the money would be converted to eternal dividends of obedience which would yield the young man hundred fold eternal returns. Giving it up is not just the act of giving it away. It is giving it away to serve God's purpose. ALL we have is God's. Our responsibility is to be good managers of it for Him and use it as He directs.

**Whatever we give up for the Lord now,  
will be converted to heavenly funds and  
deposited in the highest yielding ERA  
(Eternal Reward Account) in the universe!**

- Luke 12.33-34 Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
  - Jesus challenges us to choose what REAL treasure is. Can treasure be money, power, fame, fortune, retirement and luxury? It can. But it won't last. You WILL lose it. You can't take it with you when you die. REAL treasure is eternal, high yielding and cannot be lost in a market crash, fire, theft, decay or death. REAL treasure is Godliness in all forms.
- Deut 14.2 For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.
  - This Old Testament verse specifically speaks of the nation of Israel but the principle applies to Believers today. The true treasure on earth today is not in the Fort Knox gold vaults; it is not in the South African diamond mines; it's not in Silicon Valley or Wall Street. Earth's true treasure is embodied in those who obey God and serve Him. They are a SPECIAL treasure, of more value than all the riches of the earth. The totality of wealth, power, influence and opulence of any country is not to be compared to the treasure of one simple, faithful, believing child of God.
- Matt 13. 44 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.
  - The Kingdom of Heaven is a treasure; and for those who "discover it", it is worth giving up all you have to "purchase" it. What person would not sell every possession he has to raise \$100 in order to buy something they can resell for \$1,000,000?
  - How much more valuable is Eternal Life? How much of your life will you sell to get it? It will cost you all you have but the return on your investment is eternally incalculable.
- Isa 33.6 Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times, And the strength of salvation; The fear of the LORD is His treasure.

- The fear of the Lord is great treasure. Respect and reverence for God has great purchasing power in all things spiritual and eternal. The fear of the Lord is the first step in gaining true wisdom, discernment and understanding (Ps 111.10).
- The fear of the Lord is that deeply humble, reverent respect we have when come to learn the truth of who God really is, compared to the truth of who we really are.

**The Bible tells us of some “bad” treasure as well:**

- James 5.2-3 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.
  - Earthly treasure will be lost; it will decay. Invest it in God’s work while the “heavenly market” is still trading.
- Prov 15.16 Better is a little with the fear of the LORD, Than great treasure with trouble.
  - Have you traded eternal, indestructible treasure for the temporary and dangerous treasure this world has to offer? Why? You can’t take any of it with you (1 Tim 6.6-7). You will lose it all eventually either to loss or death. Earthly treasure with eternal assurance is bad treasure.

**What treasure gets your attention?** A pile of money, or a Bible? A retirement account, or an eternal account? The fear of being poor, or the fear of God?

Luke 12.33-34 ...a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

*God, we pray for Your wisdom and truth today. Open our spiritual eyes to see the fleeting and futile nature of earthly treasure. Instill in us the value of eternal treasure and may it change our lives noticeably today. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** What type of treasure are you heaping up? Do you consider that things of God more of a treasure than any earthly thing?

**Application:** God has more than enough treasure. It’s our choice how much and what type we store up.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## When God Answers

Psalm 140:6 I said to the Lord: "You are my God; Hear the voice of my supplications, O Lord. (NKJV)

I was sitting in on a Bible study the other day when someone said, "God always answers our prayers. He either says 'yes', 'no' or 'wait'." I have heard that countless times over the course of my life from Christians in every stage of their walk with God, from the pulpit to books to Bible studies.

Over the years it has just become one of those "standard" Christian sayings that everyone nods their head to and passively agrees with. For some reason when I recently heard it, it caused me to stop and think about it. It dawned on me that it is not profitable to perpetuate overly simplistic clichés about Christian issues.

**First of all, God does NOT always answer prayer.** It is our assumption that God's silence equates to "no" or "wait". That is OUR assumption. God's silence may be for any number of reasons:

- We may not have met the conditions God requires for answered prayer
  - Sin must be confessed (2Chron 6.26; Psa 66.18; James 5.1; Prov 1.28)
  - Unforgiveness must not be present (Mark 11.25)
  - We must be asking for the right reasons (1John 5.13-15; James 4.3)
  - We have to have faith in Christ (John 15.7)
  - We ask in Jesus name for His glory (John 14.14)
  - We have to be obedient (1John 3.22)
  - We must ask God in belief (Mark 11.24)
  - You must be treating your spouse in a Godly manner (1Pet 3.7)
- God's glory may be increased through His silence
- God's silence might be part of a bigger plan we don't, or can't, know about
- God may have His own reason and choose not to reveal it (Deut 29.29)
  - Christians walk by faith and promises that frequently don't include answers or explanations

When God does answer, there are any number of variations to "yes, no or wait" that He may reply:

- Yes
- Yes, with conditions
- Yes, with corrections
- No
- No, unless....
- No, except for...
- No, but if you will...
- Wait
- Wait, until I have...
- Wait, until you have...

Beyond that I can think of other ways God might answer us as well:

- You should already know the answer
- I have already given you the answer
- You are not ready to hear the answer
- You don't want to hear the real answer
- You aren't listening, I'm already answering
- You aren't capable of understanding the answer
- I'll tell you but you still won't hear the answer
- You've already decided what you want the answer to be

By constraining God to three easy answers, we take a lot of the hard work out of prayer. The "hard pursuit" of God is where much of our spiritual growth occurs. Remember the old "magic 8 ball" that had the answer window in it? You would turn the ball over, then turn it right-side up, and the "answer" would appear in the window.

Sometimes we treat God like a "magic 8 ball" when we box Him in with predetermined answers. We ask our prayer, spin God around, and get the magic answer. And we can predetermine the answer 33% of the time because we've limited God to three choices.

James 5:16b - The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. (NKJV)

God is so far beyond our understanding there are no doubt many ways God may answer us that we have no ability to comprehend. My feeble little list in this lesson surely does not even scratch the reality of the ways our Infinite and Creative God answers our prayers.

When you pray, you have to meet the requirements God plainly requires in order for your prayers to be considered in the first place. Assuming those requirements are met, don't limit God to a few simple answers that we can comprehend. Stand in wonder and awe at the Almighty God who can answer our prayers in ways we cannot fathom.

And don't worry about if you get an answer that you can't comprehend or see. You have to believe and have faith that whatever answer God provides, whether or not you can hear it, grasp it or see it, it is **BY DEFAULT the perfect answer!**

*O Great God, Help us to avoid putting You into nice box that suits our need to have You respond in a way that we can understand all the time. Help us to have faith and wonder at Your awesome power to answer our prayers in the way that brings You the most glory, In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Have you ever heard the "yes, no, wait" cliché? Have you ever taught it or passed it on to someone else? Can you think of other ways God might answer? If you could, would you really want to limit God to these three answers?

**Application:** Be careful of perpetuating "Christian" clichés such as this one, or ones like "God helps those who help themselves" and "grace is where you leave off and God picks up". We pass these things on so frequently that everyone comes to believe they are Scripture. They only serve to simplify and limit God in our minds, and make us lazy in pursuing the depths of real truth that is not quite so easy and nicely packaged.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Mmm... Tasty.

Proverbs 18:7-8 (NKJV) A fool's mouth is his destruction, And his lips are the snare of his soul. The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, And they go down into the inmost body.

Which of us have not been the victim of gossip, back stabbing or rumors? **Which of us are not guilty of it?**

- **talebearer** *noun* informer, gossip, newsmonger, rumor, rumormonger, scandalmonger, telltale
- **gossip** *noun* a person who habitually retails private, scandalous, or sensational and often inaccurate information; circulator, gossipmonger, long tongue, mumblenews, newsmonger, rumor, rumormonger, scandalizer, scandalmonger, sieve, talebearer, telltale; concerning the buzz, cry, grapevine, hearsay, rumble, rumor, scuttlebutt, talk; like conversation, story, tale; babble, banter, chatter, prate; gossip  
*verb* to disclose something, often of questionable veracity, that is better kept to oneself; synonyms: blab, noise rumor, talk, tattle, babble, chat, chatter, prate, prattle; hint, imply, insinuate, intimate, suggest; dish the dirt, spill the beans, tell idle tales, tell tales out of school

It is human nature to enjoy gossip and hear the "dirt" on somebody. It appeals to our sinful nature. We also find a sense of camaraderie and "mutual elevation" when we indulge with one another in the mutual agreement of someone's faults or failures. As Christians, it is easy for us to avoid the **blatant** gossip monger.. "hey did you hear about..". Why, that is downright unrighteous and uncalled for! We just won't be apart of it!

But what about these ever popular rationalization for going ahead with that story:

- "Now, I'm not trying to gossip, but..."?
- "...this is strictly private between you and me, I just need your opinion..."?
- And the granddaddy of Christians "I'm only telling you this so that you will know how to pray..."?

**Mmm.. tasty. Oooo... juicy.  
"I will be sure to pray for them."**

Let's see what Scripture has to say about **gossipers, slanderers, talebearers and whisperers:**

- **They can't be trusted:**
  - Proverbs 11:13 (NKJV) A talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter.
- **They destroy friendships:**
  - Proverbs 16:28 (NKJV) A perverse man sows strife, And a whisperer separates the best of friends.
- **They can't keep a secret:**
  - Proverbs 20:19 (NKJV) He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; Therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips.
- **They cause strife everywhere they go:**

- Proverbs 26:20 (NKJV) Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; And where there is no talebearer, strife ceases.
- **God will judge them harshly:**
  - Psalm 101:4-5 (NKJV) A perverse heart shall depart from me; I will not know wickedness. Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, Him I will destroy; The one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, Him I will not endure.
- **They are unrighteous and debased:**
  - Romans 1:28-29 (NKJV) And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness,... they are whisperers... backbiters... untrustworthy... unloving... who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.
- **They have too much time on their hands:**
  - 1 Timothy 5:13 (NKJV) And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not.
- **They are disorderly and lazy:**
  - 2 Thessalonians 3:11 (NKJV) For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.
  - Don't gossip. Don't spread stories. Don't rationalize having to disseminate "information" so that people can "pray properly" (unless a truly holy and righteous, Spirit-led reason is obvious).

**O, how many times our mouths get us in trouble.** How many things can you think of that you wish you could take back? How desensitized we have become to this scourge of "informing" each other.

### **What should we be "gossiping" about?**

Philippians 4:8 (NKJV) Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — **meditate on these things.**

Meditate on these things. Think about these things. Talk concerning these things. Tell stories of these things. "Gossip" about these things.

*Our Father, convict us severely if we are guilty of gossip, tale-bearing and news-spreading while rationalizing it as something "good" so "we can pray about it". May our mouths be bound by Phil 4:8. We ask for Your strength to harness our tongue that it may only be a source of blessing and holiness. Amen.*

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## I Am Persuaded

2 Timothy 1.12 ...for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. (NKJV)

As Christians we can live in the freedom of knowing that God is quite capable of safekeeping everything we commit to Him. We need not give a second thought about whether He will succeed. Belief in whom? Until which day? Keep what?

*"For I know whom I have believed..."* **Paul knew.** This is not a casual knowledge, nor merely an academic awareness. This is unshakeable intimate knowledge much the same way we "know" the sun will rise in the morning. We don't doubt it. We don't question it. We don't re-evaluate it.

**Who is the "who"?** It's not Dr. Seuss, it's none other than God himself, the ultimate object of confidence. Paul is saying that he cultivated a continual, rock solid confidence in God and was fully persuaded concerning God's promises. He had no doubt that God would... and could... keep His Word.

*"Until that Day..."* What day? Specifically, it speaks of a certain coming day:

**Judgment Day...** the day that Paul would hear the words "thou good and faithful servant!". This was the Day that he would be loosed from sin and suffering. The Day that he would meet his Master and God face to face. This is a very specific future date in time that Paul looked to. We will be there with him.

**Do you believe this day will occur?** No, I don't mean in some ethereal, conceptual Christian sort of way. I mean as surely as Christmas Day, or your wedding day, or the first day of school. Is the Day of the Lord as real to you as any earthly day?

What will God keep for us? **Only that which we commit to Him.** To commit something to another entails an action on our part. We have to release something. We have to give over and give up something. We have to relinquish our possession of it and entrust it to the Keeper.

**What things should we commit to God for safe keeping until that Day?**

• **Our salvation.** A choice:

- I can work for my salvation and hope that my good outweighs the bad; or take my chances that God is "love" and won't judge anyone..
- Or, I can accept the free gift of eternal life by believing in Jesus Christ who suffered and died to pay the penalty for my sin because He loved me so much.

• **The plan for our life.** A choice:

- I can plan my own life and pursue wealth, pleasure and power; hopefully culminating in a comfortable retirement where I can "eat, drink and be merry"...
- Or, I can embrace the plan God has for my life that will result in my transformation into the likeness of His Son and will lay up for me heavenly rewards and eternal life with a loving Father.

• **Our burdens.** A choice:

- I can shoulder my burdens, pull myself up by my bootstraps and take control of the situation; I can learn to bear the weight of this misery called life; When it gets too tough, I'll turn to drugs or sex or maybe religion. Either way, I don't need God as a crutch. I can handle things...

- Or, I can accept the loving offer of the Lord to cast all my cares and worries on Him and He will be faithful to bear them for me. I can live in peaceful, guilt free confidence that the compassion and love of our Savior will wash away the weight of worry and anxiety.
- **Our treasures.** A choice:
  - I can spend all my blessings, money, time and resources on temporary earthly pleasure. You only live once, I will get all I can while I am young and strong. I will live a life of comfort, ease and prosperity. And there will most certainly be temporary pleasure in it...
  - Or, I can send my treasure to an Eternal Investment, where it will reap heavenly dividends; where the market never fails and thieves don't exist. I will lay up treasure upon treasure for God in Heaven and have it waiting for me on that great Day when God will reward us for the deeds done in His name.

We have a choice to keep and control these things ourselves, or hand them over to the King of the Universe for safeguarding. I make a fair mess of everything I do in my own wisdom and strength; one way or another I will lose whatever I have; but I have a choice to lose it to my own failure, to thieves, to short term gratification... or I can give it up to God.

So my choice is to trust my way... or trust the perfect, unfailing, omnipotent God of Creation? *Hmm.... I 'm thinkin'.*

*Lord, help me to commit my entire life to you, give it over to you, cast my cares and burdens on you. Let these words not be just words, but real choices. Give me understanding where I lack it, faith when I need it and trust in all things. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you trust yourself to get it right? Or do you mess things up when you do them your way without God taking time to see what God wants? Who is more trustworthy, you or God? To whom do you entrust the most decisions?

**Application:** God is more than capable of keeping and sustaining our salvation, plan for life, burdens and treasures. We just have to choose to trust Him, instead of ourselves.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## The Right Focus - Prayer

Psalm 63:5 My soul will feast and be satisfied, and I will sing glad songs of praise to you. (GNB)

Many people have ask if I have certain guidelines I use for prayer and study. Today I will share with you a practical method I use that will help you enrich your prayer time with God. We'll look at Bible study tomorrow. Having plan is important, but first, let's make sure we have the **right focus**.

There's a common tease that kids engage in when they are told by their parents to "quit touching your sister". This usually occurs while in the car on a trip somewhere and the children pester each other until they get angry. After being told to quit, one child will put their finger as close as possible to the other sibling and declare "I'm not touching you; I'm not touching you"; which of course is **TECHNICALLY** correct, **but violates the spirit of the parents command**.

**We treat sin and righteousness that way.** We want to indulge in worldliness as much as possible while still being able to say that **TECHNICALLY**, we haven't sinned. And we want to do the minimum amount of righteousness possible to earn us the right to declare that we are Godly. We see this demonstrated in many ways:

- **The dating couple, or the engaged couple nearing their wedding day:**
  - "How much can we 'do' and not sin? Kiss? Hold hands? Can we do more if we're engaged? Can we do more physically the closer we get to the wedding day? How much and it still not be considered sin?"
- **When considering giving to God:**
  - "Do I have to tithe on the gross or net amount? Do I have give some to God when its a gift to me, or just income?"
  - "Do I **HAVE** to give, or it is only if I feel like it? Are New Testament believers **REQUIRED** to give?"
- **Or today's topic... devotion, prayer and study:**
  - How much time do I have do? Can I split it up?
  - Can I do my devotions while I'm driving? Does it have to be in private, or in quiet?
  - Will God understand how busy I am?
  - Can I just wrap my family devotion together with my private ones?

My friends, **these are the wrong questions**. We need to change our focus when it comes to God. Its not, "how much can I get away with, and still not sin?". Nor is the right question, "what is the least amount I have to do and still be able to claim 'godliness'?". The right question is:

### **What can I do to bring the most glory to God, and become the most like Christ?**

So when you are contemplating purity, giving, service, careers or money; you can know trust God will show you His will when you ask the right question such as: "What can I do to bring the most glory to God and become the most like Christ?" As we continue considering our private prayer and fellowship with God, get your focus on the right question:

How can my devotion to God through prayer and Bible study bring the most glory to God and make me the most like Christ?

Prayer is one of the most commonly neglected disciplines for Christians. You rarely meet a Christian who expresses satisfaction in a healthy, enriched and consistent prayer life. I believe the reason for this most of the time is a careless, unstructured approach to prayer. Do you ever plan for your prayer time?: how to pray, what to pray, preparing your heart for prayer, approaching prayer with the understanding of who it is you are praying to. We can not casually enter in to God's presence, shoot from the hip for a few minutes about our needs and expect a vibrant and effective prayer experience. This type of praying will leave us discouraged at what feels like a useless waste of time.

I want to give you a structured approach to your prayer time in twelve segments. I have adapted this from a very wonderful book, "The Hour That Changes the World" by Dick Eastman. I highly recommend it. **It's not a magic formula. It's something to help you get started.**

If you pray for one minute about the following twelve topics, you will have enjoyed 12 minutes of prayer time that will pass quickly when 12 minutes may have seemed like an eternity before. If you pray about each topic for 2 minutes, you are now someone who can pray for almost 30 minutes at a time! If you have never been consistent, or able to pray for more than a few minutes, this should thrill you!

Matthew 26:40-41 Then He (Jesus) came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, **"What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation.** The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (NKJV; emphasis mine)

Jesus rebuked them because they couldn't pray for an hour. Truth be known, most of us are thinking "You've got to be joking, there's no way I could pray for one hour straight!". **YES, you can.** Praying over these twelve topics for 5 minutes each will lead you to an enriching hour of prayer that will go by so fast you will wish you had more time! I know an hour is hard to get a hold of mentally. That's okay.

Start with one minute segments, totaling 12 minutes of prayer. Commit yourself to this for a couple of weeks. You will be amazed how soon you will want more and more time for prayer. God is faithful to bless your commitment. **You can do it. But not if you don't make the CHOICE..** Print out this list. Get a watch. Use this prayer guide and a timer while you pray. (All verses NKJV)

1. **Praise God** - Recognize who you are speaking to; ponder the awesomeness of the King of the Universe; worship & humble yourself before Him.
  - Mark 12:30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment.
2. **Wait on God** - the discipline of quietness; clear your mind; think only of God; be still; have a single focus on God; be as still and quiet as possible. learn the blessing of stillness in God's presence.
  - Psalm 46:10 Be still, and know that I am God;
3. **Confess Sin** - purify your heart; ask God to reveal the sin in your life; clean your heart and mind and get right with God; confess your sin to Him and ask for forgiveness; tell God what corrected behavior you will have in the future.
  - Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God;

- 1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
- 4. **Pray Scripture** - from your Bible reading, select a passage and pray over it; meditate on it; ask God to illuminate it in your heart; take the promises and declarations of Scripture and apply them to your life.
  - Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law.
- 5. **Develop spiritual alertness** - take time to become aware of possible deception or temptation in your life; become alert to what is going on spiritually around you. Ask God to reveal things the schemes and traps of sin and wickedness; pray for spiritual discernment.
  - Mk 14.37 - "watch and pray"
- 6. **Pray for others** - pray for God's work around the world; pray for the lost; pray for those in authority; pray for the special needs of others in your life.
  - James 5:16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.
- 7. **Ask God for your needs** - pray for your own needs; make your requests for things that fulfill God's will in your life; be specific; ask in faith, not doubting.
  - James 4:2-3 ...Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.
- 8. **Thank God** - thank God for all the wonderful blessings you have; try to think of one new thing each day you have never thanked Him for in the past.
  - Philippians 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;
- 9. **Sing to God** - sing a song of worship to God from your heart; it doesn't matter how you sound; God just desires your sincere worship.
  - Ephesians 5:19 ...singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.
- 10. **Meditate on God** - contemplate and mediate quietly on a specific attribute of God such as His mercy, or holiness; honestly examine your spiritual condition asking God to give you discernment and honesty about your own life.
  - Psalm 119:15 I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways.
- 11. **Listen to God** - have a notepad ready; ask God specific questions that you have about Truth or decisions you need to make; search Scripture for answers and listen for God's answers in your heart; validate those answers with Scripture.
  - Job 34:16 "If you have understanding, hear this; Listen to the sound of my words;
- 12. **Praise God** - Finish your prayer time where you started; praising God for His Goodness and Greatness!

There you go. I would love to hear some comments from people after they have tried this approach in prayer for a few days. Maybe you have some guidelines for prayer that have proven effective. Share them with us!

Let me close with this: there is no set amount of time you have to pray. There is no certain prayer you have to pray. **There is nothing magical, mystical or guaranteed about this approach.** It is merely a proven helpful guide for organizing, structuring and enriching your prayer life. Its up to you to love God enough to fellowship with Him in truth and spirit. There are NO shortcuts.

*God in Heaven, we ask that You bless our commitment to spend time with You.  
Help us to make prayer the most expected part of our day. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you find yourself trying to figure out the least amount of time you can spend with God and not feel guilty? Have you ever considered making it a habit to ask "what can I do to bring the most glory to God and be most like Christ" whenever you are faced with decisions?

**Application:** If one minute per segment is what you can manage now, do it. Do it consistently. Soon you will not be satisfied and your time will increase. God's presence will become more and more real as you devote yourself to Him.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Just Say No to Chariots

Psalm 20:7 Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the Lord our God. (NKJV)

We all in trust in something. We look to something or someone for security. Some trust in themselves. Others trust money, possessions or position. Some trust in personal experience. Some trust that things will never change. We all trust something.

**Have you ever stopped and thought about what it is you truly trust in?** For Christians, we would like to think our trust is in the Lord. A cursory glance at our checkbooks and schedules will verify the validity of that claim.

What you spend your time and money on is proof of what you really trust... no matter what we may say or claim. Let's look at some common things people trust in. While you're considering each of these, keep your checkbook and schedule in mind; the contents of which will help you realistically evaluate what you really trust in.

### **Some trust in financial security...**

No surprise here. In our affluent society, it is probably most common to trust that we have enough money to live comfortably and be independent. When is the last time you had to get on your knees and trust God to send you food, or clothing?

Do you worry about old age? Who will take care of you? Will you have enough money to "enjoy" retirement? Are you concerned with being able to spend the last 20-30 years of your life in comfort and security because you have enough money saved up?

Of course there is nothing inherently wrong with material blessings and smart financial planning... until it becomes our source of security. If you cannot feel safe, protected, secure and cared for unless you have enough money on hand, **then money has become your security**. If you find yourself thinking mostly about how money will secure your future, instead of how the Lord is your security, then money is where your trust lies.

Money is not trustworthy. Markets fail, nations crumble, thieves steal, possessions deteriorate... there is no security in finances. Catastrophic events can bankrupt individuals and entire societies in a matter of seconds. If your trust is in money, your security can be bankrupt just as quickly. Which brings us to our next consideration....

### **Some trust that things will never change...**

We are particularly susceptible to this in America, especially our children. We have enjoyed an unprecedented run of prosperity and freedom in our country. Our children have never known anything but good times, plenty, and luxury. Even the poorest and the laziest do not go without food, clothing and fleshly enjoyment. We are fast becoming an entertainment-gorged, leisure-addicted nation that gets stressed out when we can't have a couple of hours every night to "wind down" in front of a TV. Again, there is nothing inherently wrong with leisure, entertainment or relaxing... until it replaces our need or time for God. God has provided for us the blessing to rest and enjoy life as long as it is kept in proper balance and perspective.

We have come to a point where we believe our life of incredible ease and blessings will never change. Why, it is our "right" to have this comfortable life! This is America. Just let someone try to take away our lifestyle and we'll show them.

What folly! World history dictates that this life of ease will end someday, probably sooner than later. God's judgment on the shedding of innocent blood and rampant,



blatant, unrestrained immorality dictates that we are enjoying this lifestyle **on borrowed time**.

Is your trust is in the belief that life as we know it now, will never change? It will. Don't fool yourself.

### **Some trust in themselves...**

All trust, apart from trust in God, falls into this category in some way or another. We trust in our own wisdom to determine what is trustworthy. We trust in our mind, our talents, our strength, our education, our achievements or our opinions. We follow our own hearts as if we are not the easily and perpetually deceived creatures that we really are. Foolish and futile is the only appropriate description.

Our wisdom is finite and easily misinformed. Our minds are biased and self-serving. Talents diminish. Strength can be gone one second after an accident. Education is worthless without Godly wisdom. Achievements quickly forgotten when someone else surpasses us. Our opinions change like the weather and provide no anchor for stability. Our hearts are easily deceived, quickly discouraged and under the complete domination of our circumstances (apart from God).

What is there about ME that is worthy of staking my future on? Absolutely nothing. What IS worthy of being trusted? God's love. God's will. What IS faithful and true and unaffected by circumstances, catastrophe or change? God alone.

### **Some trust in the Name of the Lord Our God...**

Money is fleeting and fragile. Our freedom and comfortable life is guaranteed to be threatened at some point. A good hard look at all our failures will quickly tell us that WE cannot be trusted with our life. **But God can trusted.**

- He is faithful and true. (Rev 19.11)
- He is our Rock and Strong Foundation. (Psa 89.14; 1Cor 10.4; 1Tim 2.19)
- He is beyond circumstances. (Psa 113.4; Eph 4.6)
- He does not change. (Mal 3.6; Dan 6.26)
- He is perfect. (Exodus 3:14)
- He is the Truth. (John 17.17)
- He is awesome, holy and majestic. (Exodus 15:11)
- He knows all there is to know about us. (Proverbs 5:21)
- He is immortal, wise and eternal. (1 Timothy 1:17)

There should be no doubt as to where our trust needs to be. **Is your trust in God? Words are cheap. What evidence in your life substantiates your claim?** Does your schedule demonstrate that you trust God? Does your checkbook show that you trust God? Does your speech show that your trust God?

If your checkbook, schedule and communication don't plainly validate your claim or desire to trust God, perhaps some spiritual examination is in order. **Do it now** before the storms of life destroy the false security you have in something other than the Lord. **Once your trust is in the right place - anchored sure in GOD - then you can truly enjoy a wonderful and blessed life no matter what circumstances may come your way!**

*O Lord Our God, You alone deserve our trust. Help us to examine our lives and determine by the actual evidence where our trust has been placed. Give us the faith and courage to trust in You alone. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Looking at the evidence, what, or who do you trust in today?

**Application:** You can't trust someone you don't know. Determine today to spend regular amounts of substantial time getting to know God through prayer and study of the Bible.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Fewer Words

Proverbs 10.19 In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, But he who restrains his lips is wise. (NKJV)

Whatever is in a person's heart comes out of his mouth. It is generally true, that a person who always has to be the one talking; always the one being heard; always the one who's opinion must be known; always the one drawing attention to themselves... typically is going to be a person of lesser, or little, spiritual maturity.

Wow, that's a pretty tough statement and even now I can anticipate the responses... "I talk a lot and have an opinion on everything, and I'm a VERY spiritually mature person". Uh-huh.

Now lest I play the hypocrite, I will admit, as a teacher, and having a very extroverted personality, this is a discipline that I have to diligently work on every day. Let's look at some Scripture and find out the benefit of being a person of "few words".

- James 3.6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.
- James 3.8 But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.
- Only the tongue controlled by the Holy Spirit can speak words of life and encouragement. How many times has your mouth got you in trouble? Now compare that to the number times your mouth got you in trouble WHEN you were praying, encouraging or blessing someone?
- 
- How many times has your mouth got your in trouble when you WEREN'T talking? Starting to get the point?
- James 3.2-5 For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.
- Controlling the tongue is a very large part of controlling our whole life. Just the like the tiny rudder of a ship, or the bridle on a horse, or the steering wheel of a vehicle... our tongue is the "steering" control of our daily life. It can be a Spirit-controlled instrument of blessing and Godliness; or a "self" controlled weapon of ruin.
- Proverbs 10.19 In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, But he who restrains his lips is wise.
- Ecc 5.7 For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God.
- Ecc 5.3 For a dream comes through much activity, And a fool's voice is known by his many words.

- The more we talk, the greater chance we have of using our tongue for sin. An old proverb says:

**Keep your mouth shut, and be thought a fool;  
Open it, and remove all doubt.**

Godliness is talked about in terms of quietness and stillness:

- Ps 46.10 Be still, and know that I am God;
- Ps 4.4 Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still.
- Exo 14.13 ...Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today.
- Hab 2.20 "But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him."
- Ps 145.5 I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, And on Your wondrous works.
- 
- The scripture gives us foolproof instructions on how to never sin with our tongue.
- Psalm 119:172 My tongue shall speak of Your word, For all Your commandments are righteousness.
- Psalm 71.24 My tongue also shall talk of Your righteousness all the day long;
- Job 27.4 My lips will not speak wickedness, Nor my tongue utter deceit.
- Job 6.24 "Teach me, and I will hold my tongue; Cause me to understand wherein I have erred.

Times when we **should** speak:

- When led by the Spirit (Rom 8.14)
- When it edifies (Eph 4.29)
- When it serves a Godly purpose (2 Tim 3.16)
- Only when necessary (Prov 10.19)
- When the conversation is NOT about foolish or worthless things (Tit 3.9)
- Only when it is about things that are true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy. (Phil 4.8)

Controlling our mouth is a very key issue in our Christian growth. Learn to measure your words carefully. Think before you speak. Pray before you speak. Practice the discipline of not always having to have your opinion heard; or get your comments in; or get the last word every time.

The world is full of words and talk. Our silence is more profitable, useful and Godly than our words may ever be.

- Prov 21.23 Whoever guards his mouth and tongue; Keeps his soul from troubles.
- James 1.26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.

*Father, help me today to shut up. I know that's kind of blunt, but that's what I need. Let me learn to speak under the Spirit's control; it may be about work, or daily tasks or everyday chores... help me to make all of my words pleasing to Your ears no matter what the circumstance may be. Help me to wake up tomorrow and start new again. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** When you get yourself in trouble with people, what percentage of the time is it because of running your mouth? Is there anytime that is appropriate to gossip, speak poorly of someone or complain? If yes, inform God so He can let the rest of us know.

**Application:** The tongue is truly a mighty power. You have the choice to use it for great blessing, or great sorrow.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Why?

Job 3:25 (NKJV) For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, And what I dreaded has happened to me.

Job wanted to know why. He wanted to know "why" so bad, that he complained to God about ever being born in the first place. When something tragic happens like what I wrote of yesterday (the death of a baby), the inevitable and natural question follows: why? I believe the answer is knowable, but in parts; and over time; and in varying degrees of clarity:

- **What we would like to know**

- We would like to know the full answer to every single when, where, why and how will things turn out.
- This natural desire has not been fulfilled by a loving God. He knows that we were able to know every answer to the tragedies of life it would overwhelm us and the grief would be too much to bear.
- In His perfect will and wisdom, God reveals to us what we need to know to grow closer to Him; what we have to know to fulfill His will; and only what we should know that is not so much it would overwhelm our hearts.

- **What we don't know**

- We don't know the full answer to every single when, where, why and how will things turn out.
- We don't know it and in the future when the pains have lessened, we will thank God that there are some things we don't know because only He is able to bear the full burden and should we have known, the burden would have been more than we could withstand.

- **What we may never know**

- We may never know the full answer to every single when, where, why and how will things turn out.
- But we trust that the perfect and all-knowing God who has proven Himself so faithful will let us know exactly what, how much, and when, the reasons and purposes of suffering are... and the He knows the perfect amount and time to reveal these things.

- **What we can't and shouldn't want to know**

- We can NOT know the full answer to every single when, where, why and how will things turn out.
- Only God can know all there is to know about any given thing. This is what makes God, God. There are purposes, reasons and results that are too wonderful, too wise, too extensive, too complex and too deep for us to ever grasp, even in eternity. We do not become God in heaven and He will still have secrets too wonderful and fearful for us to understand. Far from being unfair to us, it is just one more reason why we have faith in our wonderful Savior and God who always does what is in our best interest as His children..

## What we do know

What we do know is those things our Sovereign and Loving God has chosen in his perfect mercy, and absolute wisdom, to reveal to us. A lot of our answers to "why?" depend on:

- Are we looking for answers with spiritual eyes?
- Are we looking in the right place for answers?
- How good is our spiritual vision?
- How intimately and truly do we know the One who is giving the answer?

**Barely hours after delivering the former dwelling of their baby son, the couple was already talking of the marvelous purposes God had begun to reveal through these events, and in the lives of those present.**

Before the sun had set on the first day of their trial, this blessed couple, whose spiritual eyes ARE open, had already begun to see reason, blessing and yes, good... come from the tragedy so fresh to them. They had already discovered the beginning of peace and purpose; and gratitude that God had found them faithful and worthy to bring others closer to God through their response to suffering.

- Their faith had been proven in the fires of suffering. Their choice to follow God is now more real, more satisfying and more confirmed as correct than ever before.
- God had been revealed and glorified through the comparison of how much more awful and tragic this event would have been without the comfort of a loving Heavenly Father and Savior; and the support and love of their Christian family along with their natural family.
- God had been tested and found faithful to give comfort, peace, grace and strength at exactly the moment it was needed and in full measure.
- Those who were present witnessed the magnificent transforming power of how quickly and surely God can change the lives of those who have faith in him through watching the courage, strength and trust of this young couple who in the not too distant past had yet to trust in the Lord.
- They had already begun to see and anticipate how they would be able to minister with great love, compassion and understanding to those who would go through similar trials in the future (which is a distinctly Christian characteristic: the ability to see how you will serve others even in the midst of your own intense suffering).
- Many family members and friends who either don't know the Lord, or who had not given their lives over fully yet were no doubt deeply convicted and moved by the faith displayed in these parents, and the tangible response from God to care and comfort them in their hour of need.
- The devotional account of their suffering yesterday that went out to many thousands all over resulted in response:
  - Encouragement and prayers for fellow suffering Christians
  - Conviction in hearts over spiritual dullness and apathy moved by the results of true faith in God displayed yesterday
  - People whose faith and hope had been increased through the events

It is not my intent to sugar-coat or gloss over the terrible pain and sorrow that is included in such a tragedy. There was, and will continue to be, very great sorrow, sadness and tears over the loss of this child. But it is not sorrow without hope; or sadness without comfort; or tears without purpose.

**That is the difference between those who suffer without God,  
and those who suffer embraced by God.**

*Our Great God and Father, you know the answers to when we ask why. And in Your perfect love You will let us know the "why's" that are proper, useful and bearable for us to fulfill Your will and give You glory. Thank you that we can rest in the security of your Perfectness, not needing to know the answer to every question and able to rest, satisfied that You bear the burden for us. Amen.*

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Now You Shall See

Numbers 11:23 And the Lord said to Moses, "Has the Lord's arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not." (NKJV)

Another round of bitter complaining from the Israelites had begun. The Lord told Moses that He would provide meat for the people to replace the manna they had been eating.

The people had begun craving their old way of life in Egypt (a picture of us longing for our old sinful pleasures), and they complained loudly to Moses about their desire for tasty Egyptian food (Numbers 11).

So, the Lord responded and told Moses that He would provide meat to eat (showing yet again His patience and mercy towards our human weakness). By this time, you would think Moses would be beyond questioning or doubting God but our sin nature doesn't give up easily. Moses exclaimed to God in so many words (Num 11.24):

"How in the world are You going to do that? There's a couple of million people out here in the desert, in the middle of nowhere! Should we kill all the animals, or maybe gather up every fish in the sea?" To which the Lord replied in essence,

### **"You don't think I can do it? Has the Lord's arm been shortened?"**

Moses disbelief was voiced privately so God mercifully chose not to punish Moses but did sharply rebuke him by saying in modern terms "Am I now less God than I've already shown you?" or "Am I not capable of doing what I say?". That's what God meant by "has the Lord's arm been shortened?".

The Lord's words were sharp and sarcastic. He replied in a way that left no doubt about His displeasure with the incredulous response from Moses.

**How often do we deserve the same response?** How many times has God clearly spoken and we respond in disbelief (by word or deed) for various reasons?

- God: I will deliver you to an eternal hell if you do not believe in my Son and turn from your sin.  
Man: A loving god would not send people to hell.  
God: Has the Lord's arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not.
- God: I will provide for your needs, you give up your life for Me.  
Man: I have to worry about storing up many possessions for a secure future.  
God: Has the Lord's arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not.
- God: I will bless you if you will humble yourself and obey Me.  
Man: You only live once, good guys finish last, so look out for number one.  
God: Has the Lord's arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not.
- God: I WILL...  
Man: Really? How? What if? Why? But...  
God: Has the Lord's arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not.

**God doesn't say things He doesn't mean.  
God does not make promises He won't keep.  
He does not assure us then neglect us.**

God's arm has not been shortened. He is faithful, just and trustworthy. Whatever He says He will do, will be done. No matter how difficult, no matter how apparently impossible, no matter how unbelievable... you can take God at His Word.

He is saying to us today just as surely as He spoke to Moses, "Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not." We need only to believe and trust.

*God of Moses, Your arms aren't the problem, our faith is. Help us today to truly grasp and believe that You will do exactly what You say You will do. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** What areas of your life show disbelief of God's Word? Salvation? Money? Contentment? Worry? Has God's ability somehow lessened, or is the fault with your faith and belief?

**Application:** God will do what He says He will do. Whether concerning eternity, or providing for your needs, He has spoken. He will do what He says. God is waiting on us to figure it out.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## A Child's Response

Matthew 18:3 "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." (NKJV)

Picture in your mind with me three scenarios with small children:

- An adult is holding a dog saying, "Come here. Pet the doggy. He's nice. He doesn't bite."
- An adult is standing in a swimming pool a couple of feet from the edge saying, "Jump! C'mon, I'll catch you, don't worry."
- An adult is kneeling on one knee, arms outstretched saying to a child, "I need a hug! Come let me love on you."

What will be the child's response in all three of these situations? It depends on who you were picturing as the adult. In all three scenarios, if the adult was a loving parent, a close friend or familiar family member whom the child knew well, then the response would be one of faith and trust.

Most likely the child would have ventured forward slowly and reached out to "pet the doggy" even if timidly. Or taken that leap in the pool. And what young child is not ready to dash into the safe, affectionate, and loving embrace of someone they know well and trust?

Now consider with me that the adult in all three scenes was a stranger. Maybe you're at a friend's house who the child doesn't know and the man of the house is holding the dog in his lap doing his best to persuade your child the "doggy won't bite". Maybe the adult in the swimming pool is just another parent in the community, and their own kids are jumping to them. Your child is standing close watching, and so this stranger, in an attempt to be social and polite, sees you watching and says to your child, "jump, I'll catch you".

Maybe you're at church, or a family reunion, and you're trying to be sweet to an unfamiliar child and get to know them. You reach out and say, "Can I have a hug?", or you ask the child to come sit by you.

What is the probable response to all of these situations when the adult is a stranger to the child? The child is most likely going to hesitate, be scared, withdraw and not respond positively to a stranger. They are going to retreat to the safety of someone they do know well.

**There is no intimacy, no previous history of trust, no familiarity or basis for comfort and security.**

What's the point? The point is: what is your relationship with God like? Is He someone who represents comfort, safety, security, proven trust and affection? He is someone you know well because of how much time you spend with Him? Would He be more to you like the strangers in our story, or like the parent?

Everyday God is asking you to reach out and obey; to jump into the unknown in faith; or to run into His arms of safety and love.

How well you know and trust Him will determine whether your response is one of fear, hesitation and doubt.... or faith, trust and obedience. You may respond to God knowing He loves you and would only ask you to do His perfect will for your life - or you may retreat what you know better than God: the world, doubt, fear, control of your own life or maybe just plain old mediocrity.

Become like a little child towards God. Pet, jump and run in childlike faith and trust... cultivated by spending everyday in His presence getting to know Him.

*Our God, may we spend so much time in Your presence that we learn to trust you like a little child trusts his parent. May we be so acquainted with You that we respond in childlike faith every day to Your will. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** How do you respond spiritually to God? Are you timid and hesitant? How easily do you step into the scary unknown for God? What does this say about your relationship with Him?

**Application:** We are like children. When God asks us to step out in faith, venture into the unknown or run into His arms, our response will be dictated by the degree of our intimacy, trust, knowledge and security that has been cultivated, or neglected, because of the time we spend with God..

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# A Life of Great Reward

## Part: 1

Psalm 19:11b - ... And in keeping them there is great reward. (NKJV)

How does this kind of life sound to you?

- Refreshed and re-energized
- Full of wisdom
- Joyful
- Pure and enlightened
- Consistent and righteous
- Rewarding and fulfilled

Is it possible? Or is this the dream of the "rah-rah, positive thinking" motivation crowd (and some churches!) that gets you all hyped up for a few days, then "reality" comes home to roost with a vengeance? Or maybe this life is reserved for your Pastor and other "super Christians".

Well someone should have told King David because He didn't not specify any exclusions when he wrote Psalm 19, an incredible, flowing poem about man and nature. He tells us that all creation reveals the nature of the Lord, and that turning to God, obeying His commandments and confessing our sin leads to the kind of life that for most is conceptual at best.

### **David didn't write theory, he wrote about experience.**

Throughout verses 7-11 we are promised wonderful blessings... but as you could predict, **it's on God's terms, not ours**. And good thing too. If God left it to us to determine what constitutes happiness and fulfillment in life, we would mess it up, **GUARANTEED**.

Over the next few days we are going to look at five rewards or blessings that are available for each one of us who have trusted in the risen Savior:

1. Refreshment or restoration
2. Wisdom
3. Joy
4. Purity and enlightenment
5. And finally consistency and righteousness.

Psalm 19:10 - More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. (NKJV)

How valuable and enjoyable are the things we will discuss? Well, unless God lied to us, they are more valuable than not just gold, but "fine gold" and sweeter than sugar or honey which in David's time would have been one of the most pleasing tastes available. Each of these five things are the result of something else that God has made available for our discovery. Over the next five days, we will try to mine out the riches God has for us in this Psalm.

*Holy, God, You have written for us great riches that lead to a happy and fulfilled life. Help us to discover the treasures that come by reading Your Word. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** In the privacy of your own heart, is your life refreshing? Full of wisdom and joy? Is it pure and consistently righteous? Do you even believe it is possible?

**Application:** This type of life is not a "holy grail", a myth that can be conceptualized but never attained. God has laid out the "terms and conditions" very plainly for us in His Word. It is only for us to read it, believe it, and obey it for the blessings to become ours. Are you ready?.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## A Life of Great Reward - Restoration

### Part: 2

Psalm 19:11b - ... And in keeping them there is great reward. (NKJV)

This series of lessons looks at the life most Christians want, many Christians talk about and some Christians experience brief glimpses of... but few attain on a daily, consistent, long-term basis. It is a life that is:

- Refreshed and re-energized
- Full of wisdom
- Joyful
- Pure and enlightened
- Consistent and righteous
- Rewarding and fulfilled

Why is it this type of life so elusive for so many? Obviously you can't give a simple blanket answer but in general, it's because alot of us have become "shoppers" of God's Word of true consumers of God's Word.

### **The Bible has become our mall where we look for the best deals, the lowest prices and the most convenience.**

What I mean is that we study the Bible the same way we shop for food or clothes. We are looking for what pleases us. We look for the "best deals" where we can pay the lowest price. We look for the convenient and the easy. We treat the Scripture like junk food, snatching verses that satisfy our latest appetite for fast food spirituality.

It doesn't help that alot of churches today are all too ready to offer a convenient drive through Gospel and a "99 cent holy value menu" in order to attract as many customers as possible.

What's the typical answer to a retail sales employee who asks "can I help you find something"? **"No thanks, I'm just looking around"**. Did you know that every time you open up your Bible, the Holy Spirit is wanting to help you find the riches of God's Word? But all too often we are just "looking around" and neglect His help and direction. This "casual shopper" approach to Bible Study robs us of the true benefits and rewards of God's Word.

The Bible, while most certainly pleasurable to read, is not designed for **habitual** pleasure shopper. It is meant for serious study, methodical consumption, consistent meditation and voracious devouring. It is nourishing food for the starving spirit and pure, thirst-quenching water for the parched soul... not a candy bar and a soda snack for a quick spiritual sugar high.

### **Let's begin a look at six different descriptions of Gods Word that leads us to a life of fulfillment and "great reward".**

Psalm 19:7a - The **law** of the Lord is perfect, **converting** the soul; (NKJV)

The first of our "great rewards" is a life that is refreshed. Some Bible versions translate this to the English word "converting" which is accurate in the truest sense, but is confusing to modern Christians because we think of "converting" as the process of being saved (which of course is one aspect of this verse, but not the application for the already saved).

The original word for converting gives the idea of refreshing or restoring. The law of the Lord is perfect and refreshes the righteous and restores the obedient. Refreshing... think of how you feel during a long hot shower after being all sweaty and filthy. Imagine the dirt and smell being washed off of you and the clean smell of soap and fresh water.

I remember in the Army when we would be out in the "field" (any place with no shower or air conditioner!). We would tromp around the woods or desert for days on end never getting anything but a "washcloth bath" once in a while. After a several days, or a few weeks, of that there was hardly anything more refreshing and cleansing than a hot shower and a bar of soap.

The other day I made the mistake of entering my son's football locker room at school. There is nothing quite so foul smelling as a hundred high school football players in a small room on hot day after a hard practice! I can recall how "refreshing" it was to get out of that locker room and inhale a deep breath of unpolluted air! Now THAT was refreshing....

The word "converting" in this verse also carries the sense of restoration. Think back of the times when you have been in trouble, or have wronged someone. Do you remember the sense of relief and relaxation when you came to a point where you realized everything was "okay" again? Maybe you were in trouble with your boss, or your parents. Perhaps your girlfriend or spouse was really upset with you. Or how about the times when you bad mouthed someone behind their back and they found out about it?

Think of how good it feels to finally have those situations corrected and to have the relationship restored. That is the idea here in the phrase "converting the soul". What is it that converts (restores) the soul? Money? Vacation? Recognition? Pleasure? No, none of those things that our natural flesh would think of.

### **The law of the Lord refreshes the soul.**

In Psalms 19:7-10 there are six different descriptions of God's Word that on the surface all seem to be saying the same thing: law, testimony, statutes, commandments, fear and judgments. Each of them carry a different aspect of God's Word and it's fruitful to understand the difference.

Today we're looking at the first half of verse 7... the law of the Lord is perfect and refreshes your soul. What is "the law"?

### **The Law is a "rule of action".**

It is a statement of instruction or direction that is true and binding regardless of the opinion or awareness of the object of that law.

The Law is a rule of action and in this context **it is God's rule of action**. Laws dictate our behavior and our conduct; what we can and can't do. When we violate the law, there are consequences. It doesn't matter whether we know the law, agree with the law, or like the law... the law is the law and you are under the law at all times regardless of your own personal opinion of it.

Of course God's law is perfect, just and meant to lead us into the very best life possible. Why is it refreshing? Because keeping God's law leads to a fruitful, guiltless and fulfilled life. Why is it restoring? Because it brings us back into a right relationship with God after we have gotten in trouble by sinning.

**You have to know God's law in order to keep God's law.**



The first point of our life of "great reward" is a refreshing and restored life. How does that come? By keeping God's law. How do you keep God's law? By knowing it, meditating on it and practicing it. How do you know God's law? Through diligent, consistent, serious study of His Written Word and by asking God in prayer to illumine the Truth in your heart.

Psalms 119:18 - Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law.  
(NKJV)

God's law is perfect; it restores and refreshes the soul which results in a fulfilling life of great reward. Tomorrow we will look at how God uses His testimony to bless us with a life full of wisdom.

*Lord, thank You for Your perfect Law and the refreshment it brings to us when we keep it. Empower us through the Spirit to know Your Word and bless us with the discipline and desire to study and prayer every day. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you in need of restoring your relationship with God? Do you long for some refreshment of your spirit and life? Do you know how to get either? In the past, has it been through vacations, recreation, seminars, retreats or other methods? Has your opinion changed any about how "refreshing" and "restoration" of the soul is achieved?

**Application:** The world would have us to believe that a luxury spa, a shopping spree and a couple of weeks vacation are the keys to refreshing the spirit. Not so. While rest is certainly beneficial, rest without an infusion of God's Word gives some temporary benefit at best. At worst, it leaves us even more frustrated because despite the down time, we still don't feel revitalized. You can refresh and restore yourself anywhere and anytime by simply opening God's Word and feasting on His perfect law.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## A Life of Great Reward - Wisdom

### Part: 3

Psalms 19:11b - ... And in keeping them there is great reward. (NKJV)

This series of lessons from Psalm 19:7-11 takes a look at the life most Christians want, many talk about and some experience brief glimpses of... but few Christians attain on a daily, consistent, long-term basis. It is a life that is refreshed and re-energized, **full of wisdom**, joyful, pure and enlightened, consistent and righteous, rewarding and fulfilled.

So far we have learned that:

- God's law (His rule of action) converts (restores, refreshes) the soul because knowing and keeping His law leads to a fruitful, guiltless life of fellowship with God. (v. 7a)

Today we look at the latter part of verse 7 and how to attain a life full of wisdom. The world offers a lot of "junk" that masquerades as wisdom or truth. Even the Church is increasingly infected with humanistic wisdom, pop psychology/counseling and theological ideas foreign to the plain Word of God. How do we separate Biblical truth and every other "truth"? By finding out what the Lord's testimony is which according to Scripture makes us wise:

Psalms 19:7b ...The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; (NKJV)

If the Lord's testimony makes the simple (all of us!) wise, then we need to know what "testimony" means in this verse. As Christians we think of testimony as our story of salvation, or as relating the events of God's involvement in our life. The world thinks of testimony as the version of facts that an individual would communicate about a given event or circumstance. You may find the definition found in our most common dictionary to be interesting (emphasis mine):

- **Merriam-Webster**

- Etymology: Middle English, from Late Latin & Latin; Late Latin testimonium  
Decalogue, from Latin, evidence, witness, from testis witness -- more at  
TESTAMENT

Date: 14th century

1 a (1) : the tablets inscribed with the Mosaic law (2) : the ark containing the tablets b : a divine decree attested in the Scriptures

2 a : firsthand authentication of a fact : EVIDENCE b : an outward sign c : a solemn declaration usually made orally by a witness under oath in response to interrogation by a lawyer or authorized public official

3 a : an open acknowledgment b : a public profession of religious experience

The reference to Moses' tablets and the Scriptures is not found in the newer dictionaries (imagine that!). Notice the two active ingredients: evidence and witness. The evidence of the Lord is sure. The witness or the declarations of the Lord are sure! They are the divine decrees found in the Holy Bible.

### **The Bible is the firsthand authentication of the facts about Jesus Christ!**

The testimony of the Lord is the solemn proclamation and acknowledgment of all that God has done for you and I. "Testimony" includes the idea of a recalling or presentation of the evidence about an event or deed. For Christians it can be the events surrounding God's providence in our life, or the declaration of what God has done in general.

Most notably and highest in priority, is **the testimony of Jesus Christ**, around which the entire Bible is supernaturally engineered by God.

- **Jesus spoke and enacted only that which He personally witnessed and knew as fact**

- John 3:32-33 And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony. He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. (NKJV)

- **The last book of the Bible is the revealing of the evidence and facts of Jesus Christ's return as the Conquering and Ruling King of Kings**

- Revelation 1:1-2 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. (NKJV)

- **We will become living testimonies of Jesus Christ**

- Matthew 10:18-20 You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. (NKJV)
- While this verse was written specifically to the original disciples sent out by Jesus, it is applicable to us today as Ambassadors of the Gospel of Christ (2 Cor 5.20)

- **The world will make fun of you and hate you for being living evidence of Jesus Christ**

- 2 Timothy 1:8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, (NKJV)

The primary testimony of the Bible is the evidence, declaration and presentation of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Other aspects of God's testimony include:

- The testimony of God's faithfulness (Duet 7.9)
- The testimony of God's mercy (Lam 3.22)
- The testimony of God's goodness (Rom 2.4)
- The testimony of God's care (Luke 12.6)
- The testimony of God's judgment (Ecc 12.14)
- The testimony of God's supremacy (2 Chron 20.6)

1 John 5:10-13 He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record (testimony), **that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.** These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God. (NKJV, emphasis mine)

The testimony of God is the dividing line on which one side stands the "simple" (foolish) and on the other side stand the "wise". All true wisdom starts and ends with God. There is no true wisdom apart from Him.

**You have to know God's testimony in order to be made wise by it.**

God's testimony makes us wise just as God's law restores us. This leads us back to the same question we asked about God's law: how do you know what God's testimony is? Same answer: God's testimony is found in His Word (the Bible) and you have read it, meditate on it and practice it. His testimony is learned through diligent, consistent, serious study of His Written Word and by asking God in prayer to illumine Truth in your heart.

Psalm 25:10 All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, To such as keep His covenant and His testimonies. (NKJV)

God's law is perfect; it restores and refreshes the soul. God's testimony is sure and will make you wise. These are the rewards of a life lived God's way. Tomorrow we will look at the statutes of God and how they bring us joy.

*Lord God, help us to know the testimony of Jesus Christ and to become living testimonies of Him. We ask You to remove our foolishness as Your Word is wondrously illumined in our hearts. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you wise or foolish in your own eyes? When you lean on your wisdom, what is the typical result? Do you look for wisdom anywhere except where God says it is to be found? Would you like to know that your life is based on solid, unchanging and dependable wisdom? Is your life a living testimony of God; can people see God's truth in how you live?

**Application:** There is only one true wisdom and one true place to find it. Only wisdom found in God's Word is reliable and sure. There is a saying today that goes "all truth is God's truth". **Wrong.** The only truth is God's truth, and that truth is found in His Written Word. All other truth or wisdom is only true to the extent in which is grounded, founded and substantiated by God's Word no matter how many degrees, experts or professionals might be cited as "proof". **Man's experience and anecdotal evidence do not make truth.** Man's greatest attempts at wisdom are as silly foolishness compared to God (1Cor 3.19). Learn to measure and accept "truth" (preaching, teaching, counseling, psychology, worldviews, religions, etc.) only to the degree that the "truth" in question is found clearly presented in God's Word. Perhaps some of the "rewarding life" is not yours because you are seeking wisdom from sources other than God.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## A Life of Great Reward - Joy

### Part: 4

Psalm 19:11b - ... And in keeping them there is great reward. (NKJV)

This series of lessons looks at the life most Christians want, many Christians talk about and some Christians experience brief glimpses of... but few attain on a daily, consistent, long-term basis. It is a life that is:

- Refreshed and re-energized, full of wisdom, **joyful**, pure and enlightened, consistent and righteous, rewarding and fulfilled

#### So far we have learned that:

- God's law (His rule of action) converts (restores, refreshes) the soul because knowing and keeping His law leads to a fruitful, guiltless life of fellowship with God. (v. 7a)
- God's testimony (His declaration and evidence of facts), especially of Jesus Christ imparts wisdom to the simple (foolish; anyone devoid of God's truth and wisdom) (v. 7b)

Today we will look at the first part of verse 8 discovering the key to a joyful heart:.

Psalm 19:8a - The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; (NKJV)

First of all notice the assumption that is made: the statutes of the Lord **are right**. This conclusion is stated matter-of-factly and is not presented for discussion or debate. God's statutes are right. Period. It is important to think about this for a moment. Every person has what is called a "worldview" whether they realize it or not. A worldview is a set of presuppositions (something you innately believe is true by default) that each person has developed throughout their life.

For example, a scientist may have a materialistic worldview that assumes everything can be explained without God. So when he looks at life on the earth, he immediately assumes it came to pass through natural processes and his scientific research is based on that PRE-assumption. A worldview that does not include God will embody presuppositions such as:

- All things have a natural explanation
- The physical world is the only reality
- Truth is relative to the situation at hand
- There is no absolute truth
- The purpose of life cannot be known definitively
- Man (particularly "majority rule") is a law unto himself

A worldview without God eliminates the possibility of making a definitive statement about law, morality or truth such as we find in verse 8. Nothing can be absolutely "right" because no man, government or worldly system can ever claim absolute authority. Man can only be "right" until another man rises in authority and power to declare the new version of "right".

As Christians, it is important to understand that part of our worldview is the automatic assumption that "God is right" no matter what. It doesn't matter what age you live in, what society you're a part of or what the prevailing moral climate is. God is right and all of our thoughts, decisions, opinions and knowledge must be founded, grounded and "sounded" through the Word of God.

So what are these "statutes" that are right? Statute is defined as laws or regulations, but the original word "piqqud" is translated as statutes only once and 21 times as "precepts" which I believe more accurately describes the thought of the verse.

- **Precepts**

- A direction or regulation
- A command given as a general rule of principle
- An order issued by an authorized official
- Instruction taken beforehand

The definition that catches my attention however is: **a principle instructing to do a certain action, which is to be obeyed by all in same society of the covenant.**

(Swanson, J. (1997). Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament) (HGK7218). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc).

As Christians we enter into a blood covenant (Heb 7.22) with God at the moment we accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as an atonement for our sins. God's statutes (precepts, regulations, principles, direction) are instructions TO BE OBEYED by everyone who has entered into covenant with Him. If you are saved by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, YOU are part of that covenant.

So God's instruction are right without question, and they are to be obeyed by us because we are part of the New Covenant (Heb 8.13). The result? The heart is rejoiced. This statement ("the heart is rejoiced") once again, is stated matter-of-factly. There is no question, no condition and no ambiguity. The instructions of God are right and when obeyed, our heart will rejoice. Why?

### **Being in right standing with God is the most joyful existence available to man.**

Our heart rejoices because we are in right standing with God; our heart is in tune with Him. By obeying His instructions we live in peace with the Ultimate Authority; guiltless before THE holy standard of the universe. God has created within man a part of our being that can only be happy, fulfilled and peaceful when we know that all things are right with God.

How do you get to that point? By knowing His statutes. That starts of course with salvation and continues throughout our life in a process called "sanctification" (the process of becoming more holy in our behavior and thoughts by conforming to God's Word).

### **You have to know God's statutes before your heart can rejoice.**

How do you know the precepts of God? They are found in His Word (the Bible) and you have read it, meditate on it and practice it in order to know them. His instructions are learned through diligent, consistent, serious study of His Written Word and by asking God in prayer to illumine Truth in your heart.

Psalm 119:25-27 - My soul clings to the dust; Revive me according to Your word. I have declared my ways, and You answered me; Teach me Your statutes. Make me understand the way of Your precepts; So shall I meditate on Your wonderful works. (NKJV)

God's law is perfect; it restores and refreshes the soul. God's testimony is sure and will make you wise. The Lord's precepts are right and will give you a heart full of joy. Tomorrow we will look at the commandments of God and how they give us understanding.

*Holy God, Help us to learn your precepts and obey them. Grant us a joyful heart as we choose to live according to Your instruction. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Is joy missing from your life? Does it parallel your lack of knowledge or obedience of God's statutes? Do you think it is reasonable for God to bless someone with joy when they are ignoring or neglecting His principles ?

**Application:** Knowing God's statutes and keeping naturally results in joy because it puts us in the original condition we were created for: right standing and fellowship with God..

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# A Life of Great Reward - Enlightenment

## Part: 5

Psalm 19:11b - ... And in keeping them there is great reward. (NKJV)

This series of lessons looks at the life most Christians want, many Christians talk about and some Christians experience brief glimpses of... but few attain on a daily, consistent, long-term basis. It is a life that is:

- Refreshed and re-energized, full of wisdom, joyful, **enlightened**, consistent and righteous, rewarding and fulfilled

### So far we have learned that:

- God's law (His rule of action) converts (restores, refreshes) the soul because knowing and keeping His law leads to a fruitful, guiltless life of fellowship with God. (v. 7a)
- God's testimony (His declaration and evidence of facts), especially of Jesus Christ, imparts wisdom to the simple (foolish; anyone devoid of God's truth and wisdom) (v. 7b)
- God's precepts (instructions, directions) are right (by default) and are heart is rejoiced when we keep them (v. 8a)

Today we will look at the latter part of verse 8 discovering the way to enlightenment (understanding):

Psalm 19:8 - The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; (NKJV)

First, what exactly is a commandment? We immediately think of the Law of Moses and the other direct commands in Scripture. And you would be right on both accounts. A commandment is typically obvious and to the point. Don't kill; love your brother; pray without ceasing... imperative statements usually devoid of optional compliance clauses.

### **Our understanding or agreement is ultimately irrelevant to obeying God's commands.**

Pertaining to the Word of God, these commandments are "divine directives". These are marching orders that we have no choice or option to follow. God says do it, and we do it. While there is certainly nothing wrong with studying to understand WHY God commands something, in the end, our understanding of God's motives, or our agreement with them is effectively irrelevant to the issue of obedience.

When I was a Drill Sergeant in the Army, one of the things we had to instill in new combat soldiers was the discipline of response and obedience without question. In the heat and chaos of battle there is no time or place to have a discussion about whether or not the commanding officers orders should be followed. There was no requirement to understand WHY, nor did it matter if we agreed. When the orders are issued, they are to be followed trusting that they are in line with the overall good of the entire battle plan despite personal opinion or cost (this assuming the orders don't violate God's law, but that's another devotional).

Of course humans can be flawed, and orders from commanders can be ultimately flawed. But not so with God.

**God's commands are pure: perfect, complete and holy.**



The word pure is one of those all-inclusive words that typically only God can get away with using. Something is either pure, or it's not. There is not part-pure. Here is the definition from Websters (emphasis mine):

- unmixed with **any** other matter
- free from dust, dirt, or taint
- **spotless, stainless**
- free from harshness or roughness
- being in tune — used of a musical tone
- **being thus and none other**
- sheer, unmitigated
- free from what vitiates, weakens, or pollutes
- containing nothing that does not properly belong

My favorite is the phrase "being thus and no other". Purity is being ALL of something, and NONE of anything else. God's commandments, His orders and divine directives, are pure. They are free from pollution, spot or stain and contain NOTHING that does not properly belong. They are "thus, and none other".

And they "enlighten" the eyes. What does this mean? Enlighten means to shine on, to illumine, to bring light to, to expose and to make clear. It is the process of seeing reality as God sees it.

### **Our vision of life is only as clear as the degree of illumination God has bestowed on us .**

When you enter a dark, unfamiliar room you are likely to stumble, run into things and get lost. And who doesn't love busting their little toe on the corner of something! To the degree that light becomes present, we begin to have a realistic picture of what is in the room and how to exist in it safely. The greater the light, the clearer we can see the details of the room and the greater our confidence and understanding concerning it.

In the same sense, God's commandments are like light in our dark sin-cursed world. God's commandments allow us to properly understand how to navigate and operate in a dark world. The more of God's commands we know, the more the light of understanding brightens our path in life.

### **You have to know God's commandments before they can light your path in life.**

How do you know the commandments of God? They are found in His Word (the Bible) and you have to read it, meditate on it and practice it in order to know them. His commandments are learned through diligent, consistent, serious study of His Written Word and by asking God in prayer to illumine Truth in your heart.

Psalm 119:105 - Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path. (NKJV)

God's law is perfect; it restores and refreshes the soul. God's testimony is sure and will make you wise. The Lord's precepts are right and will give you a heart full of joy. God's commandments are pure and will bring you light and understanding about life. Tomorrow we will look at the fear of the Lord and His righteous judgments.

*Holy Lord, Help us to understand that Your commandments are not restrictive or punitive; they exist to bring light into our life and in keeping them we will be*

*blessed with great spiritual reward. We pray that Your commandments will enlighten our understanding each day. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you stumbling around unsure how God expects you to live? Do you have a confidence that understand how a Christian is to live and what pleases God? When someone asks you about "life" (the purpose, the meaning, the way to live) do you feel confident and sure in answering?

**Application:** If you want to understand "life", know God's commandments. God has given us clear direction about life and His commandments are PERFECT instruction on how to live it. Our purpose and direction is clearly illuminated through the increased knowledge of God's Word.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## A Life of Great Reward - Good Fear

### Part: 6

Psalm 19:11b - ... And in keeping them there is great reward. (NKJV)

This series of lessons looks at the life most Christians want, many Christians talk about and some Christians experience brief glimpses of... but few attain on a daily, consistent, long-term basis. It is a life that is:

- Refreshed and re-energized, full of wisdom, joyful, **enlightened**, consistent and righteous, rewarding and fulfilled

#### **So far we have learned that:**

- God's law (His rule of action) converts (restores, refreshes) the soul because knowing and keeping His law leads to a fruitful, guiltless life of fellowship with God. (v. 7a)
- God's testimony (His declaration and evidence of facts), especially of Jesus Christ, imparts wisdom to the simple (foolish; anyone devoid of God's truth and wisdom) (v. 7b)
- God's precepts (instructions, directions) are right (by default) and are heart is rejoiced when we keep them. (v. 8a)
- God's commandments are pure (by default correct; they are right and nothing other) and enlighten (bring understanding and meaning) to the eyes (the mind, the heart).(v. 8b)

In verse's seven and eight we looked at four different aspects of Gods revealed knowledge to us about how we should live life. We looked at God's law, God's testimony, God's precepts and His commandments.

In verse nine the Psalmist appears to switch gears and begins to talk about the fear of the Lord. But in reality is not a change of subjects at all.

#### **The fear of God is a synonym for His law/testimony/statutes/commandments.**

#### **The purpose of the Law is to put fear into the sinful human heart.**

Deuteronomy 4:10 - especially concerning the day you stood before the Lord your God in Horeb, when the Lord said to me, 'Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that **they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth**, and that they may teach their children.' (NKJV, emphasis mine)

This is a healthy fear, a fear that is meant to lead us to a righteous life. We are not comfortable with this type of language today. When we speak of religion or Christianity we typically want to be filled with words of love... gentle and soft, and pleasing to the ear.

While that is certainly part of the Gospel, another part of the Gospel goes typically neglected and that is the part about fear, the fear of the Lord. God's law, His commandments and instruction are meant to strike fear into our hearts realizing that if we transgress a holy God that there are consequences to follow.

It's amazing and sad today that people have very little fear of those in authority over them. I remember growing up being very fearful of authority. But it was a good fear. We have turned the word "fear" into something that is always negative and to be avoided.

A good healthy fear of authority keeps us on a righteous path. I was significantly afraid of violating the instructions or rules of my parents, schoolteachers... any adult

for that matter. Even the police today don't enjoy a healthy fear (respect) from many people. Entire generations of adults and kids are growing up with a very casual and unconcerned attitude towards authority.

Some people might say that this is a good thing. Some would have us believe that to live in fear is a negative. **And of course to live in the WRONG KIND of fear is a negative.** For a Christian to live with a continual, ungrounded fear of not being saved, or a fear of God not keeping His promises, or a fear that the Lord will not care for you is an unhealthy and sinful type of fear. A fear man that causes you to bow to the wishes of the world or forsake the wishes of God is unhealthy. To be a fearful person in general... fearful of living life, fearful of troubles and trials, fearful of what might happen next... those are the types of fears that are wrong because we need to be putting our trust in God and that God will see us through everything in this life.

Matthew 10:28 - And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (NKJV)

We need and should have a very deep and healthy fear/respect of God. This is a fear based on a proper knowledge of his holiness, of his authority, and of the consequences for violating the commandments of our Creator. **This is the type of fear that keeps us on the path of righteousness and guards our way.** This fear is a built-in sensor and spiritual alarm that tells us when we have transgressed the holy standard of our Lord.

**The "fear of the Lord" is a synonym for the other four descriptions we have studied:  
law, testimony, commandments and statutes.**

Notice what verse nine says about this fear: it is clean and enduring. **This is a fear to be desired** and embraced because it is meant for our good. It is clean which is another way of saying that it is pure. It is holy, without fault and lacks anything unwholesome.

Malachi 3:6 - "For I am the Lord, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. (NKJV)

The fear of the Lord is pure... and it endures forever. It never ends, it never goes away, it never fails and we don't ever have to worry about it changing. Unlike man's religions, governments or what ever happens to be popular at the moment, we do not have to worry about the ways of God ever changing, vacillating or fluctuating.

**Ignorance of God leads to the wrong kind of fear.  
You have to know God in order to fear Him in the positive manner.**

How do you know God? He is found in prayer and time in His presence. He is revealed through His Word (the Bible) and you have to read it, meditate on it and practice it in order to know Him. Knowledge of God is learned through diligent, consistent, serious study of His Written Word and by asking God in prayer to illumine Truth in your heart.

Joshua 4:24 - that all the peoples of the earth may know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever." (NKJV)

God's law is perfect; it restores and refreshes the soul. God's testimony is sure and will make you wise. The Lord's precepts are right and will give you a heart full of joy. God's commandments are pure and will bring light and understanding to your life. The fear of the Lord directs us in the way of righteousness and can be trusted as holy and enduring. Tomorrow we will look at the righteous judgments of the Lord.

*Holy Lord, Help us to understand what a true and healthy fear of the Lord is. Teach us to embrace the fear is a way to guard our life and keep us on your path of righteousness. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you like the bumper sticker - "no fear"? Do you have a literal and tangible fear of violating the law? Man's law? God's law? If not, does it parallel a lack of spiritual depth in your life? Does fearing the Lord seem "wrong"? Has your concept of it changed after reading this?

**Application:** If you do not feel, sense or experience a real, tangible fear when you sin and violate God's holy standards, then you have become desensitized and lack the biblical fear of the Lord. If this is true for you today, pray and asked God to restore this respect for Him so that you can walk in God's paths and lead a righteous life.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# A Life of Great Reward - Judgments

## Part: 7

Psalm 19:11b - ... And in keeping them there is great reward. (NKJV)

This series of lessons looks at the life most Christians want, many Christians talk about and some Christians experience brief glimpses of... but few attain on a daily, consistent, long-term basis. It is a life that is:

- Refreshed and re-energized, full of wisdom, joyful, enlightened, consistent and righteous, rewarding and fulfilled

### So far we have learned that:

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- God's precepts (instructions, directions) are right (by default) and are heart is rejoiced when we keep them. (v. 8a)
- God's commandments are pure (by default correct; they are right and nothing other) and enlighten (bring understanding and meaning) to the eyes (the mind, the heart).(v. 8b)
- The fear of the Lord (health respect and awe; a synonym for His law and Word) is clean (pure, holy) and endures forever (does not change). (v. 9a)

It is our natural human tendency to be defensive when we're told we are wrong. When other people tell us that we are wrong there is certainly room for evaluation of their opinion and at times even a defense on our part.

It is altogether entirely a different thing however **when the Lord tells us we are wrong**. Any defensiveness, excuses, or attempt to diminish the degree of our transgression only betrays the level of pride and foolishness that is in our hearts.

The word "judgment" gets a bad rap today. It seems that one of the most common phrases of our time is "the Bible says don't judge". (Without getting off on an entirely different subject let me say that what the Bible actually says is "don't judge in a way that will bring judgment upon yourself" which is an entirely different thought altogether).

Psalm 19:9b - The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. (NKJV)

This devotional is about the Lord's judgments, not man's. You won't hear many people declare "the Lord shouldn't judge". Even the unbelieving world realizes that part of "religion" involves a higher authority with a higher standard who judges our behavior based on that standard.

### What are judgments?

- The formal declaration of an authoritative opinion
- It is an official proclamation given by one in power
- A divine decision

A judgment is not a casual opinion to be accepted or rejected by the hearer. The Lord's judgments are true and binding **regardless of whether we are aware of it**,

**acknowledge it or agree with it.** We are bound by the Lord's judgments no matter what the circumstances or what reasons we may have to feel otherwise.

That sounds kind of harsh on the surface, and if we were talking about a man's judgments it would indeed be harsh. But we're not talking about man. We're talking about the Lord.

The Lord's judgments are true and righteous. In this respect they're not to be feared as something that will harm us or that will lead to anything other than our ultimate good. As with all things **pertaining to the Lord** even the unpleasant (to us) is something to be desired not avoided.

**The Lord's judgments are true which means:**

- steadfast, honest, just
- conforming to true reality
- fully realized
- fitted, formed, and fully functional
- accurate
- logically necessary
- strict in the truest sense
- without variation
- balanced, level and square

**The Lord's judgments or righteous which means:**

- acting in accord with divine or moral law
- absolutely right or justifiable
- arising from justice or morality
- genuine and good
- legitimate, proper and fitting
- wise and right

So you can see by these definitions that anything true and righteous (not just judgments), is something to be desired. As with everything in God's Word, God's judgments are revealed to us for our ultimate benefit and good. The Lord wants us to live the most blessed and fruitful life possible. There is only one way to do that and that is to allow the Lord to be the **judge** of our life.

**You can't live by the Lord's judgments if you don't know them.**

How do you know them? They are revealed through His Word (the Bible) and you have to read it, meditate on it and practice it in order to know them. Knowledge of God's judgments is learned through diligent, consistent, serious study of His Written Word and by asking God in prayer to illumine Truth in your heart.

Revelation 19:2a - For true and righteous are His judgments...." (NKJV)

God's law is perfect; it restores and refreshes the soul. God's testimony is sure and will make you wise. The Lord's precepts are right and will give you a heart full of joy. God's commandments are pure and will bring you light and understanding about life. The fear of the Lord directs us into righteousness and can be trust as holy and enduring. The Lord's judgments are pure and righteous, sufficient to guide our life towards increasing holiness. Tomorrow we will look at how all of this leads to rewarding life!

*Holy Lord, Help us to embrace Your judgments rather than fear them or be deny them. Help us to see that Your ways are pure and righteous even when they don't feel good to us. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** When you think of "judgment" have you been influence by the world's mantra of "the Bible says don't judge"? Has that distorted your understanding of God's judgments? Do you fear or embrace God's judgments? Has your definition of "God's judgments" changed any since reading this?

**Application:** God is pure and righteous. His judgments are always perfect true and when we embrace them, and change our life accordingly, we will experience blessing and reward.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## A Life of Great Reward - Gold & Honey

### Part: 8

Psalms 19:11b - ... And in keeping them there is great reward. (NKJV)

This series of lessons looks at the life most Christians want, many Christians talk about and some Christians experience brief glimpses of... but few attain on a daily, consistent, long-term basis. It is a life that is:

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- God's commandments are pure (by default correct; they are right and nothing other) and enlighten (bring understanding and meaning) to the eyes (the mind, the heart).(v. 8b)
- The fear of the Lord (health respect and awe; a synonym for His law and Word) is clean (pure, holy) and endures forever (does not change). (v. 9a)
- The Lord's judgments (divine decrees/opinions) are true and righteous (for our best good always to be desired). (v.9b)

Psalms 19:10-11 - More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward. (NKJV)

It is not hard for us as humans to understand the feeling and the desire of wanting gold (money, riches). The desire for wealth is a universal emotion that has been common to mankind since the beginning of history.

Can you say today that you have ever wanted God's Word as much as you have wanted money? Here we have in Psalms 19 the Creator of the Universe telling us that his commandments and judgments are to be desired more than gold. Then to emphasize the point God says more than "much fine gold". Not just gold. Not just some gold. MUCH FINE GOLD.

God knows how man operates deep down and His first appeal to our understanding is a comparison to something that we can NOT mistake. We all know what it is to desire money. Secondly the Lord then appeals to our fleshly appetite for sweets stating that His law is sweeter than "honey and the honeycomb" which was the equivalent of candy in that time. Having compared the desire for Scripture to **two things we can easily understand** (possessions, appetite) it leaves us without excuse for not getting the point of verse 10: there is nothing in this life to be desired more than the word of God.

The Lord goes on to tell us that through the law and commandments we are warned. Warned of what? We are warned of the pitfalls and dangers of living in this sin cursed

world. Knowing and obeying God's commandments serves as a warning and deterrent to the evils of a world full of sin.

**If we are doing what God commands,  
then we won't be sinning...  
and we won't be getting in trouble.**

God statutes and judgments are like traffic signs and signals warning us when to stop, when to turn, what to be on the lookout for and when we are going the wrong direction, down the wrong road. DANGER AHEAD!. The more we know God's Word and meditate on it, the more we will be aware of wrong; and the more we will avoid the dangers of sin.

Finally, God tells us that keeping His commandments brings great reward. If God says it brings great reward then we can be assured that it does. The Lord does not make statements lightly. **What He plainly says, He plainly means.** We can be fully committed and secure that obeying God's law and trusting in His judgments will lead to the most blessed and joyful life possible.

The Lord wants us to have the most spiritually abundant and fruitful life possible. There is only one way to do that and you can only know how by knowing God's Word.

**You can't be rewarded by keeping God's  
commandments if you don't know them.**

How do you know them? They are revealed through His Word (the Bible) and you have to read it, meditate on it and practice it in order to know them. Knowledge of God's law is learned through diligent, consistent, serious study of His Written Word and by asking God in prayer to illumine Truth in your heart.

God's law is perfect; it restores and refreshes the soul. God's testimony is sure and will make you wise. The Lord's precepts are right and will give you a heart full of joy. God's commandments are pure and will bring you light and understanding about life. The fear of the Lord directs us into righteousness and can be trust as holy and enduring. The Lord's judgments are pure and righteous, sufficient to guide our life.

God's way is more valuable than any riches as this world can offer and is sweeter than any delight the world can give. His commandments keeps us on the path of righteousness. God's law results in a life of reward both now and in eternity.

Revelation 22:12-13 - "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last." (NKJV)

The reward comes now in the form of a peaceful and joyful life. It comes in eternity when the Lord returns to take us home and reward us for our service and faith in Him.

*Gracious God, Help us to understand that Your Law is meant for our good and keeping it brings great reward. Help us to desire Your commandments more than wealth, and Your Word more than the finest food. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you see God's commandments as restrictive or liberating? Do you think keeping God's robs you of life's reward (fun)? Have you ever desired God's word more than money or food?

**Application:** Think about it. God is perfect, loving, holy and just. If He gives us a commandment, or declares a law, it is meant only for our good. Knowing it and keeping it will only lead to a peaceful, guiltless, joy-filled life. God's laws don't rob us, they reward us.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## A Peaceful Life

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.  
(NKJV)

There is one thing almost every person wants deep down: peace. Not just peace in their nation (absence of war), but peace in their relationships (absence of conflict), and peace in their mind (absence of confusion and guilt). Very few people ever find true peace and it is simply because they have the wrong definition of peace to begin with and they search for it in the wrong place.

### **True peace is not the absence of conflict**

The absence of conflict is at best just a temporary ceasefire in hostilities when both sides are reorganizing for attack, whether it be two people, or two nations. Despite Nobel Peace Prize winners, the United Nations, peace treaties, anti-war groups and peace accords... there has not been a single time of peace in all the history of mankind.

People search for peace in from many sources. Despite self-help seminars, psychiatrists, group therapy, eastern religion, myriads of drugs, entertainment, leisure and pleasure unlimited... there is very little peace in the lives of individuals today.

### **True peace is not passively getting along and ignoring the obvious**

For some, the idea of peace is to ignore problems and act as if they don't exist. Passivity is seen as the key to cultivating personal peace or world peace. In many families, turmoil or bitterness boils just under the calm surface of unspoken tension. How often it is decided that if the problems (that all are fully aware of) are just ignored, it will go away over time. It is often expressed as "we just don't bring it up".

### **True peace is not escape**

Avoiding or temporarily eluding the source of conflict or guilt does not magically make it disappear. In fact, it only serves to intensify and aggravate the problem. Now days there is a diversion or cure-all for every difficulty and strife that comes our way. We have learned to medicate, entertain and drug ourselves into passive blissfulness. The only problem is, when the alcohol wears off, when the movie is over or the pills run out... the fake peace runs out too only to leave even greater turmoil in its place.

### **True peace begins in the hearts of individuals and only on God's terms.**

Peace cannot be enforced externally with lasting success. It only comes when the hearts of individuals turn to God, repent of the sin that is the root of the conflict, and replace it with righteousness and goodness with God's help.

### **True peace begins with individuals who are at peace with God**

There can be no peace in your life **unless you are at peace with God**. Peace with God comes very simply by dealing with the sin in your life on God's terms. Repentance and righteousness: the two ingredients of peace. It's no secret, no magic trick or new revelation. Just good old fashioned being sorry for your sin (which causes conflict and robs us of peace), turning from it (repentance), asking for God's forgiveness (obtaining Godly peace); and living a holy and righteous life before others (cultivating peace).

When individuals find true peace in God;  
only then families can be at peace.

When families are at peace then churches, communities, cities and nations can be at peace.

There will never be “world peace” until Jesus returns. It is futile to work for “world peace”; instead we should be striving for “individual peace”. The Bible calls this being a PeaceMaker.

## **True peace comes from dealing with sin and instilling righteousness**

Matthew 5:9 **Blessed are the peacemakers**, For they shall be called sons of God. (NKJV)

Matthew 10:34-39 “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. **I did not come to bring peace** but a sword.

It appears that Jesus contradicts Himself in these two verses. He doesn't. What He is teaching is that **peace does not come without a price**. Very often violence and confrontation must occur before true peace can be produced. Violence and conflict with what? SIN.

Jesus didn't come as a “love guru” or peacenik. He didn't float around in a drug stupor chanting “peace, love and drugs, man”. He came as a warrior teaching us to destroy sin in our lives with a vengeance. Jesus didn't offer false peace, false love, false unity or false hope. He willingly came to pay for OUR sin through HIS brutal death. He sacrificed Himself, though completely innocent, so that we would have power over sin in our lives and obtain true peace that only He can offer.

**We are in a sin war.** We are to exterminate sin in our life with “extreme prejudice” (relentlessly, mercilessly, fiercely). Sin is not to be toyed with, ignored or taken casually. Peace can only be gained through its destruction and the infusion of righteousness by God's standards.

A lack of peace is always caused by sin in the heart of individuals. Until it is removed and holiness fills the void, there can be no true peace.

## **How can you have true peace?**

- You have to **start with God's peace** in your own life through salvation
  - Romans 5:1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, (NKJV)
- Help others make peace with God by **sharing the Gospel**
  - Ephesians 6:15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; (NKJV)
  - Romans 10:15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!” (NKJV)
- Make peace **between you and other individuals**
  - Matthew 5:23-24 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (NKJV)
  - Romans 12:17-18 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (NKJV)
- Help make peace **between other people**

- Titus 2:11-15 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you. (NKJV)
- Romans 14:17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (NKJV)
- **God's Word has everything we need** to have peace, and spread peace
  - 2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (NKJV)
  - 2 Peter 1:2-3 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, (NKJV)

Peace is a blessing from God. He longs to grant us in peace no matter what life throws at us. **We have to obtain peace on God's terms. Deal with sin; repent and live righteously.** True peace will then be yours and you will be prepared to bring peace to others.

*God of Peace, we pray that You will give us understanding of true peace made possible only through Your Son. We pray for discernment to be able to identify the sin that is robbing us of our peace. We pray for the spiritual discipline to deal with sin. Thank you for giving us peace, for being our Peace, for sending Peace to die for our sin so that peace would be possible. In the Name of the Prince of Peace, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Is your life peaceful no matter what the circumstances? Do you recognize that sin is ALWAYS the source of conflict, whether in you, or in someone else; and has to be dealt with?

**Application:** God is the only source of peace. The closer you are to Him, the more peace you will have. Determine that you will do whatever it takes to make regular, substantial time to spend with God in prayer and Bible Study.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## God, You Already Know

Psalms 69.5 O God, You know my foolishness; And my sins are not hidden from You.

Whenever someone finds out our sin, or something we said that we shouldn't have, we are rightfully embarrassed and ashamed. There are times even now when I think of something I did years ago and it still causes me to blush with embarrassment because of the foolishness of it.

### **But with God, things are different. Like usual.**

It is a **good** thing that God knows our foolishness, and that none of our sins are hidden from Him. If we truly understand this and take it to heart, it is very liberating and has many benefits:

#### • **Freedom**

- We can live free of the pretense of trying to be perfect or hide our foolishness from God and others. God already knows what we're going to do. He is just waiting for us to understand that fact.
- We no longer have to live trying to measure up and earn God's favor. God is fully aware of our weaknesses, our foolishness, our silly efforts, our habitual sins and our embarrassing effort to try and cover them up.
- God knows. Take comfort that He accepts you anyway. Be joyful that He forgives and patiently works with us knowing our next failure is a quick certainty. Experience the freedom and refreshment of realizing that God knows we will be foolish, knows we will sin, and yet loves us and saves us anyway.

Psalms 44. 21 Would not God search this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart.

#### • **Accountability**

- Accountability is a strong deterrent to our sin and bad decisions. If we were truly convinced that someone we admired and respected would see our sin, the embarrassment and shame of that fact would help us to say "no" more often.
- Think of the one person in your life today that you most admire; that you most would not want to disappoint; that you would be most ashamed if they found out about that sin (yeah, you know the one I'm talking about)... if they found out about that one sin you keep falling in to.
- How much more accountability is there knowing that our Creator, the God of the Universe knows all about these sins? Why is that not more of a deterrent? Probably because our knowledge of God is weak; our understanding of His character is shallow; the amount of time and fellowship we have with Him is insufficient.
- Our understanding that God knows, God sees and God cannot be deceived can be our greatest accountability factor if we cultivate this knowledge and spend time in His presence.

Jude 14-15 ..."Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."

#### • **Honesty**

- God knows how foolish we are. God knows our every sin even if we fool ourselves about it. This frees us to quit trying to put the best face on our sin.
- We don't have to play word games with God. We don't have to be "spin doctors" who confess sin but paint it in the best possible light so it doesn't sound too bad. We don't have to minimize our foolish mistakes and besetting sins when we speak to God.
- In our daily lives, we struggle to always downplay, minimize, sugarcoat and dress up our foolish sinfulness to avoid the embarrassment, loss of reputation, and discomfort that comes from it.
- We can quit all that nonsense with God. We are probably more foolish and more sinful than we will even admit when we ARE trying to be honest. God knows how we deceive even ourselves.
- So enjoy the liberating freedom of God's knowledge and shed all the pretense and anxiety about what you really are. God already knows.

1 John 3. 20 For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things.

### • **Forgiveness**

- God knows how foolish we are, and how sinful we are, and yet He forgives us anyway. He knows with perfect clarity the depths to which we fall and yet He accepts us with open arms each time we sincerely repent and ask to be restored.
- God's perfect knowledge of our sin and foolishness is not embarrassing; it does not drive us from Him. To the contrary, it draws us into the embrace of the One who loves us despite knowing the truth we so ably hide from those around us.

Ephesians 1. 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace...

### • **Dependence**

- When we begin to understand that God has a crystal clear picture of who we really are, we become all the more dependent on Him.
  - Dependent on Him to rescue us from ourselves
  - Dependent on Him to forgive us
  - Dependent on Him to accept us anyway
  - Dependent on Him to teach us how to not be foolish and sinful
  - Dependent on Him to give us the power to have victory over sin
- Dependent on Him to restore our joy and fellowship after the embarrassment and shame has run its course

2 Cor 3.5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God...

God knows us; better than we know ourselves. This should bring us great comfort and joy instead of timidity or embarrassment. Learn to live in the freedom and blessedness of our Great God's perfect and complete understanding of who we really are.

Can we truly be changed by anyone who does not completely know and understand our true nature to begin with? We don't know ourselves; we deceive ourselves. We are masters at deceiving others about our true nature. So that leaves God the sole Person who can change our lives, give us victory over sin and make us holy.



*God, You know my innermost foolishness and my secret sin that I so masterfully hide from everyone around me. Forgive me. Restore me. Change me. May I start with today, resting in the freedom that You know all there is to know about me, and yet You still want to continue to love me. What more could I possibly want? Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you open and honest with God about the frequency, nature, severity and even the pleasure you have in sin? Do you find it stressful or liberating to realize that God sees through all our attempts to downplay, justify or rationalize our sin?

**Application:** Some people just ignore their sin and hope God doesn't notice. Others try to convince even God that their sin is not what it really is. Learn to be honest with God and enjoy the blessing of a clear conscience.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## How Much Is Enough?

Proverbs 30:8b ...Give me neither poverty nor riches... (NKJV)

The general consensus today concerning income is that more is better. And increasing one's income is the primary deciding factor in employment decisions.

More is not always better. The Bible is full of warnings concerning the dangers of riches. There is the myth that wealth makes life easy and if we only had lots of money, we could do all those things God wants us to do. It is the very rare person who does not allow abundant wealth to draw them away from the things of God.

Should our primary goal be to "climb the ladder" and increase our income at every chance? While it is not innately wrong, it should NOT be the primary consideration.

**God's will and direction should take precedence over all other issues, including pay increases.**

Let me stop here to say that money is not evil. Money is a tool. Money is useful in God's Kingdom. God created money. Money is a major topic in the Bible.. Money is only evil when we pursue it, instead of God. Money is evil when we begin to treat it as OURS instead of God's.

Proverbs 15:16 Better is a little with the fear of the LORD, Than great treasure with trouble. (NKJV)

The general Biblical principle about money is that **it all belongs to God** and we should follow His direction in the use of it (Matt 6.21). We should be content with what we have at any given moment (1Tim 6.6).

God allows some people to prosper financially and we should not covet their wealth. God allows others to be impoverished and we should not ignore their needs. Most of us fall in the middle somewhere. A good rule of thumb (not a legalistic standard) concerning income is Proverbs 30.7-9:

- Two things I request of You (Deprive me not before I die): Remove falsehood and lies far from me;
- Be honest. Ask God for integrity in financial matters and to not allow money to cause you to lie and cheat.
- Give me neither poverty nor riches— Feed me with the food allotted to me;
- Ask God to give you just what you need to do His will. It's okay if you don't long to be poor. Financial poverty is not a requirement for salvation. God does not command us to be poor. Neither are we to disdain it if God has chosen poverty to be our lot in life for His purposes. Ask the Lord to provide just the right amount of what you need and learn to be content because it is the perfect amount.
- Lest I be full and deny You, And say, "Who is the LORD?"
- The more comfortable and secure we are in the pleasures of this world, the less we will naturally depend on God. Don't desire a level of prosperity that removes your need to depend on God. Don't allow the care of riches and trust in financial security to consume your time and energy.
- Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God. (NKJV)
- Financial poverty does not produce "holiness" by default. God loves us. He doesn't want us to starve and beg and be tempted to steal to feed our family. Certainly, God may use extreme poverty at times to purify His children, but in general, the Lord provides for those of His Household. He knows what our needs are, and if He can feed the birds, He can feed us.

- The closer our fellowship with God, the more we will come to realize His perfect provision in our lives. He gives us exactly what we need, exactly when we need it. God is just waiting for us to discover it!

Luke 12:22-26 Then He said to His disciples, “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing. Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest? (NKJV)

Neither the despair of poverty, nor the indulgence or riches should be our desire.

**Contentment comes from having just what we need as determined by a loving God!** This brings freedom despite our bank balance:

- We aren't in want and constant need physically to the point of despair;
- Nor do we have a never-ending, never satisfied craving for more and more and more riches.

This leaves us to enjoy life, content with what God has granted us for this day.

**Tomorrow will take care of itself.**

*Father, if we desire good things for our children, how much more is Your desire to take care of us? Grant us the wisdom to understand and believe that You will care for us and to be content with the perfect portion You have allotted us today. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you content with your income? If you get a higher income, will you be content then? For how long? Why?

**Application:** There is no amount of money that will make a discontent heart become contented. Contentment is only found in God's will. Ask God to give you wisdom about money.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Lessons From Sam

Matthew 21:16 ...And Jesus said to them, "Yes. Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise'? " (NKJV)

There is a little boy at our church who continues to teach me spiritual lessons although he couldn't even tell you what "spiritual lesson" means. I'm not sure how old he is, maybe six or seven. I don't want to use his real name, so let's call him Sam.

Sam is blind and uses a guide stick to get around which will be relevant later in this story. In the past couple of months I have been humbled by this vibrant little fellow and his zest for life and the Lord.

### Lesson One

A few weeks ago on a Sunday we were singing a reverent, serious, slow tempo song in our morning worship. Our seating is angled in a type of semi-circle that allowed me to look across the auditorium to see Sam sitting next to the aisle a couple of rows from the front.

All during that reverent, serious song, Sam just clapped away and sang his heart out. He was the only person in the entire auditorium clapping, and not exactly in time to the rhythm of the song. It was interesting to notice the reactions of different people. Many folks were smiling in admiration and a few even had tears in their eyes watching this unashamed and I'm-unaware-that-anyone-is-looking-at-me expression of worship from a child who hadn't "learned" yet that you're not supposed to clap at the wrong time in church.

It appeared to make a few people uneasy, and sadly, one or two appeared to have a "why-don't-you-make-him-stop" expression (although I obviously have no way of knowing what they were actually thinking).

At that moment I realized with incredible clarity just how influenced I am by what others think about me and how carefully I subconsciously avoid doing anything that would make me look "funny" or might "embarrass" me. Don't get me wrong, I know there is appropriate self-control to consider, and that all things should be done "decently and in order" (1 Cor 14.40). This isn't a commentary about church worship. It's a commentary about undistracted focus on the Lord.

It was a sobering lesson for me to see Sam worshipping the Lord totally oblivious to what anyone thought of it. He wasn't even aware of other people's observations or opinions.

**Sam's physical blindness allowed him  
to have true spiritual sight.  
How many times does our physical sight  
cause us spiritual blindness?**

"Unless you become like one of these children..." I learned from a blind child the true heart of worship and Christian liberty because he had not yet been spoiled by peer pressure, embarrassment or expectation; nor was he distracted from his Savior as he sung his little heart out to the Lord.

### Lesson Two

Sam is very loving and outgoing little boy. He routinely makes his way around to some of the adult men before church starts to say hello. Using his guide cane he gets around really well and doesn't hesitate to ask for help from anyone who may be standing near. It is a picture of unspoiled trust in other people.

I walked up behind him in the hallway making his way to his Sunday school class. The difference this time was that no adult or older child was walking with him to show him the way. Towards the end of the hallway he paused, and I could tell that he was trying to get his bearings as he tapped his cane around to see where he was.

I said "Sam, where you heading? Do you need some help?" He said "Which way is the stairwell?" I told him it was just ahead, gave him a little turn in the right direction and walked with him to the first step. I got a little concerned at that point because it was obvious no one was helping him negotiate two flights of stairs, and then the second floor hallways to his Sunday school class.

"Sam, is anyone with you? Do you need me to help you get to class". His reply immediately brought tears to my eyes and made me realize how whiney, faithless and complicated we can be as adults.

"Nope, don't need any help" he said, "This is my first day to go to class alone. Don't need a parent to help. I gotta grow up some time". And off he went up the stairs tapping away one step at a time.

1 Corinthians 3:1-2 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; (NKJV)

## "I gotta grow up some time."

It's amazing how uncomplicated the truth really is some time. Sam had a difficult task to learn, and it was time to learn. He didn't whine or complain or procrastinate or stay satisfied with the easier solution of having someone help him. It was time to step up and GROW and that's what he was doing. If only we could see things with such clarity.

Ephesians 4:14-15 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— (NKJV)

What areas of your Christian walk should be alot more "grown up" than they are? Are you growing up in Christ or still waiting around for an "adult" to help you?

Sam unknowingly taught me two invaluable lessons: keep my eyes on the Lord and not on other people... and just do what you have to do when its time to grow up. No excuses, no whining, just grow up.

*Heavenly Father, help us to see only You, to worship and serve You as if no one is looking at us. Give us the simple courage to just do whatever it takes when it is time to grow up. In Jesus Name, amen.*

**Contemplation:** How much more witnessing would you do or worship would you express if you weren't worried about how people viewed you? What do you think would change in your spiritual life if you were "blind" to everything except the Lord Jesus? What areas of your Christian life are not as grown up as they should? Are you growing up "in all things" in Christ "who is the Head"?

**Application:** The Lord of course was so right when He said we need to become like little children. They see things with such clarity and uncomplicated simplicity some times. Serve the Lord as if people aren't watching, and just do what you have to do to grow up in your faith. Don't complicate it.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Who Is Like God?

Psalms 35:10 All my bones shall say, "LORD, who is like You...?" (NKJV)

Do you have a sense of amazement, wonder and awe about God? When you think of Him, are you left in speechless contemplation of what, or who, could possibly be compared to God Almighty? "Lord, who is like You?" The rhetorical answer is, of course, **NO ONE!**

There are so many things about God that are wonderful and amazing, it should be hard to think His name without being left speechless. What words can adequately express God?

At this point, you may be thinking "well, that makes for some nice reading or maybe a good song; but that's not really how it is in every day life when I think of God." Well, let's just see if we can begin to change that!

God is Eternal. He has always existed. Nothing existed before Him. He did not come from anywhere or anything.

## HE WAS. HE IS. HE WILL BE. Does that amaze you?

Have you ever contemplated what "eternal" means? It doesn't mean God was the first living Being; that would indicate He hasn't always been here. He was FIRST, but only because He has always BEEN.

"But God has to come from somewhere right?" **No.** "I mean, He's been around for like gazillions of years, yeah, but everything starts somewhere, right?" **No.**

**God had no beginning.** He IS. He is "I AM" (Exo 3.14). He is SELF-EXISTING... the fact that "existence" exists, only exists because God IS. Deep, huh?

He is Eternity. If you subtracted from God whatever amount of time you can possibly conceive, it would not lessen His life span one second. There's an old illustration about "eternity" that allows us just a glimpse of what it means:

Imagine a bird. Just an average everyday sparrow. You fill up a bucket of sand. The bird is trained, and able, to take one grain of sand in its beak, fly all the way to the moon, and drop it off. Our sparrow then flies back to earth, gets one more grain of sand, and makes the trip again.

The bird continues this process until the bucket of sand is empty. Once done, you take the bird to the sand box in your back yard. The sparrow then takes one grain of sand from the box and begins his trip to the moon.

After the sandbox is emptied, one grain at a time, each deposited on the moon, you take the bird to the beach. The bird must now clear the entire beach, one grain at a time, flying to moon and back each time. Then it must clear every beach, on every coast in the world. One grain at a time. Each flown to the moon.

When all the beaches are done, you take our weary sparrow to the Great Sahara Desert. It's task now is to clear the entire Sahara; then EVERY desert in the world, one grain at a time. When that is done, you drain the oceans, and the bird has to clear every grain of sand from the ocean floor, one at a time, flying to the moon, with one grain of sand each trip.

When that is all done, not even ONE SECOND of time will have elapsed in ETERNITY.

Eternity is impossible to explain in the human language. Illustrations like this help us BEGIN to get a grasp, but it is well beyond our comprehension.

**Does it amaze you that God has ALWAYS BEEN?** It's a **little** easier for us to comprehend something being eternal **into the future**, because we don't have to struggle with the idea of NO beginning. God had no beginning. God had no beginning. God had no beginning.

I AM that I AM. The First and Last. No beginning, no end. Everything else in all of existence began in Him, but He did not ever "begin".

If that doesn't amaze you, I'm not sure anything can.

*Great I AM, grant us a glimpse of Your Eternal Existence. May Your Glory cause us to stand in awe at the sound of Your Name. Who is like You Lord! In the Name of the Eternal Son, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Does anything about God amaze you? Can you remember the last time, if ever, that you were speechless or amazed about God?

**Application:** Our entertainment mad world sucks the "amazement" and "wonder" about God from our hearts and minds. The only cure is time with God.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Really, Who Is Like Our God?

Psalm 35:10 All my bones shall say, "LORD, who is like You...?" (NKJV)

Yesterday we talked about Eternity and that God had no beginning. Now that you've got that all settled :) let's take a look at some more wondrous things about God. Have you ever considered:

- God knew in eternity PAST exactly what would happen for all of eternity future. He knew what man would do. He knew what He would have to do to save us, yet still did it!
- Jesus knew for all eternity what would be required of Him. Yet He willingly chose to be incarnated as a man.
  - He knew in the womb that He was God, but was still a normal baby.
  - He knew as small child what His destiny was, yet still lived like a normal child.
  - He knew His entire life what fate awaited Him. Yet He grew up like any other kid in Israel.
  - He was God, the King of the Universe, and yet allowed prideful wicked men to treat Him as if He was the lowest of dogs... and had known for an eternity the events would occur.
- Run this one through the old cerebral meat grinder:
  - God created the universe.
  - God created the earth.
  - God created man.
  - Man rebelled against God and God knew it would happen.
  - God came to earth as a man.
  - God was killed by man.
  - God was forsaken by Himself.
  - God was resurrected from the "dead".
  - Man gets the reward of eternal life and the only part he did was sin!
  - Go figure.

This is not a systematic statement of doctrine, so don't read it that way. It would take volumes to comprehensively cover all the statements in this devotion. It's meant to cause us to think about the fact that **God does everything, then rewards us!** Amazing!

- Think of what God does for us...
  - We rebel and sin, so God provided salvation for us.
  - We do our own thing, so God draws us to Himself.
  - We are incapable of righteousness, so God gives the faith needed to respond to Him.
  - We are wicked and sinful, so God grants holiness and the Spirit to guide us.
  - Then God gives us eternal life as if we did something to deserve it!

Our God is amazing! Everything He requires of us, He provides; then rewards us as if we did it ourselves. It's mind boggling. And humbling.

*Amazing God, who is like You?*

**Contemplation:** Have you ever thought about the fact that God does everything for us, and yet we are the recipients of His love and blessings?

**Application:** Take time to contemplate the truth about God. Search out the amazing wonder of His love.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## What Matters to God

Psalm 51:3 - For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. (NKJV)

One of the evidences of authenticity about the Bible is that it never covers up the ugliness in its characters lives. David is perfect example.

He is the only person in the Bible described as a "man after God's own heart" (Acts 13.22). And yet there are some things about him that would curl your toenails:

- At times his children despised him - 2 Sam 6.16
- His guilt at being a poor parent would cause him problems later - 2 Sam 18.33
- He was living it up in luxury while his men were out fighting for the country - 2 Sam 11.1
- He lusted after another man's wife while her husband was off serving as a soldier - 2 Sam 11.2
- Committed adultery with her - 2 Sam 11.2-5
- Murders the husband - 2 Sam 11.6-25
- Steals his wife - 2 Sam 11.26-27
- The resulting child dies because of the sin - 2 Sam 12.15-23

What makes a man guilty of such wickedness earn the exclusive title of "man after God's own heart"? No doubt most who are reading this are not guilty of murder; even less doubt that many ARE guilty of adultery, poor parenting and as a host of other sins.

Are we capable of being called a person "after God's own heart", or was that just some special blessing bestowed on David? Although it might be an over-simplification, I think the quality that was the "active ingredient" for David was sincere and thorough repentance. And while there are many Scriptures we can point to, Psalm 51 shows us in nutshell why David was a Godly man.

Written following the Prophet Nathan's rebuke for David's sordid choices of adultery and murder, the King exhibits the qualities of a heart that truly loves God (Psalm 51):

- He pleads for forgiveness of his sins without excuse or rationalization - v.1
- He asks for forgiveness based on God's mercies admitting that he does not deserve it; he throws himself on God's mercy - v.1-2
- He freely acknowledges his sin and admits that it is God who is transgressed against ultimately - v.3-4
- He takes all the blame on himself so that God's name will be blameless - v.4
- He understands and admits that his sin wasn't just a one time event; he was born in sin - v. 5-6
- He admits his need to be cleansed by God; he can't do it himself - v.7-9
- He realizes that his future holiness is dependent upon God's power - v.10-11
- He knows he can't fake joyfulness and asks God to restore; he also realizes that true joy can only come from being right with God - v.12

- He knows the importance of teaching the lessons he has learned to others so that "sinners" will be turned to God - v.13
  - Note: this is exactly the reason why Christians should be ready and willing to share their "testimony". It's not religious requirement or a way that your church has devised to embarrass you.

**By testifying (telling others) of how God has cleansed you from your sin and saved you from a life of wickedness, other sinners will be turned to God's mercy.**

- David asks to be delivered from his guilty heart showing that he fully realized he deserved to be punished for his sin - v.14
- He then promises to serve God with a pure heart and not with insincere religious acts - v.15-17

Verse 17 summarizes what made David a Godly man despite his failures:

Psalm 51:17 - The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise. (NKJV)

Just the opposite of what the world calls us to be. God loves the broken spirit (poor in spirit - Matt 5), the person who realizes that they are guilty before a Holy God and have no hope of rescue other than the loving mercy of that same God. And God loves the contrite heart. A contrite heart is one that is genuinely sorry, that weeps over ungodly choices and decisions. It is a heart that deeply grieves over sinfulness because it offends and saddens the God who is violated by it.

What are you guilty of today? Murder, adultery, lies? Laziness, lukewarmness, spiritual mediocrity? You're only a prayer away from becoming a person "after God's own heart". Let me help you get started:

*Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; cording to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out (remove, forget, forgive) my transgressions (sin).*

*Wash me (through the blood of Jesus Christ) thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin (salvation and sanctification). For I acknowledge my transgressions (sinfulness; specifically name your sins), And my sin is always before me (the curse of sin and its continued temptation).*

*Against You, You only (because God is the ultimate authority), have I sinned, And done this evil (any and all sin) in Your sight— That You may be found just (so people won't blame God for your sin) when You speak, And blameless when You judge (God is perfectly just in punishing sin)....*

**Contemplation:** Have you reached a point, or regularly get to a point where you just wish God would forget that you have committed the same sin over and over? Do you think that you have been too "bad" for God to ever love or accept? How much worse than murder or adultery can you get? Or, just the opposite, do you think your sin is not all that bad, or not that frequent, and your are a good person in no real urgent need of repentance?

**Application:** You can be a person "after God's own heart" when you are "broken in spirit" (realize you a lost sinner with no hope except Christ) and have a "contrite heart" (genuinely sad and sorry about your sin). If you have those two characteristics you have a heart that God can work with. If you don't, it doesn't matter how "good"

you are, or talented, gifted or popular at church... you are not a person "after God's own heart".

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Fat & Kicking

Deuteronomy 32:15 "But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; You grew fat, you grew thick, You are obese! Then he forsook God who made him, And scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation. (NKJV)

Who is Jeshurun? In Hebrew it was a poetic title that meant "upright one" or "righteous one". At the end of Mose's life, God was revealing to him how the people of Israel would grow fat and happy on the blessings of God and then forsake the Lord. It is the age-old sinful nature of mankind to let prosperity and abundance choke out our love for God and our dependency on Him.

### **It is the natural tendency of righteous people to allow the blessing to supplant the One who blesses.**

Material blessings are a gift from God to be enjoyed (Ecc. 5.19-20). But the heart is to be guarded ever more closely as prosperity increases lest it wrestle your trust away from God (Matt 19.23). Prosperity is a gift... but better poor **with God**, than rich **without Him** (Prov 28.6).

In the last few chapters of Deuteronomy, Moses is dying and God is warning the people of the consequences of becoming prosperous, lazy and hedonistic. Wickedness is the result of forsaking God for wealth and comfort. **It should serve as a stern warning** at this point in human history when we enjoy the highest standard of living ever.

When prosperity results in complacency and laziness, our character suffers and obedience typically wanes. As our security is transferred to a bank account, our focus becomes the continuation of comfort and ease of living. This process is the natural tendency of a sinful heart.

What is the end result? We grow lazy and kick against God. This laziness speaks of both physical idleness and spiritual apathy. **We don't need God anymore.** We "kick" against God in the sense that we don't want to go back to depending on Him which is hard work; and we rebel against God's chastisement.

How often have your children kicked against you when it is time for chores instead of watching TV? How often have you kicked against God when He convicts you to study the Bible and that means giving up recreation time? How frequently do you kick against the Lord when prayer or the pursuit of money are your two options?

Ultimately, without extreme diligence, prosperity will lead to forsaking God and "scornfully esteeming" the Rock of your salvation, Jesus Christ. To scorn is to have an open disrespect or to intensely dislike something. Esteem, as a verb, means to "look on and consider". Taken together, to "scornfully esteem" means to look on and consider with an obvious disrespect and intense dislike.

### **Prosperity can lead to an open disrespect and dislike of Jesus Christ.**

Why? For the person who has transferred his trust and desire to material blessing, Jesus Christ represents the Person who is asking you to give up your riches. This could mean a physical release of wealth, but more importantly, a spiritual change in what you trust: money or God.

Matthew 19:22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. (NKJV)

The young rich man who asked Jesus for eternal life had put his trust in material blessings instead of the God who had provided them. Now Jesus was asking him to give it all up because the Lord knew what stood between the young man and God.

The natural sinful tendency of man is to disdain anyone who takes away what is "ours". If you have grown fat (lazy and lethargic) in prosperity and are kicking (rebellion or disobedience) against God, you face the dilemma of scornfully esteeming your Savior who is calling you to forsake all and take up the cross.

Wealth, prosperity, material blessing, abundance, riches, comfort, luxury... whatever name it goes by - is a gift from God to be enjoyed and used in service to Him. It is never to become your hope. It's comfort is never to become your focus. Your faith and trust are never to be in the gift instead the Giver.

Be careful you don't become "fat and kicking" lest you forsake God and scornfully esteem the Rock of your salvation.

*Heavenly Father, every good gift comes from You and we thank You that You have seen fit to bless people so unworthy as us. We pray for Your discernment and discipline that we may never become fat and rebellious and scornfully esteem Your Blessed Son in whose name we pray. Amen*

**Contemplation:** Are you rich? In the Bible the idea of being rich was having more than was needed for one day's living. In light of that, are you rich? How much of your focus and devotion is on the accumulation of material blessing? Does your pursuit of God come anywhere close to your pursuit of wealth, comfort and prosperity?

**Application:** Material blessings are a gift from God to be enjoyed and used for Him. But because of our sinful hearts, prosperity can quickly consume us and become our god, resulting in the "scornful esteem" of our Savior. We are VERY good at deceiving ourselves on this issue. Pray to God that He would reveal where your heart is today concerning this.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## 1 John - Full Joy

1 John 1:4 - And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. (NKJV)

Full joy. Joyful no matter what the circumstances. FULL joy. Not half, partial, occasional or unpredictable. Full.

Hard times at home, but full joy. Trouble at work, but full joy. Disappointment in other people, but full joy. Health problems, but full joy. Life is just not going well, but full joy.

Joyful, joyful, joyful... despite what life throws at you. Possible? Or just a nice sounding Christian concept that we smile and talk about in church, but deep down believe we will can never know this side of heaven. "Full joy" makes for a good sermon (or devotional!) but it's just not happening out here in the "real" world.

### **Well someone better inform the Apostle John.**

He begins the first of his three Epistles by declaring "these things we write to you **that your joy may be full**". So either he is wrong, or people without "full joy" haven't read, or closely read, or lately read, or believed or put into practice what the Apostle wrote. I'm not bettin' against the Revelator.

In the first three verses of 1 John, the Apostle declares that they (him and the other Apostles) were eyewitnesses to the things he was preparing to write about. There was a reason for this. Even in the first few decades of the Church, false teaching had begun to sneak in. A group called the Gnostics were teaching that there was a distinct division between the physical body and spirit; to the point that you could engage in immorality with your body without is having anything to do with your spiritual holiness.

To promote this teaching, the Gnostics had to teach that Jesus wasn't fully human AND fully God. They promoted the idea that Jesus only "appeared" to have a physical presence. I won't get into all the details of what they taught, but its helpful to know the background that was the probable reason for John immediately declaring the physical nature of Christ to open the Epistle. The Apostles had "looked upon", "heard", "seen with our eyes", "hands have handled" the living Christ... all unmistakable physical acts on tangible, physical Savior. So much for Gnosticism.

Back to our original point: full joy. John declares that he writes the things he has personally witnessed so that we may have fellowship with those who had personally witnessed Christ, and fellowship with "the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ".

If you are lacking full joy today, then stay with me through this series of devotionals as we explore what John had "seen and heard" as he declares the truth of God to us.

*O God, open our eyes that we may see wondrous things from Your Word. We pray for the "full joy" that your blessed Apostle writes about. Help us to have ears that hear, and eyes that see. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you missing full joy today? Do you believe its possible to even have it? Can you be joyful no matter what life throws at you? Would you like to be?

**Application:** A lot of folks have resigned themselves to a life with inconsistent, partial or rare times of joy. John says that our joy CAN be full. So either we are missing the boat, or he was wrong. For some it will be because they have never seriously read 1 John. For others it will be because they have forgotten what they read or allowed the world to choke out the implanted Word. Whatever the cause, the blame for a joyless, or partially joyful life cannot be laid in God's lap. He has declared to us all we need that our joy may be full.



1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# 1 John - Full Joy Through Fellowship

## Part: 2

1 John 1:4 - And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. (NKJV)

What a wonderful opportunity God has given us. The Apostle John declares in the opening verses of 1st John that he is writing "these things" he has eye witnessed. Why? That our joy may be full.

**Full joy.** I don't know about you, but a life of full joy in the midst of these troubled times and decaying morality is something that I wouldn't mind experiencing. Let's take a look at some of "these things".

- Thing: we must walk in the light to have fellowship with God that our joy may be full.

In verse five John states all inclusively that there is NO darkness in God. God is perfect in all ways and holy in all things. We must habitually and consistently be attempting to become more like Him. We dwell in the light of God's holiness and hate the darkness.

1 John 1:6 - If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. (NKJV)

If we say we love the light of God (holiness) and yet in secret (or not so secret!) allow the things of darkness in our life (sin, lust, pride, conflict, gossip, greed, hate, etc) then we are LIARS!

I find it funny how offended people get when they are called liars (their "offendedness" usually is good indicator of their guilt). How many times have you heard someone say "are you calling me a liar?!!". Then the typical response back is "no, I'm just stating that what you are saying is not true." Huh? That somehow placates the liar because at least they are not being called a liar! **Lord, save us from playing such silly word games with you!**

If we say we are a Christian, but **habitually** and **willingly** indulge in darkness (immorality, lust, dishonesty, sensuality, worldliness, etc) then we are lying about our love for God.

**If you profess Christ and live like you don't, you're a liar. Ouch.**

Plain, simple and to the point. Let's not sugarcoat what the Bible declares plainly just because it offends our delicate sensibilities. (I'm speaking of how we deal with our own selves privately. When we deal with others, the Lord will lead us in truth, gentleness and love and give us the right words to say to a straying Christian).

- Thing: if we confess our sin, we will be cleansed and forgiven opening the door to full joy.

In verse eight, the Apostle tells us that if we say we have no sin, the truth is not in us. On the surface, this seems to repeat John's previous statement about "liars" but I believe it is more severe than that.

To proclaim that we have "no sin" is to be devoid of truth (salvation?) completely.

There is NO truth in us. It is the most complete and ultimate self-deception. I might be stretching the point a little but think of what a person is claiming if they say "I have no sin". Who is the only person who has truly never sinned? What qualities does a person have to have to be truly sinless? Why, they would have to be God! And the only man who was ever truly God, was Jesus Christ the Lamb.

To claim sinlessness, you are claiming to be God. Oops.

Do you find it hard to admit you are a sinner? To confess your sins? Why? You're no different than EVERY person who has ever lived. Admitting your sin doesn't put you in some lower class of humanity. We're all in it together! Admitting it is the first step to being free from the pain of it. Look what God graciously gives in return:

1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (NKJV)

Forgiveness of those sins, and a cleansing from unrighteousness in general. FULL JOY!

Now notice one thing here before we move on: "He is faithful". Who? God. When we think of man being faithful it is always tempered with the reality that man will occasionally fail, slip, mess up, forget or fall short. Not so with God!

When God is faithful, He is perfectly faithful! Hooray!

When we sincerely confess our sins we will be forgiven and cleansed 100% of time. John lists no conditions, no time limits, no requirements and no exceptions... assuming the genuine of confession of sin. It doesn't matter how many times you've messed up. It doesn't matter how bad you've messed up. And its a good thing too, or Paul (murderer), Peter (coward, liar, betrayer), the Disciples (cowards, deserters), David (murderer, thief, adulterer) and all the other great hero's of the faith would be in big trouble!

Finally, if we say we have no sin, not only does that make us a liar, but we are proclaiming that Christ is a liar too! Pretty scary thought. Why does that make Jesus a liar? Because our Lord declares plainly and frequently that all men are sinful and only He is without transgression. To state otherwise is to accuse Jesus of lying. I don't know about you, but I'm not sure I want to be calling the Savior a liar.

Do you find it hard to formulate the words of confession free of excuses and rationalizing? Go to Psalm 51 and start with David's prayer of repentance.

- Thing: when we do sin, Jesus Himself defends us... that our joy may be full.

What an incredible thought. When I sin, Jesus defends me. He is my Advocate (lawyer, representative). Jesus defends us to the Father. God is the One who demands payment and restitution for all transgressions of His holiness. God is the righteous Judge and Jesus is our righteous Attorney!

He's the eternal pro bono (free) lawyer, but His services will cost you your entire life!

What's more, He has NEVER lost a case! The prosecuting attorney (the Accuser, Satan) lays out his LEGITIMATE charge of "sinner" against us (one the few times

Satan tells the truth) and the Defense Attorney of Heaven defends His clients who are GUILTY AS CHARGED!

1 John 2:2 - And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. (NKJV)

We are GUILTY but Jesus is our propitiation, our atoning sacrifice: He has completely satisfied (atonement) God's just demand for punishment of our sin through His willing sacrificial death on the cross. God demands payment for our crime of sin and that payment is DEATH! But Jesus already died for us and paid our penalty. We are now declared righteous because God's need for perfect justice is satisfied. (I know these word pictures don't cover all the theological fine points, so I trust you'll allow me the simplicity of the description without nitpicking the details).

PAID IN FULL!! Now THAT is full joy!

- John writes these things that we may experience fellowship with Christ that result in the full joy. Two of "these things" are: walk in light, have nothing to do with the darkness (sin), and confess your sins. Do these things and you have begun your journey towards a life of "full joy".

*Father, I am a sinner. I confess it freely. I ask for forgiveness and cleansing. Jesus is here to defend me, and He will represent me in this matter. He has already paid the penalty for my sin. Help me to walk in the light, and hate the ways of darkness. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you sinful? No, really, are you sinful? Or deep down do you think you're pretty good and just mess up once in a while? Do you consistently allow any "darkness" in your life? No? Are you sure? Do you regularly, freely and honestly confess your sin? Have you ever called Jesus a liar?

**Application:** Full joy begins by being in right standing with God. Fellowship with God is attained through confession and walking in the light (holiness, truth). It is truly joyful to realize and meditate on the fact that Jesus Christ Himself personally defends our standing before God, because He has already paid the penalty that God demands.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# 1 John - Full Joy Through Knowing Him

## Part: 3

1 John 1:4 - And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. (NKJV)

In the first chapter of 1st John, we find out that full joy comes from fellowship with God and His beloved Son, Jesus. You can't have fellowship with someone you don't know. How do you do know if you know that you know what you think you know and want to know? (I'll set up an email folder for all English teachers who are clicking "new email" right about now!).

1 John 2:3 - Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. (NKJV)

What is meant by "know"? It's about having an intellectual knowledge and awareness of God but also includes a deeper level of perception, discernment, familiarity and understanding. How can you be sure that you genuinely "know" God? In short, obedience and love. Find out what God says, and do it because you love Him. If you do what God wants then your choice of submission and obedience are evidence that you truly know the God you serve.

John describes obedience as:

- Keeping His commandments
- Keeping His Word
- Walking just as He walked

What a blessing we receive for our obedience - the love of God is perfected in us! Does that mean we are perfect? Not in this lifetime. But it does mean that when we obey God we are headed in the right direction.

We walk as Jesus walked. John says this obedience thing isn't anything new that we haven't heard before. Obedience has always been the trademark of the true believer. Jesus is the light of the world and the darkness will pass away because of Him... an ongoing process in this life (sanctification) and completed fact in the next life for those who know Him (glorification).

1 John 2:9 - He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. (NKJV)

**John has a way of making it simple for those who want to play games concerning sin.** In 1:6 he flat out says we are liars if we practice sin but claim to be Christians. He returns to that blunt but unmistakably plain language in chapter two by declaring "Liar!" to anyone who claims to know Christ but does not obey what the Lord commands.

## **Claiming Christ in one breath and sinning the next makes you a liar. Ouch.**

I was thinking on this and wondered how much less I would sin if I had a neon sign around my neck that lit up for all to see every time I sinned: "I am liar. I call myself a Christian but I just chose to sin". Or maybe if I got "Liar" tattooed on me every time I chose to disobey the Lord. I'm afraid after week or so the Guinness Book of World records might want my picture as the "most tattooed man alive".

John continues with his blunt, "here-I'll-give-it-to-you-simple-so-you-can't-mess-it-up" instruction by simply informing us that if you claim to be a Christian but hate your

brother you're "in darkness". Whether or not you believe this is talking about salvation or fellowship with God is irrelevant for this lesson. If you're "in darkness", that's some place you don't want to be. Hating your brother will put you there.

So John tells us that obedience is evidence that we "know" God. Then he makes the point practical by giving us some "things" to obey: God's commandments, walk as Jesus walked, love your brethren.

How do we have full joy in this life? One part of it is through assurance. If we know God, we are assured that we are on the right path and that we will end up with Him for eternity. 1st John gives us many practical and tangible ways to be sure that we know God.

John writes so that we may have full joy. Then tells us how, who, what and why. Thanks John!

*Lord God, forgive us when we lie about loving Christ by denying Him with our willful sin. Help us to walk in the light, and walk in love towards others. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Is your claim to know Christ validated and authenticated by your obedience? Do you follow God's commands? Do you seek to find out what they are? Does your conscience convict you each time you sin of "lying" about your claim to know Christ? Or have you become insensitive to that conviction? Do you walk in love and show love to others? Or is your whole world about you?

**Application:** Full joy is not only possible, John tells us specifically how. But you can't know what you don't study, pray about and meditate on.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# 1 John - Full Joy for All Types

## Part: 4

1 John 1:4 - And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. (NKJV)

The Apostle writes "these things" in 1st John that "your joy may be full" (v.1.4). What things is he writing?

- Full joy comes from fellowship with God, walking in the light. (1.5-7)
- Full joy comes from confessing our sin (1.9)
- Full joy comes from having Jesus as our Defender (2.1)
- Full joy comes with knowing God; evidenced by our obedience and love(2.3-11)

Full joy... for who? Who can attain it? Pastors? Super Christians? Older Christians? Who is John writing to? Starting in 2.12 the Apostle identifies three stages of the Christian walk to which he writes "these things" (1.4):

- Little Children - new or immature believers

These are new or immature believers who do not yet have a depth or the experience of faith. However, there is no doubt the authenticity of their salvation - "because your sins are forgiven" (2.12); "because you have known the Father" (2.13).

The danger for "children" in the faith is that they are easily persuaded to follow the latest Christian fads or questionable doctrines. They are a particularly easy target for Satan because of their inexperience and immaturity which is one reason why mature Christians should be actively engaged in mentoring and discipleship.

Ephesians 4:14 - that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, (NKJV)

It is my opinion that the longer a Christian remains a "child" the more danger they are in of being "tossed to and fro". It is obviously natural for a recently saved person to be immature in their faith and of course our merciful Father in Heaven understands that. It is however quite a different situation for that same person to still be immature and childish in the faith many years later. A lack of growth because of personal neglect can make someone an easy target for the enemy.

- **Young Men** - Sound and growing but inexperienced Christians

"Young men" are those who are grounded in sound doctrine and demonstrate growing spiritual discipline but just lack time and experience in the faith. John speaks of the obvious progress of these young men stating that they have "overcome the wicked one" (1.13) and that the "word of God abides in you" (1.14).

Why are these young men strong? Because the Word of God abides in them. On the surface that may sound a little simplistic but Psalms 119 should quickly dispel that notion:

- Psalm 119:9-16 - How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You. Blessed are You, O Lord! Teach me Your statutes.

With my lips I have declared All the judgments of Your mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, As much as in all riches. I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word. (NKJV, emphasis mine)

The entire 119th chapter of Psalms reverberates the effects that God's Word has on your life. If you are easily bored or dispassionate with the study of the Holy Scripture, read Psalm 119. The Apostle John echoes the power of the Word to make one strong and give power to overcome the "wicked one" (2.13-14).

- **Fathers** - mature, disciplined Christians

The last type of Christian John is writing "these things" to are called "fathers". These are Christians who have matured in the faith through discipline and prayer. They have achieved a fuller understanding of God's nature, His eternality (1.12) and have demonstrated consistent faith and wisdom.

John repeats the phrase "who is from the beginning" twice emphasizing the nature of the mature believers understanding. Any comprehension of the eternal nature of God's plan and His sovereignty, from eternity past to eternity future, is not an easy thing. Understanding God's entire redemptive plan for humanity takes diligent study, prayer and meditation (not to be confused with understanding the plain and simple Gospel message of salvation).

Ephesians 3:14-19 - For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, **to be strengthened** with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, **being rooted and grounded** in love, may be **able to comprehend** with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be **filled with all the fullness of God**. (NKJV, emphasis mine)

John writes "these things" to every believer no matter what stage of their Christian walk they are in. Full joy is attainable for all believers, not just some class of "super Christian". So if you are waiting around for a period of time to pass or a magical level of spirituality to manifest itself before you can hope for a fully joyful life in Christ, you're missing out by your choice. Either willfully or in ignorance.

*Merciful God, help me to recognize what stage of my walk I am in. Teach me to know Your Word and to mature through the meditation and application of it. Grant me "full joy" through knowing You, loving You and obeying You. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** What stage are you in? If you're a "child" in the faith is it because you are recently saved or long term lazy? If you're a "young man" are you growing and staying grounded in the Word? If you are a "father" have you become complacent with your level of maturity? "Fathers", are you discipling any "young men" or "children"? "Young men", are you encouraging and discipling any "children"?

**Application:** Full joy is not a blessing for any special class of Christians. It is attainable for you no matter what stage of your Christian walk you are in. John tells us what brings full joy, it's up to us to avail ourselves of it.



1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# 1 John - Full Joy Through No Love

## Part: 5

1 John 1:4 - And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. (NKJV)

The Apostle John writes "these things" in 1st John that your joy "may be full" (v.1.4) What things?

- Full joy comes from fellowship with God, walking in the light. (1.5-7)
- Full joy comes from confessing our sin (1.9)
- Full joy comes from having Jesus as our Defender (2.1)
- Full joy comes with knowing God; evidenced by our obedience and love (2.3-11)
- Full joy is for all Christians in every stage of maturity (2.12-14)

There is a "love" that God hates. And that is the love of the world. Sometimes we are guilty of throwing out Christian terms and assuming everyone understands the true meaning. So let's stop and define "world".

"The world" in this context can be described in a number of ways. It is sin. It is love of the creation over the Creator. The world is materialism, immorality and hedonism. It is man-made religion and Godless government.

### **The result of the creation trying to exist without the Creator constitutes "the world".**

I like to define "the world" in this context as everything man has created for Himself originating from a mindset (passively or deliberate) of "I don't need God". Whether religion, government, business, recreation or even trying to establish a purpose and meaning to life... the "world" is humankind's effort to exist without God. It's a mentality that is quite content to live life with no regard for God... ignoring Him, denying Him, never thinking of Him. Whatever results from man apart from God (sensuality, materialism, war, paganism, etc.) constitutes "the world".

*Note: I realize there are many ways to define "the world", some more simple, some more complete, some more elegant. The point remains that man's attempt to live without God, results in "the world", whatever form that may take. BR*

1 John 2:15 - Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (NKJV)

So the Apostle John tells us that in part "full joy" comes from **NOT** loving "the world". In his usual "I-dare-you-to-try-and-misinterpret-this" direct style of communication, John plainly states that if you love the world, the love of God is not in you. I think this is true on two levels.

1. First, and the obvious primary meaning in my opinion, is that a consistent love for the world indicates a lack of true salvation. If a person claims Christ (or not) and continually lives life in a manner that is obviously based on a love for this world and not a love for God, then it is evidence that a true salvation experience most likely has not occurred.
2. Second, I believe there is an application for the truly saved as well. To the degree that a "love for the world" infects your life (which it does in various ways and in various degrees for us all), you will no doubt experience a proportionate LACK of the "love of the Father". In other words, even as a Christian we will most certainly struggle with loving the world our entire life and to the degree we fail in the struggle, we will be missing other Godly attributes and attitudes.

John goes on to describe some specifics about the "love of the world" and while the application to the unbeliever is obvious, genuine Christians should not dismiss the warning or the descriptions of what identifies "worldly" behavior:

- **The lust of the flesh**

These are lusts that originate in our flesh: uncontrolled appetites, illicit desires, greed, pride, etc. The lust here is any desire derived from our flesh that violates God's commands.

1 Peter 2:11 - Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, (NKJV)

The "flesh" becomes part of the "world" when it is unrestrained and ungoverned by God's Word. The lust of the flesh wars against all that is Godly. The more place we give in to the lusts of the flesh, the more unlikely the fruit of the Spirit will be manifest in our lives.

- **The lust of the eyes**

The eyes are the window and entrance to our mind and heart. Our eyes are the seed bag of our thought life. What we dwell on visually is fertilized in our mind. What we choose to set our eyes on stirs and inflames in our heart, whether holy or lustful.

Psalms 101:3 - I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; It shall not cling to me. (NKJV)

Be careful what you allow your eyes to dwell on. What enters your eyes, plants in your heart and eventually becomes a harvest in your life, whether for God's glory or your shame.

- **The pride of life**

The pride of life is an attitude of arrogance that somehow we are in control of life. It's living day after day believing that we are the masters of our destiny, the creators of our circumstances. It's living life acting like we are god, and God isn't.

James 4:14-16 - whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. (NKJV)

You cannot add one second to your life. You could be dead before you finish this sentence. In an instant your money, health and possessions could be wiped out. God is in control not us. To live disregarding that is pride. Pride is placing man's way over God's.

A life of full joy requires a life marked by a consistently diminishing love for the world. John gives us three plain, working examples of what "the world" is made up of: the lust of the flesh and eyes, and the pride of life. Examine your life today for signs and evidence of what you love... God? Or the world?

*Father in Heaven, help us to recognize the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life. May we love You and not the world. Grant us this day full joy and may You be glorified in it. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you love the world? Is just a little okay? Does John leave room for exceptions? Do you regularly examine your life for evidence of lust of the flesh and eyes; and the pride of life? What connection do you think there is to your lack of joy and the worldliness you allow in your life?

**Application:** The Lord promises and grants full joy in our lives. But it's on His terms, not ours. We want to enjoy the blessings of God, and the pleasures of sin. You have to pick one or the other.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# 1 John - Full Joy Through Righteousness and Purity

## Part: 6

1 John 1:4 - And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. (NKJV)  
The Apostle John writes "these things" in 1st John that your joy "may be full" (v.1.4)  
What things?

- Full joy comes from fellowship with God, walking in the light. (1.5-7)
- Full joy comes from confessing our sin (1.9)
- Full joy comes from having Jesus as our Defender (2.1)
- Full joy comes with knowing God; evidenced by our obedience and love (2.3-11)
- Full joy is for all Christians in every stage of maturity (2.12-14)
- Full joy through loving the things of God and not of the world (2.15)

John continues in chapter three describing the "things" that contribute to a life of "full joy". I love the way the Apostle just lays it out there in 1st John in such clear, simple and unmistakable terms. I often hear people say, "I just wish God would just tell me directly and plainly what He wants me to do and I would do it".

Well there are two problems with that. One, for most things that have to do with daily living a holy life, HE DOES TELL US plainly and directly what to do. We're just like a bunch of kids who want to find loopholes and exceptions to excuse our poor choices and when that's not possible, we play dumb like we didn't know or didn't understand God's Word! Second, even when we do discover what God says, we are still faced with the choice of actually doing it!

1 John 3:3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (NKJV)

John not only writes to us with a "holiness for dummies" level of simplicity, but gives us an incredible motivating result: FULL JOY! We started this lesson with six bullet points that have been covered in previous devotionals. We continue at the end of chapter 2 with more clear, precise, simple, to-the-point teaching on how to have a life of full joy:

### • Full joy comes through abiding in Christ

2:28 And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. (NKJV)

"Abide" means to wait with, remain stable in, to continue with or remain in fixed state. We abide in Christ now so that when He comes we won't have to be ashamed but have confidence. It's not all that hard to understand when we think of it in terms we can relate to.

For example, when you were a child do you remember the feeling you had when your Dad came walking through the door and you had not done what you were told such as clean up your room? You weren't exactly confident at that moment, were you? But oh, how proud and ready for inspection a kid is when they have actually done the chore! (However infrequently that may actually occur!)

Or how about at work? How would you feel if you were approaching a project deadline and had procrastinated and been lazy to the point where you knew that your work was unacceptable and below standards? Contrast that with the

confidence you have when you know that you hit a home run with your efforts and can't wait until the boss shows up to take a look.

### **Not abiding in Christ will rob you of your joy.**

When we abide in Christ, we look forward to His appearing. Are you apprehensive or downright scared of Jesus showing up tonight? How much of that stems from you not abiding in Him at this point in your life?

- **Full joy comes from being righteous**

2.29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him. (NKJV)

Are you born again? Is it evidenced by growing and consistent righteousness in your life? Jesus is righteous, we can all get our teeth into that fact. If we know that He is righteous, then those who want to be like Jesus have to practice... guess what? Righteousness. That's a little harder for us to get a grip on.

If our lives are marked by increasing righteousness then according to John we know what fact? That we are "born of Him". If we are born of Him, that means we are what? Truly saved. Knowing that we are truly saved is what? Assurance. Assurance brings what? FULL JOY!

- **Full joy comes from being called children of God**

3.1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! (NKJV)

I love the word "Behold". It has a kind of timeless elegance that is lost in today's vocabulary. Behold... pay attention! Behold... look and marvel! Behold... stop and focus your mind! Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us!

What manner of love is it? That we frail, pitiful, sinful, wishwashy, disloyal, ungrateful creatures should be granted the most privileged title in the universe... children of the Most High! Behold, what manner of love!

If that fact doesn't cultivate "full joy" in your heart, I'm not sure anything can.

- **Full joy come from expecting to see Jesus**

3.2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

We are called children of God and at the moment of true salvation it becomes a fact. However true that may be, the fullness of exactly what being a "child of God" actually encompasses has not been revealed completely to us. But it will be!

When Christ returns we will be like Him and see Him for what He really is. We strive to be like Him now but it is based on understanding that is flawed by the curse of sin. We can read and meditate on the person of Jesus now but our comprehension is inhibited by our sinful nature.

When we appear before Jesus either by death or the Second Coming, we shall see Him "as He is". Three simple words. "As He is"... as He truly is; undimmed and undistorted by our sin, ignorance, neglect or biases. And we will finally be exactly like Him in perfect holiness, not just striving to be. Being just like Christ... does that bring any joy to your life?

- **Full comes from purification**

3.3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (NKJV)

Do you hope to see Christ and to be just like Him some day? (for clarity, being just like Christ in this context means that we will finally be free of sin and exist in perfect righteousness and holiness. It is important to define that in this day and age where false teachers even in the church claim that we are "gods" and are "equal" to Christ)

If you have the hope to see and be like Christ then what must you strive for now? Purity. Why? Because Christ is pure and we strive to be like Him. The result? Righteousness. And righteousness is evidence of what? Being "born of Him". And that means what? That you are truly saved. Which is what? Assurance. And once again, assurance of salvation brings what to your life?.... drum roll please... full joy.

The blessed Apostle John... what a debt of thanks we owe to him for recognizing how hard headed and difficult we can be. He just lays it out there in terms that any believer at any stage of life can understand. Do this, be that. Sweet and simple.

Joy comes through righteousness, being a child of God, expecting to see Jesus and the purification of our lives by becoming more like Christ. These are more of "the things" that John says will result in "full joy".

*Lord God, thank You for making these things simple for us to understand. Thank You for giving us the recipe for a life full of joy. Thank You for calling us Your children and may we long for the day when we will see your Blessed Son and finally be just like Him. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you have full joy in your life? Does your lack of joy parallel your lack of righteousness and purity? Do you have confidence in seeing Jesus or will you be ashamed of your life? Have you ever thought about what it really means to be called a "child of God"?

**Application:** Full joy comes on God's terms. Righteousness, purity, obedience, love... all of these things are evidence of true salvation and bring assurance of that fact. Assurance of salvation and an eternity with God brings fullness of joy into our lives that is not possible any other way.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# 1 John - Full Joy in Deed and Truth

## Part: 7

1 John 1:4 - And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. (NKJV)

The Apostle John writes "these things" in 1st John that your joy "may be full" (v.1.4) What things?

- Full joy comes from fellowship with God, walking in the light. (1.5-7)
- Full joy comes from confessing our sin (1.9)
- Full joy comes from having Jesus as our Defender (2.1)
- Full joy comes with knowing God; evidenced by our obedience and love (2.3-11)
- Full joy is obtainable for all Christians in every stage of maturity (2.12-14)
- Full joy through loving the things of God and not of the world (2.15)
- Full joy is cultivated by righteousness (2.28) and purity (3.3)

The Bible is full of opposites. God consistently reveals that His ways are opposite of man's. You give to get. Be last if you want to be first. Be exalted through humility. Gain life by losing it. True to that idea, we find out in 1 John 3 that joy and assurance is found in our sacrifice to love others and give our lives "for the brethren".

What does it mean to love others? Is this a feeling that you have? While that can certainly be part of it, true love is a choice to serve, to sacrifice, to prefer, to defer... to lay down your life for the good of those you love.

1 John 3:16 - By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (NKJV)

How do we know what true love is? Because Jesus modeled it for us. He laid His life for us. His love was a tangible choice to sacrifice His life for ours. It would have rang hollow for a Savior to only speak of loving us and not demonstrate it with action (given the need for a solution to our sin problem).

1 John 3:18 - My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. (NKJV)

And so we are to love in the same way Jesus modeled it to us. We are to love in "deed" which means it has to be more than words. We are to love in "truth" which means it can't be haphazard love based on our own ideas. It has to be love grounded in God's Word.

John, in his usual practicality presents the idea unmistakable terms. If you have money, food, clothes or resources and you ignore a brother in genuine need, then how can you say that the love of God is in you? Does this mean that we are to help every single person that crosses our path who presents a need? We can't possibly help everyone so what is John talking about?

1 John 3:17 - But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? (NKJV)

I think the key to the principle is in the phrase "shuts up his heart". God will direct us to those opportunities and people that He wants us to respond to. If your heart is open to love others, God will lead you in how to respond to needs as they arise. The key is your open heart (love) towards your brethren.



When we love in deed and truth, then we can be assured we are walking in truth (3.19) and our heart is right with God (3.20). When our heart is right, we are free of guilt and condemnation and have confidence when we come into God's presence.

When we are confident in light of our right standing with God, we are primed to receive from Him whatever we ask. Why? Because we are keeping His commandments and doing those things that please Him (3.22). What commandment are we keeping? John circles back around to his opening point:

1 John 3:23 - And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and **love one another**, as He gave us commandment. (NKJV, emphasis mine)

Once again, in beautiful simplicity, John writes "these things" so that we can have "full joy". Look at the path the Apostle draws out for us (1 John 3):

- v.23 - we are commanded to believe in Jesus and love one another
- v.16 - we know what love is because Jesus modeled it for us by laying down His life
- v.17-18 - love is practical and demonstrable, not just words; you love by helping and serving
- v. 19 - if you show this tangible love, you can know that you are in God's truth
- v.20-21 - when we know we are in God's truth, we can be confident towards God
- v.22 - when we are confident towards God, we can ask from God expecting to receive because we keep His commandments and do what pleases Him
- v.23 - And what is the commandment we keep? To believe in Jesus and love one another which starts the cycle over again.

The Apostle John tells how to love, what it means to love, who our example of love is and the benefits of that love: assurance, confidence which help us to have a life of full joy.

*Loving God, thank You for sending Your Son to show us how to love. Help us to learn to lay down our lives for each other to demonstrate that love to the world. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Is your life marked by love for others? Is it evidenced by action, or just words? Would you say that the lack or presence of joy in your life is parallel to the amount of selfless love you show others?

**Application:** A life of full joy is obtainable but on God's terms not ours. It always involves doing things His way. Joy is the result of a life characterized by love for others. If you're unsure what that means then look to Jesus to see how true love is demonstrated.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# 1 John - Full Joy, Love and No Fear

## Part: 8

1 John 1:4 - And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. (NKJV)

The Apostle John writes "these things" in 1st John that your joy "may be full" (v.1.4) What things?

- Full joy comes from fellowship with God, walking in the light. (1.5-7)
- Full joy comes from confessing our sin (1.9)
- Full joy comes from having Jesus as our Defender (2.1)
- Full joy comes with knowing God; evidenced by our obedience and love (2.3-11)
- Full joy is obtainable for all Christians in every stage of maturity (2.12-14)
- Full joy through loving the things of God and not of the world (2.15)
- Full joy is cultivated by righteousness (2.28) and purity (3.3)
- Full joy comes from loving in deed and truth, not just words (3.18)

All throughout 1John, especially the 4th chapter, we find that love is evidence of true salvation. God is the source of love and the presence of love shows is authentication of true saving faith.

1 John 4:7 - Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. (NKJV)

Godly love characterizes the genuine Christian. This love gives us assurance that we have experienced the true saving power of Jesus Christ. "Assurance" is the overriding theme of 1st John. If you ever doubt your salvation, or need to disciple someone who does, take them to 1st John. There you will find over and over statements about what indicates true salvation.

- If you are "this" you can know you're saved.
- If you act like "this" you can know you're saved.
- If you believe "this" you can know you're saved.
- If you love like "this" you can know you're saved.

The Apostle John writes in very plain and easy to understand language what "this" is.

## **1st John can be either very encouraging, or VERY convicting.**

Along with obedience, "love" is one of the most mentioned attributes of the true Believer. How to love, who to love, what to love, when to love... with Jesus being pointed out as our example.

1 John 3:16 - By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (NKJV)

Love is important because it is the base reason for why God bothered to save us. When we return His love by imitating it, then we can be confident of God being pleased with our life. John, in usual fine form, takes us through the logical progression of the affect of Godly love in our life:

- **Why is love important?** So that we can have boldness in the day of judgment (4.17). On the day we stand before the Lord to account for our lives, we

haven't nothing to fear when His gaze falls upon the history of our life.

There is no fear in love (4.18), because the essence of true love is to act like Jesus. When we act like Jesus we can boldly stand before the throne and expect approval from Almighty God who is pleased in all ways with His Son.

**If you want be confident and assured in God's presence, it's simple: act like Jesus.**

- If you have fear in your life it will be directly proportionate to a lack of Godly love (4.18). **Fear of what?**

Fear that God is not pleased with you. Fear of not being saved. Fear that God is out to get you. Fear of facing God. Fear of God's opinion of you. Fear of having to give an account for your life. Fear that God won't love you.

Don't confuse this with the healthy and proper "fear of God". That is a reverent proper fear that understands the gulf that separates frail and finite man from a perfectly holy and infinite God.

The kind of fear here is a fear that is produced from knowing that you are not living a holy life sacrificed daily to God, exchanging your will for His.

It's the same fear you had when you hadn't done what your parents told you and then had to face the music. It's the same fear that comes with doing a half-hearted job at work then being called on it by your boss. It's the same fear you have when you are confronted with an opportunity to share the Gospel but your neglect of God's Word leaves the poor victim with more questions than answers.

**If you fear meeting God on judgment day to account for your life,  
you should pray and ask God to reveal where love is lacking in you.**

John finishes the thought by giving us the reason we are to love: because God loved us first. Now think about that a minute. Why is that a big deal? God loved us first. So what? I thought you'd never ask...

- God gives us life and we deny Him
- God blesses us daily and we shame Him
- God cares for us and we take it for granted
- God created us in perfection and we ruined it with sin
- God sent His Son to save us and we killed Him
- God draws us to Himself, saves us, secures us eternally... and we thank Him by being worldly, lukewarm and wishy-washy
- God loved us when He had no reason to, no obligation to and no real need to....

**Accept for the fact that God is love.** And the essence of true love is to love the unlovable; love the undeserving; love for the sake of love. We are unlovable before God transforms us into the image of His Son. But God loved us anyway.

God loves us first and calls us to love others. It's a good thing God chose to love us first because we are utterly incapable of loving Him or anyone else FIRST without God Himself giving us a heart transplant and infusing us with the ability to do so.

So let's put it all in a logical summary:

- We are to love because God loved us first and Jesus is our example.
- Love is the evidence of true salvation.
- Love casts out fear and allows us to be confident to stand in front of God.
- This confidence translates into assurance of our salvation.
- Assurance of salvation results in a life of "full joy".

Thanks John.

*Heavenly Father, thank You for loving us first and showing us what love is so that we can love our way into a life void of fear and full of assurance. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you know that difference in the "fear of God" and the fear we are discussing in this lesson? Do you have a fear of facing God and having your life examined? Does it correlate to a lack of Godly love in your life? What does this kind of love look like? How do you identify it?

**Application:** God loved us first when we were unlovable. Then He shows us how to love by giving Jesus as our example. When we imitate Jesus and our lives are marked by love, we can stand in confidence before God with no fear. If that isn't full joy, could someone please tell me what is?

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# 1 John - Full Joy in Obedience and Victory

## Part: 9

1 John 1:4 - And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. (NKJV)

The Apostle John writes "these things" in 1st John that your joy "may be full" (v.1.4) What things?

- Full joy comes from fellowship with God, walking in the light. (1.5-7)
- Full joy comes from confessing our sin (1.9)
- Full joy comes from having Jesus as our Defender (2.1)
- Full joy comes with knowing God; evidenced by our obedience and love (2.3-11)
- Full joy is obtainable for all Christians in every stage of maturity (2.12-14)
- Full joy through loving the things of God and not of the world (2.15)
- Full joy is cultivated by righteousness (2.28) and purity (3.3)
- Full joy comes from loving in deed and truth, not just words (3.18)
- Full joy is the result of loving as Christ loved which casts fear from our lives (4.18)

John writes "these things" all through the book of 1st John. These "things" give us assurance of our salvation and confidence that we are in right standing with God. Assurance of salvation is the height of "full joy", for what it in this life can steal your joy when you are assured of an eternity in Heaven?

In closing this series of lessons, I want to give you a list of "these things" so that you can reference them when your joy seems to have taken a vacation. You can be assured and joyful when you:

- Walk in the light  
1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. (NKJV, emphasis mine for all following verses)
- Confess your sins  
1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
- Keep God's commandments  
1 John 2:3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.
- Love your fellow Christians  
1 John 2:10 He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.
- Do not love worldliness  
1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.
- Let truth abide in you  
1 John 2:24 Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.

- Practice righteousness  
1 John 2:29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.
- Purify yourself  
1 John 3:3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.
- Practice righteousness and love your brother  
1 John 3:10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.
- Lay down your life for others  
1 John 3:16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.
- Love in action not just words  
1 John 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.
- Obey God  
1 John 3:24 Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.
- Love one another  
1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.
- Confess Jesus Christ  
1 John 4:15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.
- Love your brother  
1 John 4:21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.
- Believe in Jesus  
1 John 5:1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.
- Pray according to God's will  
1 John 5:14 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.
- Keep yourself from sin  
1 John 5:18 We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.

The Apostle John opens the book giving the reason for writing it: that we may have full joy. What a blessing to be able to evaluate our spiritual lives against such a straightforward and easy to understand set of truths.

When your life lacks joy it may be because of fear, worldliness, disobedience or a lack of love. Turn to the book of 1John and prayerfully ask God to reveal what could be stealing your joy.

*Heavenly Father, thank you for showing us how to have a life of full joy. Help us to love, to obey and to practice righteousness so that we can have confidence and assurance in our salvation. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Is your life characterized by joy? If no, can you identify any areas that don't match up to the commands and instruction in 1John? Do you even believe that "full joy" is possible? If not, which other parts of the Bible do you not believe?

**Application:** Full joy. Elusive for most, possible for all. Full joy comes on God's terms not our whims. But full joy from God is immune to the circumstances of this life. John lays it out in terms we can all understand. Love, obey, believe, confess.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Rebukes and Beatings

Proverbs 17:10 Rebuke is more effective for a wise man, Than a hundred blows on a fool. (NKJV)

A wise person is more affected by a single word of correction, than a foolish person is by a beating.

Godly correction comes primarily through the study of God's Word. He may also impart it by prayer, circumstances or through the words of other people, but spiritual rebuke comes mainly through Scripture (2Tim 3.16-17).

The ease in which Godly redirection is accepted by us directly parallels the depth of wisdom we possess. Why? Because no matter what level of maturity we have reached in the Lord, there isn't any portion of Scripture that, if studied, meditated on and properly applied, cannot transform us more into the image of Christ. The person who recognizes this truth, is always alert to how God's Word is asking them to change.

For the wise Christian, one convicting truth from scripture affects more response than a severe beating does from a fool. Which of us has not known a hard-headed, stubborn, prideful person who is unmoved by admonishment? This person takes pride in defending their "right" to do whatever they want. They proudly proclaim their independence of all judgment and standards while brandishing harsh words towards those who would dare confront them.

We live in a world today where any confrontation of sin is labeled "intolerant", "judgmental" and "self-righteous". A person is considered weak if they don't ardently defend their right to do whatever they want "as long as it doesn't harm anyone else".

**What foolishness.**

For Christians, the opposite is true. We should constantly be sensitive to God's Word convicting us about our attitudes and behavior. We should be ready to change **anything** in our life at the slightest hint of non-conformity to God's Holiness.

You may get a fool to change some things externally as the result of a good beating.

**But his heart will not change.** One convicting word of correction to a wise Christian **will result in a change of heart** that will spill out externally as well.

Proverbs 12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, But he who heeds counsel is wise. (NKJV)

Notice the fool is right **in his own eyes**. The Christian does not look to himself as the judge of what is right, but to God. We seek wisdom from another source. We are only right if we are right **in God's eyes**. How do you become a wise Christian?

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (NKJV)

God gives wisdom generously to those who ask in faith, not doubting (James 1.6). Ask the Lord to give you wisdom and humility. A Godly rebuke should change your life, instead of offend you. And you won't need that beating.

*Father in Heaven, we ask You in faith, not doubting for Godly wisdom. Soften our hearts and make us sensitive to the corrections we need make in our lives. We pray for humility and commitment that will bring about effective change in our hearts when confronted with the truth of Your Word. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you easily changed and affected by God's Word? Or does it take a good beating to get your attention?

**Application:** There is peace and blessing in being soft hearted, wise and willing to change. Be sensitive to the truth of God's Word and be willing to change whatever is necessary.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Saying What's On Your Mind

Proverbs 12:16 A fool's wrath is known at once, But a prudent man covers shame. (NKJV)

Foolishness is lack of wisdom. Foolish behavior manifests itself in various forms and choices.

"A fool's wrath is known at once..." In other words, fools shoot off their mouth every time they feel like it, especially when mad, offended or insulted. This person will often be heard bragging how they "say what's on their mind", or "tell it like it is".

Why is it foolish to have a quick, sharp tongue? What is wrong? What is missing?

- It shows a lack of self control
- It demonstrates a person who has not learned temperance, and meekness
- It means this person hasn't matured past the point of being constantly on guard of their feelings
- It is evidence that self interest is the first priority, that "self" has not been "crucified in Christ"

A person who becomes easily, or frequently annoyed and irritated, is **primarily motivated by "self concern"**. They get annoyed because someone spoke ill of them, or didn't say what "should" have been said. They get irritated when something is happening that is not of personal interest or benefit to them. They are quick to show impatience and voice criticism when things aren't happening exactly the way they want.

### **A foolish person is quickly irritated or annoyed; and quick to tell you about it.**

And they will always have a great reason why, which no doubt they will be glad to inform you of.

On the contrary, a wise man is thoughtful in response, and as a rule overlooks insults or offenses. The wise man has **eternal interests** at heart, and is more concerned with leading the other person closer to God. The wise man is not concerned with making sure everyone knows he is mad or offended. This wise person sees others through the Lord's eyes and discerns the spiritual need that is underlying the behavior. A wise man loves others enough **to see past the offense** and into the sin that needs dealt with.

1 Peter 4:8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." (NKJV)

The fool is worried about **personal feelings**. The wise man is concerned with helping the offender to **turn to God**. The fool sees their own critical impatience as merited and justified. The wise man gives no thought to how he personally feels, but seeks to discern only what God would do.

Philippians 2:3-4 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (NKJV)

If you are someone who is easily offended, often irritated, and you make sure everyone knows about it; then you are person who needs to carefully examine who is sitting on the throne of your life. If you are quick to anger, and frequently annoyed at other people, it is evidence that "self interest" is the king of your life, not Christ.

*Father, help us to be slow to anger, slow to speak and quick to show mercy, patience and selflessness. Give us the wisdom and discernment to see the spiritual need of those who offend us, annoy us or bother us. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you easily irritated? Are you annoyed at somebody every day? Do people "get on your nerves"? Does your family? Your spouse?

**Application:** If yes, this betrays a self interest that needs to be dealt with before God. Christians should not be easily annoyed and quick to respond in irritation. Ask God to reveal the truth of this to you and give you strength to change.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Storms and Fear

Psalm 46:1 - God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. (NKJV)  
Very early this morning during my short drive to our church, I flipped on the radio and all the stations were full of news about the impending, massive hurricane that was bearing down on the East coast of the United States.

I live in Oklahoma where tornadoes, not hurricanes, make life an adventure. The impact point of a tornado is usually more destructive than a hurricane, but of course, the area affected is microscopic comparatively and the chances of getting hit by a tornado are pretty slim (though that's no consolation to those who have!).

I lived in Florida for a few years and experienced a couple of hurricanes (just the edge of them thankfully!). Unlike a tornado, hurricanes can cover the entire state at one time. You usually have fair warning its coming, and the damage is not as violent and severe **on average** as that from a direct tornado strike. Still, the deluge of water and reversing winds of a hurricane can destroy everything in its path.

**Life's problems are like tornadoes and hurricanes... some you see coming, some strike without notice. Both can be devastating.**

Some problems we face are unexpected, tightly focused, extremely intense and cause violent damage to specific areas of our life. The "tornado" trials of life are unpredictable and sudden... like losing your job without prior notice, becoming badly injured in an accident or losing a family member unexpectedly.

The hurricane problems of life can be seen coming on the horizon and while we may have warning, their power and scope can overwhelm us. These storms might come in the form of wayward children, recurring health problems, divorce, bad economies or a slow acting disease.

### Therefore we will not fear

Psalms 46 says "therefore we will not fear.." and that God is present to help us in times of trouble. What kind of trouble? Is it just the general daily problems of life? Are we to have no fear when we find out we have cancer? When the stock market crashes and our life savings is wiped out? When our child dies in an accident? When our house burns down? Can the writer of Psalms 46 have all that in mind when he says "therefore we will not fear"?

- v.2 - ...Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;
- Each of the events described in Psalms 46 can be thought of in both a physical and an emotional sense. So whether it is an actual natural disaster, or a personal upheaval, the writer of Psalms had the most extreme circumstances in mind.
- Has your whole world been rocked by personal tragedy? Does it feel like the foundations of your life have broken loose and slid off into the depths of the hopelessness? When your personal "earth" is shaken, it can be every bit as damaging as an actual natural disaster.
- Therefore we will not fear
- v. 3 - Though its waters roar and be troubled, Though the mountains shake with its swelling.

- Have you ever seen a raging river or the sea whipped up by an approaching storm? It is both mesmerizing and terribly dangerous. Life's troubles can be that way sometimes. Our world can seem to roar and foment with problems and challenges. Life can get so tough sometimes that we feel shaken loose and swept away, helpless to do anything about it.
- Therefore we will not fear
- Does the Psalmist leave us hanging with that? Does the Lord tell us not to fear then fail to tell us how that is accomplished? Of course not. How do we "not fear"?

## Be still and know that I am God

What does that mean? It means to be still and know that God is God. Boy, we sure try to complicate things!

When you are in the midst of the storm, when life is shaking beneath your feet, when it seems at any moment the foundations of your life are about to be torn loose and destroyed... be still and know that God is your very present help in your time of trouble.

### We can't get our minds off of ourselves until we are still.

If we are trying to outrun the storm, we can't stop and know God. If we are scurrying around to tell everyone about our troubles (gals? hello?), we can't know God. If we are busy trying to fix everything (guys? hello?) and get life back to "normal", we can't know God.

All of our personal efforts to weather the turmoil life **without** God are fruitless. Only when we become still and turn our eyes upon God, will the fear subside.

### Fear is the result of trusting or gazing at anything but God.

Is there a hurricane on the horizon of your life? Can you see a big, unavoidable, devastating storm bearing down on you? Divorce, terminal illness, money problems, straying kids? Do not fear. Be still, get your focus on God and know Him.

Have you been through an unexpected "tornado"? An accident? Death in the family? Sudden loss of a job or finances? Unfaithful spouse? Do not fear. Be still, get your eyes on God and off your self.

No matter what life is throwing at you, there is one answer to it: **turn to God**. Get your eyes off the problem, off your self and off other people. Be still. Know God. Focus on God. He is **very** present in your time of need. And therefore, you will not fear...

*Thank You O God that You are very present, and that we can turn to You when the storms of life rage and threaten to undo us. Reveal Yourself to us as we become still and know that You are God. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Is your first reaction to life's storms to spring into action, or to be still and "know God"? Which is your natural tendency? Why does God tell us to do opposite of our natural inclination? Have you ever been still and pondered God even in the peaceful times of life? Do you think practicing being still when life is peaceful will help you do it when tragedy strikes?

**Application:** We can't do in game time what we haven't done in practice. Learn to be still and meditate on God. Ponder God. Think about the simple fact that God is

God, there is none like Him. There is nothing, nothing, nothing in this life that can so much as cause Him to blink unless He so chooses. Be still. Know God.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## The Answer

Romans 12:9-12 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; (NKJV)

Christian life is not magically devoid of stress, disappointment, heartache and discouragement. The answer to most of them, is to get our mind off of ourselves, and on to God and others.

Today's self-help trend will no doubt categorize that statement as simplistic, untrained and unrealistic. God has made it very clear that Scripture contains **everything** we need to live a pleasing, whole life.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (NKJV)

2 Peter 1:2-4 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (NKJV)

**Denying self is the cure for most of our personality flaws and unhappiness.**

We spend our whole life (before God gets a hold of us) worried about one thing: ME; pursuing one interest: MINE; judging all things by one criteria: what's in it for ME.

## How's that working out for you?

The day we step down off the throne and begin a life of service and sacrifice, is the day life becomes fulfilling.

- Are you depressed? Find someone to help and care for. Your spirits will be lifted.
- Are you discouraged? Help someone whose circumstances are worse than yours. Your joy will return.
- Are you bitter? Pray for the person you are bitter against. You can't be bitter about people you pray fervently for.
- Are you unhappy? Sacrifice your time and energy to bring happiness to someone else. Your smile will reappear.
- Are you discontent? Help others who are suffering hardship and lost. Your discontentment will quickly melt away.

Do you feel like "what's the use?" If personal interests consume your life, you're exactly right, what's the use. Can you imagine EVER thinking "what's the use?" when you are helping, serving or sacrificing for others?

Titus 2:11-14 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. (NKJV)



Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (NKJV)

If you are down, discouraged, tired, bitter, frustrated, unhappy or discontent.... get your mind off your SELF. Focus on serving God, and helping others. It is the cure for 99% of life's emotional, relational and spiritual problems. That is the blessing of being a child of God. God promises to care for us when we give our life up for Him. **No prescription needed.**

*Lord God, grant us wisdom to understand that serving others and denying ourselves is the solution to many of life's ills. May we know that denying ourselves and serving You is the answer to ALL of life's troubles. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Is your life consumed with your wants, your needs, your happiness, and your feelings? Is that working out for you?

**Application:** To the degree that we are focused on ourselves, it will directly parallel with how discontent and unhappy we are. Read Matt 5:1-11.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## The Blessing of Humility

Luke 18:13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’ (NKJV)

Humility is repeatedly put forth in Scripture as a basic characteristic of the Christian. What is the foundation of humility? It can be found in Jesus teaching, commonly known as the Beatitudes:

Matthew 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (NKJV)

What exactly is "poor in spirit"? The idea is to be "spiritually destitute and bankrupt". It is the realization that we are hopelessly lost and in need of being rescued. It goes much deeper than the idea of helping ourselves. It's like a poor, lame beggar who will die if someone doesn't come along and take care of him.

That is our dilemma before meeting Christ. We are lost and condemned to eternal death. **We have no way of helping ourselves** or doing anything to better our situation. We are in need of being rescued by God. We can do nothing to save ourselves and are completely dependent on the Savior. The tax collector in Luke had truly reached the point of "poor in spirit"....

Luke 18:9-14 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’ 13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, **‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’**

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

The beggar realized that nothing he could do would help his condition. He was not even worthy of looking up to ask for help. He understood that no contribution on his part could help. He humbled himself and begged for mercy, which he no doubt received. **What effect does true humility have on us?**

### • A right knowledge of ourselves

- We are incapable of living up to God’s standard
  - Romans 8:7-8 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. 8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.
  - Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
- We deceive ourselves into thinking we can please God and do right apart from Him
  - Psalm 58:3 The wicked are estranged from the womb; They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.
  - Jeremiah 17:9 “The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?
  - Ephesians 2:1-2 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world,

according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience .

• **A right knowledge of Christ**

- When we see ourselves correctly, then we seek to see Jesus correctly because He is our only Hope. We will seek the true way of salvation knowing that it is impossible in our effort. Christ Alone! Our hope, our joy, our security, our eternity!
- Correctly understanding to the best of our finite ability what Christ did, who Christ was, what Christ sacrificed, what He accomplished, will only cultivate our humility. Our futile efforts to please God in our own strength pale and diminish with our growing knowledge of Christ's sufficiency.
- A right knowledge of Christ leads to a right knowledge of attitude, a right knowledge of worship, and a right knowledge of our dependence on Him.

Humility is not a personal attribute that is cultivated or encouraged today. Pride and self-sufficiency are the way of our world. So we have to dig through alot of misunderstanding and obstacles to learn about and grow in humility.

Psalm 34:18 The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit. (NKJV)

Far from being weak, humility brings us close to God. The more we understand the TRUTH about what we really are, and WHO God really is, the more we can truly begin to develop spiritual maturity, consistency and power.

*Father in Heaven, we are need of being rescued by You. Help us to understand that humility allows us to enter more fully into fellowship with You. We pray in faith for wisdom knowing that You will generously grant it. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** In the past, how have you defined humility? Do you see it as something negative that Christians have to endure to be "good"? What does "poor in spirit" have to do with being saved?

**Application:** Humility is understanding reality. It is understanding our true nature and circumstance; and God's true power and supremacy..

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## The Joy of Time with God

Psalm 63:5 My soul will feast and be satisfied, and I will sing glad songs of praise to you. (GNB)

**Today I want to encourage you!** Too many times, a "guilt trip" is laid on us and we make some commitments to change that quickly fail. Don't think of today's devotional as "if you don't pick up that heavy load, you're gonna be punished". Think of them as "there's a load of gold waiting for you. It's heavy and will be hard to pick up, but if you choose to do it, you will be rich beyond measure!". **An encouragement leading to blessing, not a guilt trip!**

I often challenge individuals, and groups concerning their private devotions (prayer and Bible study). It is rare that the immediate facial expressions don't reveal the opinion that "devotions" and Bible study are boring, painful duties; to be endured because "God says you have to do it".

How tragic. For the person who makes the choice to sacrifice time each day to spend with God, **there is inexpressible joy waiting**. Over time, as your intimacy with God grows, your biggest "frustration" will be your insatiable desire to INCREASE your time with Him! Now that's a "frustration" we can all use more of!

Sometimes we think that consistent devotion and real time with God in private is only for the Pastor, or the "super Christians". My Brethren, **this should not be!** Anticipation and excitement for time with God should be **TYPICAL** of Christians, **not extraordinary!**

I'm not a "super Christian". I'm just a normal, average guy who **CHOOSES** to spend time with God. Notice I said "choose" not "feel". Hopefully we get to a point where we genuinely feel like it, but it always begins with a choice.

### Feelings always follow choice.

Like a caboose being pulled by a train engine, feelings are always manifestations of our choices. Your **CHOICE** (train engine) may turn you in a new direction, and it might be a while before your feelings (the caboose) round the bend. But it **WILL** happen.

Through God's power, you can choose to make your time alone with God your highest priority. You can **CHOOSE** now to do it, even if you honestly **FEEL** like you'd rather be doing other things. You can **CHOOSE** to make your private time with God more important than your work, entertainment, ministry and leisure time. These other things will **NOT** suffer because they are lower priority. **All other areas in your life will be blessed by your choice to put God first.**

Okay, let's be honest. Many of you at this point are thinking "yeah, whatever". You have come to think and believe that your time with God is just another task, duty or "command" that you have to get done every day so you can be a "good Christian". Or maybe you've failed so many times, you just don't realistically think it is possible. You wish could get excited about it, but you just can't anymore. Maybe you even experience guilt for having this feeling but that's **honestly** the point you're at right now. God understands.

Beloved, let me challenge you to **give God the chance to fill your life with blessing**. Open wide your heart and time... see if the Lord will not fill it beyond measure. There will come a time when God will so incredibly bless your choice to get

to know Him, that you will laugh at the silly thought your private devotions to God used to be a "duty" and a hardship!

Psalm 81:10 I am the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it. (NKJV; God was speaking directly to the Israelites here, but the promise to fill (bless) you and I is no less applicable; Luke 6.38)

"Open your mouth wide..." Opening your mouth (in other words, "making yourself available to God in expectation that He will use you") requires action, you have to be DOER, not just hearer. You will never know this blessing until you CHOOSE to act accordingly. Start with one hour. Get alone with God. Pray to Him. Spill your heart out to Him. Read His Precious Word and get to know Him. Then be amazed when very soon you will be longing for 2 hours with Him!

*Father in Heaven, help us to know the joy of spending time with You. We pray for the strength to make the choice to arrange a time with you every single day. We ask that you will quickly allow our feelings to follow our choices. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Is prayer and Bible study hard for you? Is it boring? Is it a task you HAVE to perform in order to be "good" Christian? Do you wish you could have a FEELING of excitement about prayer and Bible study?

**Application:** God rewards commitment and discipline. It is a guarantee that the more time you spend in God's presence, the more you will begin to "feel" like doing it. Eventually, you will have excitement, expectation and anticipation about your time with God. It all begins with a choice.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## The Negative Reality

Psalm 39:4 - "Lord, make me to know my end, And what is the measure of my days, That I may know how frail I am. (NKJV)

Death, few, very.

From a human perspective, those are the answers to the Psalmists requests in our Bible verse for today. Death is our end. Few are the number of days we have in this life. And we are very, very frail when compared to what this wicked, sin-filled world can throw at us.

Does admitting your frailty make you a "negative" person? Is this speaking "bad confessions" into our lives?

### **Hardly. It's reality.**

Is it a "negative confession" if you proclaim "I will be killed if I stand on these train tracks too long". Your "bad confession" doesn't cause the train to come down the tracks. It's coming no matter what you "confess". I have often chuckled at the silliness of the "speak negative" mentality that says if a person sneezes, they shouldn't say "I think I'm getting a cold" because they just "spoke a cold" into their life by their negative words.

### **There's a huge difference between being pessimistic and addressing the reality of life in a sin-cursed world.**

It's profitable to understand our frail, finite nature compared to God's infinite nature. **Understanding the TRUE nature of things helps us to respond correctly**, not live in a make-believe world that we attempt to "confess" into existence despite the reality of what God says about this sin-cursed world.

Am I saying we need to walk around being "sad sack" pessimists? No. We don't need either extreme. We don't need to walk around in a fantasy afraid of thinking or speaking something "negative" into our lives; nor do we need to wander around in a pity party bemoaning the hardships of life.

### **WE NEED THE TRUTH.**

And the truth will set us free. Both extremes deny the truth and come with a set of problems. The "eternal optimist" or "positive confession" adherent denies the reality of a sin-corrupted, wicked world where suffering, tragedy, poverty and sickness are very real and coming to your doorstep sooner or later. To speak, act and live as if these negative aspects of this world aren't reality is to deny what God has declared as the curse for man's sin on His perfect creation. The curse is a part of life just as much as blessing. It makes no difference if we choose to ignore this fact.

On the other hand, the "poor me", "doom and gloom" "life stinks" person is guilty of denying the flip-side of reality that is just as true. **Yes**, we live in sin-corrupted world full of suffering and sickness. **However, God can literally bring joy, happiness and peace to ANY situation or circumstance.** But the Creator will do things His way and in His timing, not ours. Life is NEVER "doom and gloom" for the person who has a Godly perspective.

In Psalms 39, verses 4-7, God gives us a dose of reality; an idea of how things really are. Why? To depress us? No, to give us a true perspective on life; to emphasize His greatness compared to our weakness; to highlight our dependence on Him so that He may be glorified through His mercy and goodness.

Each observation has both positive and negative aspects - both meant to glorify God.

- Psalm 39:4 - "Lord, make me to know my end, And what is the measure of my days, That I may know how frail I am. (NKJV)
    - What is our end? Death. That is the inevitable, the equalizing destiny for us all. But God has given us a choice of where that "end" will "end up". God knows we will all die. So He has given us choice of eternal life or eternal condemnation at the price of His very own Son.
    - Death is the ultimate "reality check". We will all die. Where we end up is our choice. God has graciously given us that choice.
    - What is the measure of our days? Short, unsure, like a vapor (James 4.14). We don't know how long we have in this life so there is no time to waste. On the one hand, it's a bit scary to realize that today you could die a hundred different ways; but on the other hand it really puts a sense of urgency into our minds that time is short and we are to be about our Fathers business and not waste a moment.
    - This sense of imminent death also causes us to long for the security of salvation in Christ knowing that we could be face to face with God at any moment giving an account for our life.
    - When we understand that death gets us all, and it could come at any time, we all of sudden begin to grasp how truly frail we are. The result? The greatness, mercy and love of God is glorified through our frailty. To the degree that we are frail, God is infinitely more powerful and has provided the way for us to ultimately overcome this frailty.
  - Psalm 39:5-6 - Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, And my age is as nothing before You; Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor. Surely every man walks about like a shadow; Surely they busy themselves in vain; He heaps up riches, And does not know who will gather them. (NKJV)
    - Our days are very short. Our age, even our old age, is nothing compared to God. Even in the very best of circumstances, a man's life is like a wisp of smoke that appears and quickly drifts away into nothing. I'd say that's pretty negative. But it's reality.
    - This life is like a shadow. It's not reality. Eternity is reality. Heaven and hell are reality. This life is a whisper of time; a moment of preparation and decision that is a breath, a wink, a vapor compared to eternity. Understanding this reality leads us to spend this short time in preparation for what really counts, what really lasts, what really matters.
    - What's the "positive" reality? Our days are short, but God knows it and has given us everything we need to live a Godly and fulfilled life (2Peter 1).
    - While our "best" is like a vapor, God's "mediocrity" (if there were such a thing) will be far beyond anything that we can conceive or dream of (1Cor 2.9); and God is preparing the next life for us even now (John 14.2-3).
    - Do you "surely busy" yourself in vain? Are you running around chasing, storing up and coveting the things of this life as if this life were MORE than a vapor, MORE than wink in time?
  - Psalm 39:7 - "And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You. (NKJV)
    - The result of this "reality check"? Our hope turns to God.
- Depressing? Negative? A "bad confession"? Only if your happiness and security is tied to this temporary, sin-corrupted world.

If our faith is in God, if our reality is based on God's reality, then these "negative truths" only serve to give us a wake up call and rightfully shake our trust in the things of this world which so quickly and unexpectedly can disappear. These "negative truths" increase our dependence on God, increase our hope in Him and increase our love for a Savior who is preparing our "true reality" even now.

Our end is death. Our days are short and unsure. Our lives are frail. We don't need to busy ourselves chasing after the things of this life. We know these truths and our hope is in God (Read Ecclesiastes).

The "negative truth" of this life leads us to **the ultimate positive truth: God is our hope.**

*Lord God, help us today to see truth no matter whether it is positive or negative.*

*Let us see reality according to You. Our hope is in You, In Jesus Name, amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you believe you can avoid or change the negative realities of life by being "positive"? Are you overly pessimistic about life and truly "negative" about things?

**Application:** Each of these attitudes puts life into man's hands and ignores the truth that God has set before us. Life in this sin-cursed world comes with sickness, sorrow, suffering, futility and tragedy as well as blessings. That's reality. But its also reality that Christians are to live above the emotions brought on by the hardships of life and find peace, joy and happiness in all circumstances.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## The New Boss

Colossians 3:17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (NKJV)

Work, whether in the business world, or at home, is a two-sided coin: futile or fulfilling; painful or purposeful; discouraging or delightful.

The difference between the two sides of our work coin is that one side is dedicated to our personal desire and control; the other side is dedicated to the Lord.

On the personal side of the coin it doesn't matter what kind of job you have, what kind of money you make or what level of achievement you rise to. The result of work not done in God's name is futility, or in other words it won't get you what your hoping for.

### **Work, apart from God, will never make you happy.**

It will never be enough. It will never be satisfying. It will rarely be enjoyable over the long run. Contrarily, the other side of the coin is truly exciting! When you dedicate your work to the Lord, it doesn't matter how lowly or esteemed your position is. We work for the Eternal Supervisor who has an entirely different, perfect way of measuring the value of what we do.

Being a corporate CEO done in selfish personal pursuit will leave you empty and unfulfilled. However, even digging ditches when done "as unto the Lord" will bring satisfaction and a clear conscience.

You see, God is not interested in our status, position or importance... **He is interested in our love for Him.** He is interested in our dedication and obedience in everything we do. Doing all things, including work, in the Lord's name brings God's favor:

- It brings blessing - Prov 22.29
- It is watched over by God - Psa 127.1
- Leads to a satisfying life - Prov 10.16
- It is a gift from God to be enjoyed - Ecc 2.24

Much of our discontent with labor, and the continual pursuit of a "better" job stems from not wholly dedicating our work to the Lord. When He wants us to move on, He will direct us, assuming we are in good fellowship with him. There is nothing wrong with seeking a better paying job, or accepting a position you will enjoy more... if done with God's will as our primary measure.

Whether homemaking or business, if you are perpetually discontent with your labor it is most likely because you have not dedicated your work and time to the Lord. If you find yourself consistently feeling frustrated and discontent about your daily labor, ask God to help you understand why. Maybe you have not fully dedicated your day to the Lord.

*O God, You have given us labor as a gift to be enjoyed. Help us to dedicate our work day to You so that we may find blessing and fulfillment in it. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Have you ever purposely dedicated your work to the Lord? When you think of work, do you primarily see God as your "employer"? Do you treat work as something not related to "Godliness"?

**Application:** Many Christians mistakenly separate the "secular" and the "sacred".

They see church as "God's work" and employment as unrelated to serving the Lord. Realize that every moment of your day is sacred when consecrated to God in obedience, submission and gratitude.

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## What If the Lord Said

Ecclesiastes 2:17 Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind. (NKJV)

It seems to be a common struggle in life for people to feel defeated, weary and without purpose; at least occasionally. This is a natural consequence of our fallen, sinful world. When sin entered creation, it corrupted everything. Work became hard, life became difficult... everything that could go wrong, usually does. We can reach a point where we honestly feel like "what's the use?"

Sometimes the "what's the use" feeling creeps in to our Christianity. When we suffer or go through trials, we tend to wonder what God is doing, and why He doesn't make things easier for us. Just when we get victory in one area and things start "going our way", inevitably something ruins the smooth sailing.

We become tempted to **endure** life,  
instead of **live** it.

When I reach these times, I find it helpful to wonder how many times the Lord has looked at me, **and had THE RIGHT to say** "what's the use?". He would be perfectly justified in the conclusion that there is no use in bothering with me. My next failure or sin is not a question of IF, but WHEN.

Despite that, my Savior does not say "what's the use" about me. Contemplation of that should help us when we're tempted to say "what's the use". God is faithful. He is perfect. He has us exactly where we should be, going through exactly what will make us more like Christ. God is just waiting for us to realize that He has things absolutely under control.

Amid the trials which I meet, amid the thorns which pierce my feet, one thought remains supremely sweet, thou thinkest Lord of me!

The cares of life come thronging fast, upon my soul their shadow cast; their gloom reminds my heart at last, thou thinkest, Lord, of me!

Lest shadows come, let shadows go, let life be bright or dark with woe; I am content, for this I know, thou thinkest Lord of me!

Thou thinkest Lord of me, of me; thou thinkest Lord of me!  
(E.S. Lorenz)

Rejoice that God has never said "what's the use" about you, though He would be perfectly justified in doing so. Take that blessing and motivation and allow it to help you through defeat and weariness when you're tempted to look up to God and say, "what's the use"

*O God, how blessed we are that You never say "what's the use" about us. Help us to have faith and perseverance, relying on Your strength and power to see us through this life until one day we are home with You. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Have you ever contemplated how the Lord would be justified in saying "what's the use" about us? What response does that invoke in your heart?

**Application:** When you get weary of the Christian life of sacrifice, think of how many times Jesus could say "what's the use" about you. In appreciation of His love, patience and mercy, renew your strength to serve Him.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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# You Must Have Forgotten

## Part: 1

2 Peter 1:9-11 - For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (NKJV)

Ah, Peter. For us hard-headed, simple-minded folks, he's just what the Doctor ordered. He makes things so plain and straight to the point. In the first chapter of 2nd Peter, he starts out by letting us know that we don't have any excuses for not living a godly life:

2 Peter 1:2 - Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness... (NKJV)

As Christians, we have the divine power of Jesus Christ that gives us ALL (not part, or some) things that pertain to life and godliness. How? Through the knowledge of Him who called us... which is the essence of a great deal of our failures: lack of knowledge (Hosea 4.6). We don't lack knowledge however because of God not giving it. We lack godly knowledge due to our own sinful non-pursuit of it.

Peter then goes on to list the characteristics of the godly:

2 Peter 1:5-8 - But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (NKJV)

These qualities encompass the full measure of "all things that pertain to life and godliness". They will be the topic of the upcoming series of devotionals. Let's introduce the result before we begin to study the journey.

After listing these characteristics Peter tells us that if we possess them in **increasing measure** we will not fail to be useful to God. He says "for if these things are yours and abound"; or in other words if they are present in your life and visibly increasing.

**God is not primarily concerned with the  
AMOUNT of holiness in your life, but rather,  
is it a consistently increasing amount?**

Peter then bluntly states the opposite truth. If you **don't** have these qualities, you're like a spiritually blind person who has forgotten that they were saved from their old sinful way of life. Having forgotten about the cleansing you received, you wallow around in the mud of sin like you used to. This sets up a vicious negative cycle:

**Being shortsighted and forgetful of your "sin cleansing" leads to more sin and lesser amounts of holiness which makes you more shortsighted and forgetful which leads to more sin...**

And round and round it goes. See the trap? Peter is giving us a spiritual slap in the face saying "HEY!!! You were cleansed from that old sinful life. Wake up and start living like it!". Let's consider some thoughts about verses 9-11:

- Going back to your old sinful way of life is like the dog returning to consume its own vomit (2Pet 2.22)

- Being shortsighted effects your ability to see things from an eternal perspective; you start reacting with a short-term mentality which most always leads to bad decisions
- You will remain shortsighted and lacking of the aforementioned Godly qualities until you "remember" that you are saved from your old sinfulness
- It is possible **for Christians** to reach a state of spiritual blindness because the verse clearly states that this person was cleansed from his past sins; so don't dismiss this as only the behavior of the unsaved

Peter encourages us to be diligent so that we don't fall into a state of forgetfulness. He encapsulates the Christian life in the phrase "calling and election" which covers the spectrum of our salvation and sanctification. How do we do that? By developing "IN INCREASING MEASURE" the qualities listed in verses 5-7. He says to make our "calling and election **SURE**". He would not command us to do something that was impossible.

Can you be SURE about your salvation? According to Peter you can. How? By living in increasing Godliness. Is there one word that summarizes those traits? Yes: OBEDIENCE. The entire book of 1John confirms Peter's point.

Peter goes on to say that a person who does these "things" (the list of godly qualities) will never stumble. Stop the train. Did Peter say NEVER? Remember, only God can typically get away with using words like "never", "all" and "every". By divine inspiration, Peter says that "if you do these things you will **never** stumble". It's a future, ongoing, increasing "doing" of the things he lists in verses 5-7.

When you find yourself sinning (stumbling), stop and contemplate which of the listed godly traits you are missing, ignoring or neglecting. Re-engage that particular holy characteristic and the sin in question will stop. An answer to dealing with sin is to think:

"Wait a minute. I've been cleansed from this sin. I don't have to do it. Which holy quality is lacking in my life that is leading to this sin? Faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness or love? Which one?"

If Peter tells us that we can "forget" about being saved from our old sinful ways; then the implication is to remind ourselves frequently, "I have been cleansed from my old sinfulness, and I no longer live that old life." And there is a "rich" reward for those who live an increasingly godly life.

That increasing life of godliness will be where we pick up tomorrow.

*Almighty God, You have given us everything we need to live a life of Godliness. We pray that You would remind us every time we forget that we have been cleansed from our old sin. We pray you would correct our spiritual vision everytime we become shortsighted. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** How sure are you of your salvation? What does "increasing measure" mean? What does Peter mean by "never" stumble?

**Application:** Of course we will always continue to stumble but it should be with DECREASING frequency while our Godliness is INCREASING. Peter states we will NEVER stumble if we "do these things". So each time we do stumble, one of these "things" is not being done. Ask God for wisdom and discernment to recognize the lacking quality behind your sin, and ask the Holy Spirit to remind you when you start to "forget" that you have been cleansed from sin.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## You Must Have Forgotten

### Part: 2

2 Peter 1:9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. (NKJV)

If we lack these "things" we're spiritually blind, forgetting that we were cleansed from our old sinful way of life. On the opposite side, in verses 10 & 11 we're told that if we do these "things" we will never stumble and will receive a rich welcome in to heaven. What things?

2 Peter 1:5-7 - But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. (NKJV)

Before we get into the "things", what "reason" is Peter speaking of? In the preceding verses (v.3-4) we learn that we have everything we need to live a godly life provided to us through the Divine Nature of Jesus Christ. So for **that reason**, Peter continues with list of characteristics that describe the behavior of someone who possesses this "divine" nature. In keeping with Peter's "Christianity for Dummies" simplicity, he doesn't just tell us to live godly lives... he tells us how.

He starts by telling us to add virtue to our faith while "giving all diligence" or "making every effort". The original Greek had in mind to "come along side of with all zeal". **So "let go and let God" doesn't apply well here.** It is the picture of a small child who works WITH his father for the purpose of learning something. The Father is the teacher and the one responsible for the results, but the child comes along side the Father and gives it his best effort regardless of how insignificant (maybe zero) his actual contribution may be. We are to make try with all our heart to develop these qualities. God will actually empower us to see results but our effort is commanded.

So... because we are partakers of Christ's Divine Nature, we are to come along side of our Father who will help us learn to add virtue to our faith. How do you "add" these qualities? This word "add" taken in context **actually translates to our English word "choreograph"**. Weird, huh?

In ancient Greece, the state chorus had a director who paid for all the expenses of training the chorus. So the word "choreographer" meant someone who supported the chorus abundantly, and eventually came to mean the person who directed, provided for and planned.

So the idea of "add" in this verse is that the Believer is to "pay for, supply, furnish, direct or support" these virtues in his life. All together the beginning of verse 5 means:

"Because you have the Divine Nature of Jesus which gives you everything you need to live a Godly life, you should come alongside of the Father and give your very best effort to supply your life with these virtues..."

**Of course God gives the true increase in this effort.** Like a father teaching his young son how to use the lawn mower, the dad actually does all the real pushing and turning. But the youngster has his hands on the handle pushing with all his might, even if in reality he couldn't budge the mower without his dad providing the actual effective power.

This sets the stage for learning the virtues Peter lists. We'll pick up there tomorrow.

*Almighty God, You have given us everything we need to live a life of Godliness. We pray that You would remind us every time we forget that we have been cleansed*



*from our old sin. Give us the discipline and desire to come along side You and give our very best effort. Then give us a thankful heart knowing that any success is totally Your doing. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Does a Christian have a real part in his own growth or do we just "let go and let God"? Does the amount of your effort matter? Does the actual result of YOUR effort matter? What parallels do you see between these thoughts and Jesus' comments about becoming like children?

**Application:** It is a fact that our effort will amount to a grand total of ZILCH in the actual instilling of godly virtues in our lives. God is the sole source of righteousness. But just like you train your children to do chores or learn new tasks, no matter how incapable they actually are of completing the task, they have to make an effort or they will never learn. And no matter what they are actually capable of, as parents we are always satisfied when they make a whole-hearted effort. God is the same towards us.

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## You Must Have Forgotten

### Part: 3

2 Peter 1:9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. (NKJV)

If you were to lack certain things that caused you to be blind, forgetful and stumble alot, would you want to know what those "things" were? What if these "things" encompassed all that pertained to living a Godly life? Let's add to the fact that if you do these "things" you will never stumble, and will receive a rich welcome into heaven. How important are these "things" now?

2 Peter 1:5-7 - But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. (NKJV)

These are the "things". Notice that he does not start by instructing us to add faith. Peter is clearly addressing genuinely saved Believers so the presence of faith is a matter of fact. Of course we all continue to increase in faith our entire life because faith is simply a focus on God. God is the object of faith and faith is the decision to look to Him rather than to ourselves, or something else.

Today we look at "virtue". I would venture a guess that of the entire list, virtue is the least likely to be understood or defined well by most Christians. It is generally thought of as "goodness" and of course there is accuracy to that but it goes deeper. In the Scriptures, virtue speaks of the idea of:

- **Diligence** - being virtuous is the constant awareness and faithful effort to be Godly in all things; being Godly does not happen by default or on accident; it is only through diligent obedience. (2 Tim 2.15; Deut 6.17)
- **Moral excellence** - this is a superior attitude towards moral purity that does not ask "what can I do and still be Godly?"; but rather asks "what can I do that will bring the MOST glory to God?".
- **Courage** - being virtuous in a sin-driven world requires great courage (Prov 28.1). In the New Testament the blessing of persecution is promised to every virtuous Believer (Matt 10.22).
- **Wonderful acts** - virtue is an inward quality but manifests itself in our behavior and our selfless service to others. In the Greek culture, virtue was used to describe the ability to perform "heroic deeds" (2Tim 3.17)
- **Manifestation of power** - the Holy Spirit empowers us to live good and excellent lives; when this power is manifested in our lives, in a sense it flows out of us and into the lives around us. God imparts goodness to us that we may impart goodness to others (Rom 5.13; 2Tim 1.7)
- **To fulfill a purpose** - when a Christian lives a life that glorifies God, they are fulfilling their intended purpose (Rom 8.28; 2Tim 3.10)

Faith helps develop virtue because faith has our spiritual eyes already focused on God who also is the Giver and Teacher of virtue. Living a virtuous life authenticates our salvation not only to those around us, but also to ourselves... otherwise known as the "assurance of salvation".

### **The lack of assurance of salvation is a self-made tragedy.**

It is epidemic in the church today that most Christians are not "sure" they are saved and going to heaven. This is a tragedy. But it is a self-made tragedy. A life of virtue

will provide this assurance. If we obey God, virtue is a default way of life. Obedience brings assurance. Virtuous living brings assurance. The entire book of 1John confirms this.

In summary, your genuine saving faith is now confirmed in and demonstrated by a virtuous life. That virtue is learned and obtained from the object of your faith: God.

Tomorrow we will learn how our virtue helps lead to and develop Godly knowledge.

*Father of Virtue, help us to keep our eyes of faith on You and live a virtuous life.  
Help us to be diligent and courageous demonstrating a life of goodness and moral  
excellence in a sinful world. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you unquestionably sure of your salvation today? Is your level of doubt in any way parallel to a lack of virtue in your life? How has your understanding of "virtue" changed after reading this lesson? If you lack virtue, what statement could this be making about the nature of your faith? Your salvation?

**Application:** "Virtue" has become one of those nice "family values" terms. We are coming into an age where "moral goodness" is back in vogue. As Christians, our virtue is added to our existing faith. This makes virtue for us an identifying trait and a manifestation of true salvation. Attempts at "virtue" apart from saving faith are nothing more than pride masquerading as goodness. If you don't understand that statement, ask God for wisdom about it because it is an important concept to understand.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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## You Must Have Forgotten

### Part: 4

2 Peter 1:9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. (NKJV)

These "things" are listed beginning in verse five and last time we discussed virtue being added to your faith. Virtue is the outward manifestation of your salvation in the form of goodness and moral excellence demonstrating the authenticity of your faith.

2 Peter 1:5-7 - But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. (NKJV)

Next we find Peter instructing us to add knowledge to our virtue. Keep in mind this is not a "checklist" or a set of beads we add to a string. You don't add them one by one and "check" them off as done. This is a growing, interdependent list of qualities that feed and build on each other.

Remember too, that the idea of "diligently adding" means to "come along side of" and make your best effort while realizing that the "greater power" (God in this context) is actually the real producer of results. We are to try our very hardest all the while knowing that our efforts alone will amount to nothing. But God honors our effort by producing results for us. God does the adding in an abundant and extravagant manner.

What does Peter mean by "knowledge"? In this context it speaks of complete, practical knowledge - the ability to successfully deal with life in a Godly manner. It is not intellectual knowledge, but knowledge that comes from the illumination of God's Word in the Believers heart. It is the ability to determine right from wrong - to have moral discernment.

Psalms 119:18 - Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law. (NKJV)

This knowledge comes from your eyes being opened by God Who reveals the truth of His Word to you that you may rightly apply it to how you live your morally excellent life of faith.

Romans 12:2 - And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove (know) what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (NKJV)

We are to renew our mind through Bible study and prayer that we may know the will of God. You have probably heard people ask on many occasions "how can you know what God's will is?". Well now you know! Renew your mind with holiness learned from the Word and prayer... and you will know the good and acceptable and perfect will of God!

Tomorrow we will look at adding self-control to our discerning, morally excellent life of faith.

*God of True Knowledge, open our eyes that we may read Your Word and learn wondrous things to help us live a virtuous, faithful life. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you renewing your mind each day in God's Word and prayer? Do you know the good and acceptable and perfect will of God? If no, do you see any connection? Does Scripture imply a connection between the two? Are you bold about what is right and what is wrong? Do you take a stand for it, or fall quiet to the accusations of "judgmental"?

**Application:** The knowledge in mind here is not simply broadening the amount of Bible knowledge you possess. This knowledge is a God-illuminated understanding of right and wrong.. of Truth. It is a clear understanding of morality and holiness. This clear understanding allows us to live a virtuous life of good works and moral excellence.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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## You Must Have Forgotten

### Part: 5

2 Peter 1:9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. (NKJV)

We've been looking at "things" that characterize the Christian. What's more, doing these things will keep us from stumbling and gain us a "rich" welcome into heaven (v. 10-11). Notice that there are seven qualities listed. Seven is always the number of Godly perfection in the Bible. Everything that is in the Bible is there purpose!

2 Peter 1:5-7 - But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. (NKJV)

So far we've learned that we are to come along side of God, doing our very best to add ("abundantly supply") these qualities to our lives... all the while understanding that in reality only God can give results. We are incapable, but our effort is still required. It's like having your small children "try" to do a new chore knowing full well they won't be successful and you will have to actually do it for them. But their effort is what we are seeking from them.

We are to add morally excellent and courageous living (virtue) to our faith. In order to live a morally excellent life we must seek the knowledge of God to understand exactly what the virtuous life consists of. As we gain the knowledge needed to live a life of virtue, we begin to exercise self-control and discipline in order to conform our lives to the knowledge of Christ.

The self-control or temperance spoken of here is the idea of gaining mastery over our lusts and sinful desires. The Apostle Paul frequently used athletic word pictures to convey this idea. It is the concept of doing what "has to be done" no matter painful or devoid of "fun". Our bodies and passions want non-stop pleasure. Our self control denies that in order to cultivate virtue founded on Godly knowledge.

### **We live in a "self" controlled world but this is not Godly "self-control".**

The self control in question here is conforming your life to your Godly knowledge not your lusts. You take what you have learned from God and filter each behavioral decision through that knowledge. The essence of self-control is deciding to cause every action, choice and desire to come into line with what you know to be Godly.

Keep in mind this is not a "sheer will" type of self control. If you resolve by pure personal choice to conform to Godliness then you will experience short term success followed by sure defeat. The proper type of self control is allowing and trusting that God's way is best (that's why we choose it) and that God will empower us in that way (that's how we have consistent victory in it).

In this verse, self control literally means to "hold in". It speaks of mastering our fleshly passions so that they become a servant to our will rather our life remaining a servant to our lusts. A good analogy is that of an athlete who chooses to train and practice rather than indulge in laziness or overeating because he "feels" like it and it is easier.

In Matthew 5 we find the Beatitudes and a blessing for "meekness". Scriptural meekness is "power under control", in this context the Holy Spirit's control. This is Godly self control. The Holy Spirit empowers us and reigns, or controls us through our submissiveness to His control.

Compiling our lessons so far, we have learned:

- As a Christian (who by default must already have faith if genuinely saved) you are to live a morally excellent and courageously good life; how do you know what that is?
- Because you have added Godly knowledge through diligent study, prayer, meditation and asking God for wisdom.
- Now you are taking your Godly knowledge and you are "holding in" your fleshly desire in conformity with that knowledge.

You now have a clear understanding of how hard our flesh battles for control although it can no longer enslave you because you are under the Spirit's control now (unless of course you choose to replace "self control" with "self" control. Because we have lost the true meaning of "self control" in our modern language, it may help to think of this in your mind as "Spirit control").

Next time we will see how all this natural leads to and empowers us to persevere. And we are half way towards the goal of learning the qualities of the "divine nature" of Christ that are all we need for life and Godliness.

*O God, we so desperately need You to empower us to control our flesh. We are incapable of holding it in ourselves. We ask that You add to our virtue and knowledge a full measure of "Spirit control". In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you person of self control? Do you hold in and control your passions and lusts? Are you tangibly increasing in your ability to do so? Do you do it from sheer will power? CAN you do it from a sheer choice of your will? What is your idea of meekness and have you ever seen it as having anything to do with self control?

**Application:** There is a danger of two extremes. One is to be "self controlled" by attempting to be "self" controlled, in other words using your own will power to try and conquer your flesh. WON'T WORK! The other extreme is to believe there is no effort required by us, we just "let go and let God". Both extremes are unscriptural and will be unsuccessful. We are to try our very hardest, with all our heart... all the while knowing that only God will give any real results or victory... but He requires our effort! Another wondrous Christian paradox.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# You Must Have Forgotten

## Part: 6

2 Peter 1:9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. (NKJV)

The Apostle Peter isn't one to sugar coat things. He just flat out says "if you lack these Godly qualities you're acting like you have forgotten you're a Christian". When I was a Drill Sergeant in the Army I made a similar statement to young privates in boot camp when they were goofing off.

I'd say, "Private, obviously you have forgotten you're not back on the street!". The "street" was a euphemism for their previous **non-military** life and behavior. And okay, I rarely actually called them "Private" either. It was usually something a bit more descriptive but you get the point! (Just so you will know, even as a Drill Sergeant for many years, I never cursed. "Profanity is a strong way to show weak mind!").

Peter is using a very blunt statement as well. He's knocking us on our foreheads with his knuckles saying, "hello? anyone home? You're behavior shows that you are lacking certain Godly qualities. Have you forgotten you were saved? Hello? Anyone?"

2 Peter 1:5-7 - But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. (NKJV)

In part six of our series, we come to perseverance. This is generally one of those Christian words that most people have a vague definition of but can't really nail down exactly what it means.

Perseverance is from the Greek word "hupomone" (hoop-om-on-ay) that is translated at different times as patience, endurance, continuance, waiting or steadfastness. It is the picture of a determination in person to **not be deterred from a deliberate path** or course of action no matter what the consequence.

It is the idea of setting your direction and no matter what happens you will not be distracted. It's like the focus of a professional football running back. When the play begins, the running back sets his course up the field and even though he will be met with violent opposition, he will not quit running up field for any reason as long as he is physically capable. Crushing collisions, scrapes and cuts, bruises, aches and pains... no consequence will deter him as long as he is physically capable of continuing on towards the goal line.

The Apostle Paul liked sports analogies and there is a reason why. Athletes are known for their dogged perseverance to reach the intended goal. They will hurt, bleed, fight through injury, ignore pessimism and adversity..... pretty much endure anything to "win the prize" set before them.

A world class athlete will play by the rules (virtue), know everything there is to know about their sport (knowledge), make every decision in their life with a single focus (self control) and endure any amount of hardship or pain possible to reach the goal line, win the medal or be ranked number one (perseverance).

**Worldly unsaved athletes are capable of this type of perseverance.** O that we (who possess the Divine Nature of Christ) were as dedicated and focused.

*Lord God, if only we had the same dedication to you as the natural man can have to a sport or an idea. Help us to learn the true meaning of perseverance and being*

*willing to endure anything without being deterred from the Goal. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** What are you willing to endure to be good at a sport? To be good at your job? To maintain the lifestyle you lead? To be "liked"? How does that compare to what you're willing to endure to be Godly? Are you willing to endure giving up personal time and recreation? Are you willing to endure people making fun of you and even hating you? Are you willing to endure imprisonment, injustice and death?

**Application:** We are willing to make great sacrifices and endure many discomforts to achieve a worldly goal. But often it's "too hard" or "I just can't do it" when it comes to spiritual matters. "I'm just not a morning person"; "I just don't like to read"; "church is boring and besides that's my only day off every week". In order to persevere spiritually, you have to know, and see, the finish line. Can you see it?

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# You Must Have Forgotten

## Part: 7

2 Peter 1:9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. (NKJV)

We have learned that these "things" are a list of Christian qualities starting in verse 5. They are not a checklist of things to be added sequentially but rather they are interdependent with each one building on and leading into the former and latter.

So far we have discovered that along with our faith we diligently strive with full effort (knowing that God is the source of true results) to add moral excellence and courage (virtue); and Biblical, God-illuminated wisdom (knowledge); while reigning in our fleshly lusts (self control) and pressing on with a single-minded, undeterred focus (perseverance).

2 Peter 1:5-7 - But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. (NKJV)

To all this, the Apostle Peter says to add "godliness". On the surface that seems pretty generalized and out of place because you would think that just covers everything, doesn't it?

This word "godliness" in the original Greek meant "god-likeness" or "worship well". The idea is that we are to be in good standing with God; that our relationship with Him is unhindered and not neglected. It is the demeanor of reverence and piety because our close relationship with God draws us up above the petty and fleshly trivialities of this life and keeps us focused on God.

### Is the "godly" person some sort of angelic caricature living as if the world around them isn't real?

Are we talking about the person who walks around with their eyes skyward, hands folded and an angelic choir singing in the background? Is this person impractical because they are so "holy"? Far from it.

The "godly" person is the most practical of all because they have the welfare of others foremost in their mind. All of their decisions are filtered through Godly wisdom so they end up being decisions of true nobility and goodness. This is the person who truly loves and serves others.

The godly person is "pious". It's unfortunate that to most people this word has come to mean "religious bigotry and hypocrisy". **Piety is simply a reverence for God.** It is the habitual filtering of everything a person experiences, feels, thinks or does through the knowledge of the Scriptures and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

A common mistake of Christians is to ask God to "give us" godliness, or "make us" godly. At the moment of salvation when the Holy Spirit indwells the new believer, they now possess in full all that is needed to live a godly life. That is the essence of verses 3 & 4, that we possess the Divine Nature of Christ that is everything we need to live a godly life. We don't need to pray for "more" or for God to "make" us godly, **we need to pray that we will avail ourselves of what God has already given.**

Why is godliness listed after perseverance (endurance, patience, temperance)? Because patience is a primary way to develop Godliness. Patience is the process of being undeterred in our pursuit of God despite suffering, persecution and hardship. The single minded, unwavering focus (perseverance) on God produces godliness in us.

If you want to be godly, pray for patience. When you pray for patience, be fully aware and prepared for how patience is produced... by enduring and suffering. Patience is not all there is to it, but it's a big part. **It takes a truly courageous Christian to pray and ask God for patience.**

To summarize up to this point, we are to diligently add moral excellence (virtue) and Godly wisdom (knowledge) to our faith; reigning in our fleshly desires (self control) having a single-minded, undeterred focus (perseverance) on the goal of being Christ-like (godliness).

Tomorrow we will look at brotherly kindness as we continue on our quest for a stumble-free life, full of assurance (of salvation) looking forward to a rich welcome in heaven (v. 10-11).

*Holy God, we don't ask You today for more godliness because You most graciously have already indwelt us with the Divine Nature of Your Son. We ask You for wisdom and discipline to avail ourselves of the already present, but mostly neglected Godliness that we received at the moment of our salvation. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** How have you defined or perceived "piety" in the past? Is a reverence and continual worshipful attitude towards God something that characterizes your life? If not, what do you think the reason is?

**Application:** We have redefined holy words to the point where they almost all have negative meanings. Piety, holiness, righteousness, humility, meekness.. all carry negative impressions of bigotry, self-righteousness and hypocrisy. Let's not let the world redefine our godly vocabulary. By the way, if you lack godliness, do you have the courage to pray for patience? It's a sure-fire way to develop godliness.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# You Must Have Forgotten

## Part: 8

2 Peter 1:9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. (NKJV)

The Apostle Peter goes on to say in the following verses that if we possess certain Godly qualities, not only will we be received "richly" into heaven, but we can also live a "stumble-free" life. The degree in which we live without stumbling is proportionate to the degree these qualities are present:

2 Peter 1:5-7 - But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. (NKJV)

Each of these qualities are not part of a sequential checklist but rather, are extensions of, and built upon each of the other characteristics listed in verses 5-7. Everything in Scripture is supernaturally arranged exactly as God would have it for His exact purpose including the order of these traits.

Brotherly kindness would appear to be a "simple" quality and yet it is listed in our spiritual building project after traits like virtue and godliness. Why?

### **Brotherly kindness represents a selfless nature that prefers others over ourselves.**

This is the exact opposite of our old nature that masterfully filtered everything in life through the mindset of personal advantage and "what's in it for me". As we cultivate this list of qualities we transform from being "me-centered" to "others-centered".

New believers (or perhaps a not-so-new believer who has neglected God) builds upon their faith adding moral excellence and courage to their behavior. How do they know what virtue is? They know because they have diligently pursued Godly knowledge through a life of self-control, focusing their attention on the goal of Godliness from which they will not be swayed or deterred.

Through this life of self control and patience we become more Christ like, reverent and worshipful. The natural spiritual result of being more Christ-like is to serve others and instinctively look for ways to show kindness to those around us through which we demonstrate Christ's kindness towards us.

**Kindness is a defining Christian trait.** When a person reaches a point where their continual, natural state of mind is to view every situation or person as a opportunity for kindness and good deeds, this person has truly moved into the realm of deeper Godliness.

For example, when a car stalls on the road in front of you, is your first reaction to figure out how to get around them as quickly as possible, or is your first reaction a concern for whether or not they need help? What's the FIRST thought that pops in your head?

You're walking through a cafeteria and someone in front of you drops a tray of food and that splatters like a hand grenade all over everything. Is your first instinct irritation because the food is all over your clothes and shoes? Or is your first reaction one of compassion for the embarrassment the other person is feeling, and an instinctive desire to help them clean up the mess?

Okay, how about this one: you're on your way to CHURCH and an older couple is off the side of the road on an exit ramp laboring over a flat tire. What's more, they are

obviously of a lower income status and their car is an old "piece of junk". What's your first reaction? Worried about getting your hands dirty and your shirt sweaty? Worried the time you will "waste" when someone else will probably stop and help? Or is your first instinct without hesitation to pull over to offer help? Do you get out and timidly offer help hoping they will say "that's okay, we got it"? Or do you get out of your car already rolling up your sleeves greeting them with "looks like you folks need some help"?

### **When we are focused on service and kindness towards others we don't have time to pursue sin!**

The Lord seems to give plenty of object lessons to those who teach His Word. I teach a fairly large Sunday school group at our church and one morning a few months ago I was gearing up to present a "gem" of a lesson on kindness and serving others. As is my usual habit, I was up very early that Sunday morning going over my lesson at my office, then got in my truck to head to church.

On the way I saw what appeared to be a-not-very-well-off person, trying to carry his bicycle down a long stretch of road. I have to be honest and tell you that my first thoughts were "I need to get to church. I have a big class to teach. That guy can't be doing anything really important. It's early Sunday morning, he's carrying a bicycle; it's cold out and I don't have my coat; He's probably just some lazy guy who has all the time in the world on his hands and I'm a really busy important Sunday school teacher who's time is very valuable". (ouch, it hurts to admit that to you!)

I can imagine God was getting quite a chuckle from that situation because it was more than obvious that He arranged this scenario to prove to me that teaching about "kindness and service" is useless if you don't actually do it! So I passed the guy and for about two blocks I tried to convince God that I really WAS a kind and serving person, I just didn't have time to do it right now!

I had a Sunday school to teach!

I didn't have time to help this guy who was probably in this situation due to his own negligence anyway!

### **Can you say "H-Y-P-O-C-R-I-T-E"?**

After a couple of blocks, I finally obeyed the Lord and turned around. Come to find out, this young fellow was on his way to work. His car was broken down and he didn't have the money to fix it. He was riding his bike several miles to work early each morning and he had blown out a tire. That's why he was carrying his bike in the freezing cold and he still had about 4 miles to walk.

So I loaded him up, put his bike in the back of my truck and gave him a ride. I got to talk to him about his life and about the Lord. I was late to church, **but I was right on time to do God's will.** And my lesson on kindness that morning was real, not theory.

### **Kindness brings the blessing of "feeling good" and feeling "right with God".**

The other day a rather elderly gentlemen had lost a load of carpet remnants out of the back of his truck on a busy street. I was driving with my daughter as we came upon him and dozens of cars quickly detouring around him.

He was obviously physically incapable of picking up the carpet that had fell out, yet all these cars passed him in irritation because he was "in the way" and slowing them down. So we immediately stopped to help him. I'm a pretty strong fellow and it's a good thing because it took all I could muster to heave that carpet back into his truck.

I didn't get to speak to the gentleman much standing in the middle of this very busy street, and it was pretty hot out as well. But when I finished, through the sweat on

his face, he said to me with tears in his eyes "you don't know how much this means to me." I told him that God did, and with that I was off.

Not only was this a wonderful teaching opportunity for my daughter to witness, but wouldn't you know it, God threw in an extra blessing. While I was helping this kindly old man, my son's bus passes by with him and his friends on it coming home from school. "Hey, that's my Dad!"... and so my son witnessed a live lesson in "brotherly kindness" too along with his friends on that bus.

So I tell you those stories not to say "look what I did" but to give you personal testimony that kindness is a blessing that always pays huge dividends!

### **Never pass up a chance to be kind to others and demonstrate God's love.**

The more you are transformed into the image of Christ the less time you have to focus on yourself. Your mindset becomes one of sharing the gospel, serving and encouraging others and generally viewing every circumstance as an opportunity to be kind and helpful. The wonderful reality is that the more you experience this life of kindness, the more you will be blessed by it and the more you will want to experience it to an even greater degree! It is a truly heavenly "vicious cycle".

Try it today. Look at every situation you encounter today and allow the Lord to reveal to you a way to show kindness. See if you don't just feel closer to the Lord at the end of the day.

*Kind and Holy God, You have shown us the Ultimate Kindness. Help us to transform ourselves into the image of Your Kind Son. Help us to know that when we are being kind we are bringing glory to You. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Is your natural reaction to a situation one of kindness? Do you view others as opportunities for showing love, service and kind deeds? Or do people irritate you? Examine the last couple of weeks. How many acts of brotherly kindness are you "guilty" of? Or is all your time spent serving your own needs?

**Application:** Quick irritation and easy annoyance are sure indicators of selfishness and a lack of brotherly kindness. If the circumstances and presence of other people "get in your way", "slow you down" or "get on your nerves", you need to ask the Lord to forgive you for this lack of brotherly kindness. Ask Him to begin to cultivating a spirit of kindness in you by giving you opportunities to show kindness.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## You Must Have Forgotten

### Part: 9

2 Peter 1:9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. (NKJV)

The shortsighted person in this verse has neglected, never learned or temporarily traded his new divine nature (v.3) and gone back to his old sinful life. The Apostle Peter is bluntly reminding this person that he has very poor spiritual sight, valuing the old sinful way of life over the new eternal divine nature of Christ.

2 Peter 1:5-7 - But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. (NKJV)

Peter finishes up the list of qualities almost matter-of-factly tacking "love" on the end. At first glance you would think that "love" is just a summation of the other qualities and to a degree you would be correct. But it goes deeper than "love" being just a simple culmination.

Notice that the list of qualities in verses 5-7 begins with qualities that are inward and private in nature. We work on our own personal attitudes and thoughts of virtue and a personal quest for Godly knowledge. We patiently endure hardships for the sake of the cross and practicing self-control. So far all of these qualities are still very personal and all about the individual.

As these characteristics are cultivated, it begins to affect how you treat others. Now you begin to look outside of yourself allowing the godly nature in you to begin to influence those around you through brotherly kindness and service. Think about that term, "brotherly" kindness. It implies that we are showing kindness to those who are like us, who are "like-minded" or "brotherly". Your natural brother is part of your family and your blood. It is our natural tendency to show kindness to those who are part of us.

Brotherly kindness applies to our spiritual family too. As the level of our godliness increases it becomes instinctive to demonstrate kindness and "brotherly love" to those who share our faith and likeness.

Peter tells us to diligently add LOVE to brotherly kindness. Love, in this context, removes the "brotherly" aspect and now we ascend to the highest form of love, what we call "agape" love.

Agape love transcends our feelings, our commonalities or differences. This love is the love of God that sees every person as a precious creation of God who has lost their way and in need of the same Savior who has rescued us. Agape love ignores differences, ignores skin color, ignores financial status, ignores personality issues... and sees each person as God sees them.

### **There are only two types of people:**

Sinners who need the Savior and know it.

Sinners who need the Savior and don't know it.

If they already admit they are lost and need salvation, the "planting and watering" has been done and God will "give the increase". If they don't know they need a Savior, then we have an opportunity to do some spiritual farming (1 Cor 3.6-7). This "love" that Peter tells us to diligently add to our life is cultivating the habit of seeing every person through one primary question: Has the blood of Jesus washed away their sins? Everything else is a formality.



Love sees every person as needing the same salvation that we have been blessed with no matter how different they are, or how much we may be tempted to dislike them or think they don't deserve our love.

"Brotherly kindness" is loving those who are like us and are relatively easy to love. "Love" as used in verse 7, is loving those who are not like us, and seem difficult or even impossible to love.

*God of Love, help us to realize that You love us when we are very un-lovable. Help us to mature to the greatest level of Godliness, and that is loving those people that we just can't see a reason to love in our own heart but by seeing them through Your eyes we discover eternal reasons to love them. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Name one "unlovable", undeserving person that you love and show kindness to in any way? Can you name one?

**Application:** Scripture tells us that even evil people can show love to those who love them back (Luke 6.32) or deserve to be loved. The true differentiator of Christians is the power to love every person, seeing them through God's eyes, not ours. Whether they deserve it or not is not our place to determine.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## You Must Have Forgotten

### Part: 10

2 Peter 1:9 For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. (NKJV)

We will conclude our series on the "things" which make you short sighted if you lack them. On the other hand, having these "things" allows you to live a life free of "stumbling" and rewards you with a "rich" welcome into the Kingdom of Heaven (v.9-11). Let's remind ourselves of the "things" we have studied for 9 days:

2 Peter 1:5-7 - But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. (NKJV)

Taking all of our studies together let's summarize each part of these verses:

- "But also for this very reason"
  - What reason? The fact that as a Believer in Christ you are empowered with His Divine nature and everything that pertains to "life and godliness" is now inside you and available through His Word (v.3-4; 2Tim 3:16-17)
- "giving all diligence, add"
  - The idea is that we should make every effort to come along side of God and try as hard as we can to develop these godly qualities with all our heart and strength; all the while realizing that our own power is insufficient and that only God can truly increase these qualities in our lives. But God commands our effort in the process.
- "to your faith"
  - This verse is written to Believers who by default already have a measure of faith to begin building on or they wouldn't be Christians to begin with
- "virtue"
  - Moral excellence, godly courage, goodness
- "to virtue knowledge"
  - Godly knowledge found through illumination of Scripture and asking God for wisdom (James 1.5)
- "to knowledge self-control"
  - The "holding in" of our fleshly desires; reigning in our lusts; meekness is "power under the control of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 5:5)
- "to self-control perseverance"
  - Patience, endurance, temperance; having an eternal perspective on suffering and trials
- "to perseverance godliness"
  - Christ-likeness; having a continuous reverence and mindfulness of God
- "to godliness brotherly kindness"
  - Selflessness; preferring others over yourself; an instinctive compassionate mindset of being helpful and kind

- "and to brotherly kindness love."
  - Agape love; seeing others through God's eyes; showing kindness to those who your natural mind says don't deserve kindness.

Remember, these are NOT a checklist of things to add to your life. They are an interdependent, natural progression of qualities that build on and lead to all of the traits in total.

### **What is the reward, the result and the culmination of these godly characteristics?**

2 Peter 1:10-11 - Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things **you will never stumble**; for so an entrance will be supplied to you **abundantly** into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (NKJV, emphasis)

The reward considers both this present life and the future. To the degree that you stumble and sin during this life, you are missing or neglecting some or all of these "things" we have learned about because Peter plainly states that if all these characteristics are true of you, you will NEVER stumble.

When you sin, examine the sin and determine which of these characteristics are missing or lacking in your life. Keep in mind that while you may identify one particular trait that is obvious, typically there will be a lacking in several of them that contribute over all to your sin.

What is the future reward for cultivating these qualities in your life? A welcome into the eternal kingdom. Oh, wait a minute! A RICH, ABUNDANT welcome in the eternal kingdom of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

### **I can hardly imagine what a "welcome" will be like, much less an "abundant welcome"!**

This is a foundational portion of Scripture. It is an encapsulation of our entire Christian walk. Learn it well and teach it to your family, friends and every new or lukewarm Christian you know. The conciseness, plainness, and clarity of Peter's teaching here is of immeasurable value and depth in our effort to disciple and influence others for Christ.

2 Peter 1:12 - For this reason I will not be negligent **to remind you always of these things**, though you know and are established in the present truth. (NKJV, emphasis mine)

Peter's directive is to remind Christians "always" of these truths, even if they are already "established" (know) in them. Obviously he believed there is great value in revisiting these truths often no matter what stage of the Christian journey you are in.

When you come across a struggling or searching Christian, a passionate and zealous new Believer, or an apathetic and bored Saint, take them to this passage (2 Peter 1: 1-11), explain each portion and watch the Lord stoke the fires of their spirit through it.

*Most Gracious Eternal God, help us to "never stumble". You have told how us, but we need Your grace and power to accomplish it. Accept our effort as the offer of a living sacrifice even though we know we can't do it ourselves. May You receive all the glory and honor, In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you familiar enough with any portion of Scripture that you can sit and disciple someone in how to live well as a Christian? If someone asks you how they can overcome sin, can you answer them with anything more than a few nice Christian clichés?

**Application:** If you had to answer "no" to those questions, start by learning to explain 2Peter 1.9-11. They are not hard to learn, hard to explain or hard to communicate and there is hardly a person or situation that will not be blessed by hearing and applying these verses.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## You're Not Less Than the Least

Ephesians 3:8 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ (NKJV)

It's common for Christians to view Biblical characters as "super Godly"... that's why God put them in the Bible, right?

Next in line after Bible characters are a few select saints of renown devotion and spiritual discipline which might include well-known Bible teachers, Pastors & preachers, and others that you personally know who have a reputation of being "super" Christians.

Because of the perception that these folks make up some kind of "upper class" quality of spirituality, we often settle for mediocrity in our own Christian walk believing that we can never achieve such high standards. We think we can't possibly be as "good" as the famous Bible characters or those Christians we know who are so powerful in their walk with God.

**Wrong. That's a myth, a misperception, a built-in excuse meant to trap you in spiritual lukewarmness.**

In a moment we will look at the type of people some of our Bible heroes really were, but let me make a statement concerning the "great" Christians you may know today. **The more Godly a person is, the more they realize what a weak and inconsistent sinner they are.**

The most Godly and consistent Christians you know will be the first to proclaim how utterly weak and prone to failure they really are. Given the chance they would argue strongly that they are the least and the last person who possesses the goodness and qualities that God should be looking for.

**Ask a "great" Christian how "good" they think they are.**

Their self-realization of weakness and fault is in essence what makes them a "great" Christian, because that realization drives them towards dependence on God. It's true today, and it was true of Biblical characters as well. The heroes of the Bible that we elevate to an unattainable elite Godly status were some of the most sinful and unlikely people you would think God would choose to do His work.

### **Moses:**

- Questioned and doubted God's word - Ex. 3:11
- Was a complainer and grumbler - Ex. 5:22-23; Num. 11:10-15
- Was impatient - Ex. 5:22-23; 6:12; 32:19; Num. 11:10-15; 16:15; 20:10; 31:14.
- Was unaspiring and pessimistic - Num. 14:12-20; Deut. 9:13-29

### **David:**

- Was an adulterer - 2 Sam. 11:2-5
- Was a murderer - 2 Sam. 11:6-25
- Was a thief - 2 Sam. 11:26-27; 2 Sam. 12:1-14
- Was self absorbed at times - 2 Sam. 18:33; 19:1-4

- Proudly disobeyed God allowing Satan to influence him - 2 Sam. 24; 1 Chr. 21; 27:24

### **Peter:**

- Was presumptuous and impulsive - Matt. 16:22-23; Mark 8:32-33; Luke 8:45; John 13:6-11
- Had failing faith at times - Matt. 14:28-31
- Acted without thinking - Matt. 26:51; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:50
- Denied Christ completely - Matt. 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:55-62; John 18:17-18
- Was a hypocrite - Gal. 2:11-16

### **Paul:**

- Was a prideful religious zealot - Acts 22:3; 23:6; 26:5; 2 Cor. 11:22; Gal. 1:14
- Was a murderer and persecutor of Christians - Acts 7:58; 8:1-3; 9:1; 22:4
- Was the least of Christians - Eph. 3:8
- Was the worst of all sinners - 1 Tim. 1:15
- Struggled constantly with sin - Rom. 7:14-25

The next time you think you can't ever be like those "great" Believers in the Bible, or like those "super" Christians that you know in your life, remember that the whole bunch is made up of liars, murderers, adulterers, cowards, hypocrites and weak sinners.

God doesn't look for the "good", the "best" or the "exceptional". God looks for the "available", the "repentant" and the "willing". It doesn't matter what you were in the past, whether 5 years ago, or 5 seconds ago. **What will you be from this moment forward?**

Philippians 3:12-14 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but **I press on**, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, **forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal** for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (NKJV, emphasis mine)

I doubt your much worse than a coward, adulterer or murderer. God can use you no matter what you have done in the past, even if you "worst" sin is lukewarmness towards God. So don't settle for Christian mediocrity in your life. Pray to God and let Him know:

**"Lord, if you can use a bunch of sinners like David and Paul, I'm already perfectly qualified to serve You!"**

*O Great God, I can hardly think of anyone less qualified to be called by You, but that very understanding, along with my willingness, makes me ready for You to use. I am a great sinner, but You are a greater God. Use me from this moment on... here am I Lord. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you mistakenly see Bible characters or your Pastor as some sort of "special" Christian? Has that subconsciously (or maybe on purpose!) caused you to

settle into a mediocre spiritual life? Do you hold back from complete devotion and dedication to God thinking "I can never be like 'them'"?

**Application:** God typically does things just the opposite of how we would do them. If we were God, we would search out the "best" people to do our will. But God uses the least likely of us who may possess some terrible sinful qualities, but have in common a heart of repentance, willingness and availability. Remember, even after David committed adultery and murder, God proclaimed him to be "a man after God's own heart". Why? His willingness to repent, and serve God.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# Clean Hearts, Pure Lives

## Part: 1

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. (NKJV)

As we move into a new year, what greater desire could we imagine than to have pure and consistent Godly lives in 2003?

The Psalm writer is saying in simple terms "God, purify my life, clean up the heart damage my sin has caused and help me to be consistently righteous". What a marvelous thought that we would be able to look back, at the end of every year, and see a life full of discipline, holiness and growth; rather than having to lament "I'll get it right next year". What has been your experience?

Begin this year by writing your spiritual "epitaph" for 2003. When 2003 is buried, what would you like to have written on its headstone? Decide now and live every day doing only what will make it come to fruition. **Begin, with the end in mind.**

"Here lies the life of Brent Riggs in 2003. It was a year devoted to prayer and God's Word in simple, consistent, disciplined daily devotion. It was a year marked by increasing holiness and purposeful sacredness in everyday life. In 2003, Brent had his priorities correct and lived a life worthy of our Lord's commendation, "Thou good and faithful servant".

That's mine. Write your 2003 epitaph today. Put it in your Bible, tape it on your mirror, print it on an index card and include a favorite Bible verse(s) that will encourage you during the upcoming year. (Note: send me your "2003 spiritual epitaph" and I will post them on a web page so everyone can enjoy them and be encouraged).

1 Peter 1:22 Since you have **purified your souls in obeying the truth** through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently **with a pure heart** (NKJV; emphasis mine)

This week we will begin looking at "clean hearts" and "steadfastness" to encourage us as we consecrate our lives towards ever increasing Godly devotion and holiness. We will look at the first of seven types of "purity" that should be present in our Christian walk.

*Heavenly Father, as we begin a new year, it is our wish to have a year free of the typical regrets that come at the END of a year. Let us begin this year with holiness and sacrifice in mind. We ask you for wisdom, discernment and power over sin; to be able to live this year worthy of being called a "good and faithful servant". In Jesus most precious name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you experience the typical regret of "holy failure" at the end of every year, determined to change with "new year resolutions" that quickly fall apart sometime in late January?

**Application:** Determine now what 2003 will be like spiritually for you, and make every day conform to achieving that Godly goal.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Applied Purity - Are You Truly Saved?

### Part: 3

Psalms 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. (NKJV)

Last time we discovered that **fundamental purity** is God. It is the definition of purity. God is what all things are compared to in order to measure purity.

**Applied purity** occurs the moment we are saved. God imputes (adds; places; applies) the righteousness (purity) of Christ to us supernaturally. From that point on, He quite literally sees us a pure, worthy of salvation, worthy of coming into His presence.

When something is "applied" it has to be added, it wasn't part of the original. Purity is not part of us (Ps 51.5) until someone (God) gives it to us (applies) outside of our ability to do it for ourselves (Matt 5.3). This occurs when we are supernaturally, spiritually regenerated ("born again"; Tit 3.5; 1 Pet 1.23; John 3.3) at the moment of true salvation through saving faith and belief in Jesus Christ (Rom 3.21-16; 5.1; Tit 3.4-6).

Applied purity **is a transaction** that occurs by the grace of God (Eph 2.8-9) and cannot be bought, merited, coerced or demanded. It only occurs on God's terms made possible through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (John 3.16; 1 John 2.2; 4.10).

Can we know for sure that this purity has been applied to us? It is a common today to believe that you can have assurance of salvation (applied purity) **if you have**:

- Simply said you believe in Jesus (even the demons believe but aren't not saved; Matt 8.29)
- Said the "sinners prayer" (a prayer not specifically found in the Bible)
- Made a "decision for Christ" (again, not specifically found in the Bible)
- Asked "Jesus into your heart" (not specifically in the Bible)
- Been baptized (Baptism is an act of obedience resulting from salvation, it does not produce salvation; Acts 10.44-48; 8.13; 18.8)
- Attend a certain church (church attendance is commanded but never earns the attendee salvation; Heb 10.25)

None of the above actions are sinful or unbiblical; remember the question: **Can we know for sure** that purity has been applied to us (salvation has occurred)? For the answer to that question, we must put our trust only in plain Scripture; our eternal destiny and current peace of mind depends on it! We can "test" the authenticity of our salvation with Scripture.

The Apostle John states at least 10 times in 1John alone that we can **know** we are saved **if certain things are true of us**:

(All verses from the NKJV; emphasis mine)

- 1 John 5:13 These things **I have written** to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.
- 2:3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.
- 2:5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.

- 2:29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.
- 3:14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.
- 3:16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.
- 3:18-19 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.
- 3:24 Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.
- 4:2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God.
- 4:12-13 ...If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

There you have it. Plain, simple tests of assurance, **straight from the Bible**. If these verses characterize your life, you may enjoy the blessing of rock solid, Biblically sound, assurance of salvation. It is the most important “test” you will ever take. The answer has **eternal consequences**. You may fail at times in these areas, but the conditions should be generally true, and tangibly increasing in amount and quality as time progresses.

If your life is not represented in these verses, then my friend, you should fall on your knees and ask God to reveal to you the true condition of your soul.

**Only the Bible can be trusted to give assurance  
about the very same salvation It alone offers.**

As Christians we are never commanded to assure another person of their salvation. We are to teach the Scriptural BASIS for assurance; and let God convict, or assure; for only He knows the true answer.

*Most Holy God, eternal destiny is the most important question of our existence. Help us today to use the very Words You have written to test the authenticity of our salvation. Thank you for the glory of assurance if we truly are saved; and we beg you for heartbreaking conviction and humility if we are not. In the Name of the One Who made Salvation possible, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Have you examined the authenticity of your salvation according to Biblical “tests”? Do you have true assurance of applied purity (salvation)?

**Application:** Learn to always use the Scripture only as your basis for truth. Be diligent not to let the methods and traditions of men slowly become “scripture” to you over time.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## **The Burden of Self: Pretending**

*Proverbs 13:7 One man pretends to be rich, yet has nothing; another pretends to be poor, yet has great wealth.*

Why do people pretend to be something they aren't? Because the only way to be satisfied with who you are, is to be right with God.

Our world is full of services, advertising and encouragement to help you pretend you are something more than you really are:

- Plastic surgeons, makeup, hair treatments, personal trainers and image consultants to give us the appearance we want
- We spend money we don't have on clothes, cars, houses, jewelry and other status symbols to be something we aren't
- We pursue knowledge, power, popularity and pleasure to cover up the real us

Even as Christians, we have to be diligent about pretense towards God. He knows how we really are. Our justifications and smooth talk doesn't make us any less sinful, any less needy, any less dependent on God. All it does is hinder our spiritual growth.

Our pretending places a great burden on us: the business man fears business failure and the shame of being unsuccessful; the wealthy pretend that wealth is unimportant to them and doesn't fight for control of their life; the beautiful use every method to be more beautiful and dislikes those who don't recognize it.

**We want to be perceived as being MORE than we really are.  
What freedom to be released from this awful burden.**

God knows the real you. You don't have to pretend with Him. He cares intimately about your needs and struggles. Throw off the pretense that is necessary to "impress" everyone you meet. Be concerned only with God's opinion of you. What conceivable difference does a man's opinion count for in eternity?

Our image. Make no mistake, this is a real and heavy burden. How others see us; what their opinion is; what our reputation is; whether they recognize our skills, contributions, talents, beauty or worth... many people are consumed and controlled by these thoughts. Most all struggle to some degree with this burden.

*Lord, help us today to stop pretending. You know who we really are, and in reality, it doesn't matter what others think. Let our sole burden be to please you in obedience to your Word and cast the weight of our reputation and image into the sea of your infinite care. Amen.*

## The Burden of Self: Pride

*Matthew 11.29-30 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

Have you ever contemplated the debilitating effects and burden that we willingly place on ourselves? Through our choice to enthrone our own will we embrace a ruthless taskmaster, a great burden of disappointment while the light and easy yoke of Christ is forsaken.

*Job 30.27 My heart is in turmoil and cannot rest...*

### **What is the price we pay for the privilege of being in bondage to pride and self concern?**

- Constant worry about other's opinion of you
- Stress and emotion over perceived slights of our character
- Frustration when overlooked, or unacknowledged, or not recognized
- Disappointment when our contributions or self-determined worth is not rewarded

We fight a fierce battle with our touchy, sensitive heart that is amazingly aware of the slightest injustice and wants to "set the record straight".

Isn't it funny (if hypocrisy can be funny) how we humbly admit to God one moment our unworthiness and wretchedness; how we are sinful and completely undeserving of blessing and attention from Him... then two hours later we are fuming and upset because we were criticized by someone, overlooked by the boss, or treated ungratefully by a friend.

God is not fooled by our words that don't match our behavior and responses.

Take refuge rest in the "light and easy" yoke of Christ. Forsake the burden of your pride for the liberty of knowing that Jesus is pleased with you.

### **From an eternal perspective, does it really matter...**

- If someone thinks you're not so great after all?
- If another person receives honor that you should have gotten?
- If you are overlooked and unappreciated?
- If you are slandered or made to endure injustice?

Why carry that burden when our only real concern is God's opinion of us? If you're right with God, then your life towards other men will be right, even if they don't acknowledge it.

*Ps 37. 7 Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him...*

Is there any lasting reward from the acknowledgement and recognition of man? Or is it fleeting, inconsistent, insincere and fragile?

*Ecc 2.23 For all his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity.*

There is unending burden, toil, frustration and disappointment in our pursuit of "self".

**It is unnecessary to carry the burden.  
You have a choice.**

Let Jesus carry the burden of your reputation, your recognition, your receipt of criticism, and your endurance of injustice. Rest in the simple blessed peace of obeying God's Word and putting your trust in Him.

*Jer 6.16 Thus says the LORD: "Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls."*

**In Jesus there is peace and rest and comfort and freedom from this self-imposed bondage.**

*Lord, help us today to release the consuming burden of self-concern. May we truly learn to look to you with eyes of faith, unable to return our gaze to ourselves. What a blessing to give up worry about our reputation, recognition, and fairness. Let us put those things in Your hands, and rest in the freedom and peace of knowing that you are well pleased with us, and that's all that really matters. Amen.*

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Dark & Divine Mysteries

Ephesians 3:2-5 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: (NKJV)

Imagine you are staying the night at someone's house for the first time. You wake up in the middle of the night and need to find the bathroom. As you lay on the sofa bed in the middle of the living room, you realize in the pitch black darkness that you have no idea where the light switch, hallway or furniture is in this unfamiliar house.

It's a mystery. And you're about to journey into the dark mysteries of bruised shins and stubbed toes. Use your imagination to put yourself in that situation. What instant relief would be yours if a little switch somewhere could just be flipped into the "up" position and turn a light on. All of a sudden the dark mysteries that engulf you would instantly vanish. And as long as the light stays on, the darkness has no power. You can see now.

### **The Bible contains both dark mysteries, and divine mysteries of light.**

The Book of Ecclesiastes warns us of some of the dark mysteries of life. We stumble around oblivious to them until we bang our shin or stub our toe; then slowly and painfully we learn the hard way that life is full of danger and uncertainty when we live in the dark. Some dark mysteries in Ecclesiastes:

- Chapter 1 - Life is monotonous, futile and never changes
- Chapter 2 - Pleasure won't bring happiness and we all end up alike whether we are the fool or the wise
- Chapter 3 - Life is a big, fat ZERO because for every good thing, there is something bad to nullify it; injustice happens to all without partiality

And on and on. Ecclesiastes covers every aspect of life and the attempt to find happiness. The conclusion is always the same: it's a waste of time. The person who was never born is better off:

Ecclesiastes 4:3 Yet, better than both is he who has never existed, Who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun. (NKJV)

So why bother? **God to the rescue!** Scripture reveals many DIVINE mysteries that light up the darkness and sustain us through what would otherwise be a completely hopeless existence. Three of those are found in Ephesians.

These divine mysteries allow us to rejoice no matter what our circumstances are. They allow us to enjoy life even when the reality is that life in this sin-corrupted world is futile and meaningless (without God). Each of these divine mysteries touch a major portion of our common existence:

- The divine mystery of marriage (Eph 5.22-23) - a Godly marriage is a picture of our relationship with Christ. It serves as daily reminder and encouragement of what Christ has in store for us. (Some marriages reflect it better than others!)
- The divine mystery of the Church (Eph 2.11-3.21) - the church is the perfect picture of unity and submission of all things under the headship of Christ. All things will be gathered under Him in order to exalt Him and glorify Him for all eternity.



- The divine mystery of Christ (Eph 1.1-2.10) - Christ is everything. The glorification of Jesus is the foundation of all things. To bring Christ glory is the sole motivation of our existence.

Most people live in the discouragement of the dark mysteries of Ecclesiastes because they have not been illumined with regard to these truths in Ephesians. When life seems to have no purpose or meaning, a quick review of these three divine mysteries will give us cause to re-evaluation the discouragement.

*Father in Heaven, reveal to us the divine mysteries of marriage, church and Jesus Christ and let it dispel the darkness that so often threatens to discourage us. Let us walk in the light of Your Son. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you easily discouraged and defeated? Do understand these divine mysteries? What is keeping God from shining the light of truth in your life?

**Application:** God illumines our hearts when we truly seek Him. If you're life is characterized by fumbling around in the darkness of discouragement and futility, perhaps you haven't found the Light Switch yet. Maybe the Light has grown dim or is so far away that there is little light reaching where you are at.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## The Burden of Self: Personal Rights

*Romans 12.1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a **living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (emphasis mine)*

We live in an age and a country where freedom has been redefined as personal rights, the right to do whatever we want. True freedom is freedom from the bondage of sin.

**A tortured prisoner in a cold, dark, rat-infested cell in a godless country suffering for Christ's name is infinitely freer than the average American who enjoys an unhindered life of sin.**

In the past 50 years, freedom has been devilishly redefined as "freedom to do whatever you want free of judgment". The cry can be heard across the land that "its my right!" and sadly even professing Christians have been conditioned to believe they are owed many things simply because they were born.

Originally our country was founded on a wholesome set of personal rights: freedom to worship God; freedom to speak the truth; freedom to oppose tyranny.

A poll of Americans today will quickly reveal a common mindset that it is our right to have (NO! to be given!) a comfortable life, a good job, a nice home, a life free of tragedy and suffering, a life of security and peace. There is the general mindset, that simply because of the fact that we were born, we are owed all of this.

*Make no mistake, if the Lord tarries, at some point in the not too distant future, prosperity, peace and freedom will end in America. It is as sure as the sun rising. God have mercy on us when that day arrives for it will be a terrible time. Are you prepared spiritually for that day? Are you preparing your children and grandchildren? Or are we allowing them to living under the false security that things will never change? History has never allowed a society to escape this conclusion. Should we be foolish enough to think America will be the first?*

We have "Christian" teaching about our right to prosperity, our right to luxury and comfort, our right to abundant blessing (material of course), our right to the life of our choice, our right to choose, our right to live to by our own self determined standards. We have put a Christian spin on this plague of personal rights.

It is my custom to try each day to read about life of the missionaries and martyrs. Why? Because keeping their life, their sufferings, their sacrifices and their devotion fresh in our mind helps keep us from slipping into a mindset that we have a "right" to live a comfortable, trouble-free life. Jesus, of course, is our greatest example.

**God may very well grant us a comfortable life, but we do well to appreciate it instead of expect it.**

Concern for our "rights" very easily expands into a selfish way of life:

- Its our right to spend our money any way we want
- Its our right to a better job, better pay, less work, bigger house, nicer cars, blah, blah, blah
- Its our right to hear a good preacher every Sunday, to be treated to a good worship service

- Its our right to have our opinions heard
- Its our right to live where we want and how we want
- Its our right to follow the plan for my life as I have carefully laid it out

Our so-called rights **are a ruthless taskmaster** constantly inflaming our sense of being wronged, overlooked, slighted or ignored by God. It drives us into constant battle to correct affronts to our rights, why? Because it is our right!

**What rights do Christians have? None.** Slaves have no rights except that of their Master (Matt 20.26-28). The sacrificed don't have rights (Rom 12.1-2). Those who have forsaken all retain no rights (Luke 14.33).

So then are we doomed to a gloomy life of bondage while those around us "enjoy" their freedom? **No, exactly the opposite!** What freedom to be loosed from the burden of "my rights"!

- We no longer have to be offended when our "rights" are violated.
- We no longer need to be bitter because our right to prosperity and comfort are unrealized.
- We no longer need to worry and distress that our "rights" as Americans are ignored
- We don't have to be apart of strife, gossip or contention in the church when our "right" to be heard, or considered, or responded has been overlooked

It is the greatest of freedom to be released from the bondage and tyranny of my personal rights in exchange for slavery to Christ; for there can be a no more blessed life than to surrender our rights to the loving, caring, providing, comforting Master.

What blessed freedom to be truly free of concern for my own rights when the Creator of the Universe has promised a better way. He will make all wrongs right. He will avenge all injustice. He will judge perfectly in both punishment and reward. He will set all things straight.

My only true, lasting, profitable right is to love the Lord my God with all my heart and serve Him all of my days. That is the one true right we can cling to, and the only right we should be concerned with. **God is quite capable of handling the rest for us.**

*Lord, help us today to give up the fruitless concern of personal rights. They are a never-ending source of bitterness and stress. May we strive today to be concerned with only one right: the right to obey you and love you... despite our circumstances which no man or society can ever take away. Let our freedom be in our devotion and trust in You. Let my only personal right be to love and serve You.. Amen.*

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## **My Rock, My Fortress, My Strength**

Psalms 18:1-6 (NKJV) I will love You, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust.

### **Dedicated to the memory of Ian Matthew Fuller**

I'm at a hospital writing this. Next door is a young couple about to deliver their baby son who they found out today... is no longer alive.

There is deep sorrow and sadness. There are more than enough tears. There is pain. There is the anguish that accompanies the death of a child. A baby. A son. Already named, already known through the wonder of ultrasound. A crib and baby clothes are waiting for him in the nursery of what would have been his loving home. The pain of death. The sorrow that accompanies loss. The grief of the suffering.

### **But there is something missing in the room.**

#### **There is something different...**

Something that makes this heart-wrenching scene opposite of what you would expect. There is no despair. There is no despondency. There is no hopelessness. No anger. No bitterness.

The mother lovingly smiles in genuine gratitude at each concerned visitor even while she is in the midst of the cruelty of birthing a child who has already left this life. She is pleasant and gracious and beautiful. And yes, she cries. And tears stream down her face.

The father of this baby boy strokes his wife's hair and gently embraces her hand with deep love and concern. No doubt he is suffering intensely; but for now he sacrifices his welfare for others; he is strong for his wife and sincerely responds to each person who has come to visit while never allowing his attention to be drawn from his bride for very long.

In this room, there is love instead of anger; peace instead of bitterness; hope instead of despair. There is gentleness, care and the mutual sharing of grief as if every person who enters the room willingly takes on their portion of the suffering... and would take it all on their behalf if they could.

It is a room overflowing with loving friends and family, with prayer and sacrifice. In that room is the safety of a common bond; the unspoken camaraderie and comfort of a mutual destiny. In that room is a loving Savior tangibly soothing, comforting and instilling quietness in a parent's broken heart.

For God's children alone, there is no hopelessness or despair, even in the most agonizing of circumstances. God cares for His own.

### **He will comfort us in our hour of need.**

- Psalm 23:4 (NKJV) Yea, 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.
- Psalm 119:50 (NKJV) This is my comfort in my affliction, For Your word has given me life.
- 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NKJV) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

### **He will strengthen us when our strength is gone.**

- Psalm 27:14 (NKJV) Wait on the LORD; Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the LORD!
- Psalm 119:28 (NKJV) My soul melts from heaviness; Strengthen me according to Your word.
- Isaiah 41:10 (NKJV) Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'

**He gives us hope in hopeless situations.**

- Psalm 38:15 (NKJV) For in You, O LORD, I hope; You will hear, O Lord my God.
- Psalm 71:14 (NKJV) But I will hope continually, And will praise You yet more and more.
- Romans 15:13 (NKJV) Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**He bathes us with peace when despair threatens to overwhelm us.**

- 2 Thessalonians 3:16 (NKJV) Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all.
- Psalm 29:11 (NKJV) The LORD will give strength to His people; The LORD will bless His people with peace.

God is faithful to care for His own. There is no circumstance, tragedy, or agony that He is not able to see us through. We may call, and He will answer.

Psalm 50:15 (NKJV) Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.

*Lord, what a privilege and honor to have You watch over us in our darkest hours. How thankful we are that we need not be afraid or despair over any thing that life can throw at us. Glory to God. Amen.*

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# Fundamental Purity

## Part: 2

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. (NKJV)

Purity is a subject that is woven into every facet of the Bible from cover to cover. Purity begins with, and is the essence of God. Man was originally created pure, and for those of us who have put our faith in Christ, we will return to total purity upon meeting Jesus in eternity, even while we strive toward purity in this life.

Purity is the primary attribute of all things Godly. The elements of Old Testament worship and the temple were to be pure. Christ was pure. Our redemption is pure. Our lives are to be marked by a continued increase in purity. The Bible says that even the light from the stars is not pure compared to God's purity (Job 25.5)

Webster's dictionary defines purity as being "thus and none other". It means to be of one essence; to be one thing and one thing only; free from contamination or mixture with any other thing.

### To be thus and none other.

As Christians we are to be righteous, "thus and none other". We are to be like Christ, "thus and none other". We are to be holy, "thus and none other". We are to be Godly, "thus and none other".

Purity of life **begins with cleanness of heart** and that only comes with repentance and faith initiated through confession of sin (1John 1.9). There are different types of purity and is it profitable for us to discover them. The first is "**fundamental** (basic or original) **purity**".

**Fundamental purity is the purity of God.** An accurate definition of "purity" would simply be "God". If something is like God, it is pure. The more like God it is, the more pure it is. God is the original source and essence of purity. Purity in this sense is not an attribute; it is a primal element. God is what everything pure is compared to in order to determine it's purity.

You really have to meditate on this. It's not a shallow concept. This is not purity that is pure **because** all impureness has been removed. It is not purity because of continued successful effort to avoid impurity. No, this **IS** purity... the source, the definition, the tangible origination of it. Ask God to give you an internal, spiritual understanding of fundamental purity; meditating and praying about it is the only way to begin to grasp it.

Because of sin, there is no innate source of human purity apart from God. **The best of our righteousness is as "filthy rags"** (Isa 64.6). We tend to picture some greasy, dirty garage rags when this phrase is used. If you have a weak stomach, hold on...

Leprosy was a common, incurable disease that caused the skin to rot off the bones. The Biblical writer was referring to "filthy rags" as the discarded, disease-saturated bandages of lepers that had become so disgusting, even the rotting-skinned, festering Leper had to throw them away because they couldn't hold anymore oozing sores and decaying flesh. Disgusting, yes; but this is what the best of our efforts to be pure is equal to, without God.

Job 4:17 Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker? (NKJV)

God's fundamental purity is the source of our personal purity. It comes from God alone. Meditate on the truth of it. Over the next few days we will look at six manifestations of fundamental purity that are part of our life and flow from God's innate pureness. It is God's way of imparting His pure nature into our existence.

*Our Father, You demand pure lives from us. We cannot do this unless You instill Your purity into our lives. We pray for You to give us understanding of this, and an insatiable hunger to receive purity from You. In the Pure Name of Jesus, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** If your best effort to be good is like filthy lepers rags, what do you suppose our willful sinfulness is like when God sees it?

**Application:** Meditate on the Source of purity. Begin to understand that only God can empower us to pure lives.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Finished

John 19:30b Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Today is the day that is recognized as the day Jesus Christ, the Son of God was crucified, and died. It matters not whether today is that actual date or not. That the event occurred is what matters.

Two thousand years ago, on crucifixion day, all seemed to be lost. Jesus Christ was dead. The sun had gone black that day, earthquakes had rocked the city, people long dead had been seen walking around, and rumor had it that the Temple veil had ripped in two exposing the Holy of Holies.

The disciples had scattered in defeat. Their King was dead. Satan (who knew perfectly well who Jesus was) had, for the moment, successfully ruined God's plans (or so he thought). He had killed the Son of God. He had achieved his goal to be like the Most High. Even Jesus was no match for him.

Think of what really happened. The Son of God had sacrificed Himself. God had been forsaken by God. God had punished Himself through the Person of Jesus to pay for sins He had never committed. And now the Son of God was dead and in a tomb.

Jesus, who can never die, was dead. God who could never be less in any way, turned His back on Himself. Jesus, Son of God, God Incarnate, the Everlasting by whom the entire universe is held in place would be resurrected though He never ceased to exist.

Now friends, my point is not to whip up a theological debate. I realize some of those statements could be nitpicked pretty easily. My intention is not to teach you hardcore theology today.

My intent is to get you to think past the surface events concerning the death of Jesus Christ. I want you to move past the "Bible story" mentality and really immerse yourself in the events of Jesus death. Think of who He was. He knew in eternity past this event would transpire. Does that not blow your mind?

Think about what He did, what He thought while doing it, how he acted, what His Father must have been feeling. What were the angels doing? How about the demons? Think of Jesus one minute after He "died". Satan obviously didn't know he had just fulfilled God's plan instead of ruining it. Did the angels in heaven know?

What about Moses, Elijah, Enoch and the Old Testament saints? Did they know what was going on? Could they see what was happening?

On this day, 2000 years ago, sinful wicked mankind had murdered the perfect Lamb of God. And the Lamb went to the slaughter willingly to save the same world that hated and crucified Him.

Think on that. And this Sunday, think all over again what it means that Jesus rose from the grave to save YOU.

*O God, You gave Your Son that we might live. Now may we live that Your Son might be glorified. Amen*

**Contemplation:** Does the death of Jesus produce any emotion in you? The single most important week in history brought the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. How much do you know about it, think about it, meditate on it and share it with others? How does that reflect on your opinion of Jesus sacrifice?

**Application:** The events of Jesus death and resurrection should saturate every fiber of your being. If they do not, ask God to illumine the importance of it in your heart.



1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Thankful for Our God

Psalms 86.15 But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, Longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth. (NKJV)

Have you ever contemplated how blessed we are **that God is who He is?**

All other god's of this world are harsh taskmasters, distant and cold, never satisfied. They require men to earn their favor in slavery to them with no assurance of salvation or relief. They cruelly mock man's attempts to appease them and enslave the world in a cycle of hopelessness, despair and ultimately death.

Consider the gods of this world:

- Pagan gods
- Religion gods
- Material gods
- The god of self

All of the world's gods offer only one thing: a complete sacrifice of your entire life spent in pursuit of appeasing them, only to be rewarded with disappointment, failure and death. Are you serving one of these gods? If you do not serve the God of Scripture; the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the I AM; the Almighty One; the Eternal Creator, Father of Jesus Christ and King of the Universe... then you are serving some god of this world... whether or not you know it, believe it or recognize it.

- If you put your trust in idols, the earth, nature, Satan or superstition, you worship pagan gods.
- If you are working your way to heaven through church membership, rituals, good deeds or anything other than Jesus Christ... you are worshipping the god of religion.
- If you are pursuing wealth, power, fame and social status, you worship at the feet of the material god.
- If you are the king of your own life, and believe you answer to no one, then you are a servant to the god of self.

### **There is only one reward offered by these gods: death.**

What death? Death to peace and joy; death to contentment and happiness; and ultimately, eternal death separated from the one true God. Only the Most High God of Heaven offers eternal glory and reward, which you cannot earn; in exchange for simply giving up what you cannot keep.

**Do you need to be loved today?** Do you need comfort and understanding? God is FULL of compassion. He doesn't have just a little, nor is He stingy with it, nor is it rationed. He is perpetually full, overflowing and rich in compassion and love for His children.

- Ps 145.8 The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy.
- Lam 3.32 Though He causes grief, Yet He will show compassion, According to the multitude of His mercies.
- Ps 112.4 Unto the upright there arises light in the darkness; He is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous.

- The Lord is gracious and patient in ways that we can't imagine. It is truly amazing what He patiently sees us through: the sin, the failures, the selfishness, the betrayals. Our God is unlike any other god in this world in that He bears our burdens for us. He lovingly and patiently transforms us into His image. How incredibly thankful we should be for a God who gives us what we need to please Him, and then rewards us as if we did it ourselves. We serve a God of new beginnings who is always waiting for us to return to Him. He is gracious, slow to anger, full of great kindness and mercy.
- Neh 9.17 ...But You are God, Ready to pardon, Gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, Abundant in kindness, And did not forsake them.
- Ps 103.8 The Lord is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.
- Joel 2.13 So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the Lord your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness;

**Our God is the God of Truth.** Truth in its essence implies exclusiveness. In our age of tolerance, we tend to forget that only the God of Christianity has revealed Himself to us miraculously, and authentically. He is Truth. We can rest fully assured of this despite the hate of the world that will persecute us for believing in One Way. We can have the confidence of knowing God has revealed the authentic TRUTH to us instead of living with nagging question "what makes my way any more right than someone else's?" The answer: nothing. We don't follow our way, or a religion, or personal set of beliefs.

We put our faith and trust in the miraculously inspired, divinely authenticated, life changing Word of God and in the God who reveals Himself through It.

- John 14.6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.
- Ps 86.11 Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; Unite my heart to fear Your name.
- John 2.24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."
- Ps 31.5 ...You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.

**Be thankful for who our God is.** Be thankful that He is not like the gods of this world. Be thankful that **He Is Who He Is** and that because of who He is, we are of all peoples of this earth most blessed.

Numbers 6.24-26 "The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace."

*Most gracious and loving God, we are thankful for who You are. There is no other God like You and it is truly a wonder that You would love us. Increase our understanding of You today and accept our offer of thanks for Your gracious mercy and loving kindness. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Is this age of "pick a religion" have you meditated on what makes the God of the Bible different from all others? Are you able to adequately tell others when they ask "what makes your God any different from other religions?"

**Application:** Religion and spirituality is becoming popular again. Pick a "faith" and stick to it is presented as being adequate for salvation. "God" is used by most religions and it successfully blurs the line between the One True God and the "God" of other world religions. Know God. Appreciate and meditate on all that sets Him apart.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## A Trip to the Laver

Exodus 30:20 When they go into the tabernacle of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to burn an offering made by fire to the Lord, they shall wash with water, lest they die. (NKJV)

The Jewish Tabernacle was a picture of how to approach God. The temple layout was done according to very explicit instructions from God. To ignore or violate the Lord's precise method of entering His presence resulted in severe consequences to the careless or rebellious.

Through the death of Jesus, we now have direct access to the Throne Room of Grace, though our approach should be no less careful and reverent. The symbology of the tabernacle gives us an idea of how to approach the Lord in prayer. It's not a magic formula or legalistic requirement. It is a picture of how serious and specific the approach to God is. The ideas remain the same for us, but they are manifested differently because of Jesus.

- The Gate into the Temple area – represented one way to God
- The Alter – symbolizes sacrificing your life to God, being washed by the blood of Christ
- The Laver – where you cleanse yourself from the filth of sin and purify your life before moving on towards fellowship with God
- The Lampstand & Show Bread – partaking of God's word and having it illuminate you

The priest would now be ready to enter God's presence. **There is much more to it than this**, but you have the basic idea. Here we have a revealing look at how to move into prayer and communication with the Lord (again, not legalistic or magic, but it is an accurate picture).

What happens if you skip an area, or take a different path? What if we bypassed the Laver failing to purify our life of sin and simply entered into God's presence unwashed? Scripture gives us insight about the effects on prayer spoken offered with unconfessed sin:

- God will not forgive us if we harbor unforgiveness – Mark 11.25
- Husbands who do not honor their wives may have their prayers hindered – 1Peter 3.7
- God doesn't answer the prideful – Job 35.12
- Ignoring God's law makes your prayer an abomination – Prov. 28.9
- Doubt can cause God to not respond – James 1.6-7

We should not underestimate the effects of unconfessed sin on our prayers. God is holy. He does not tolerate sin in His presence. On one hand, we are allowed directly into His presence because of the imputed righteousness of Christ through His shed blood for our sins. On the other hand with regards to daily sanctification, we must wash the stains of sin from our lives before approaching a holy God in prayer. How?

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (NKJV)

Repentance and confession are the Christian laver. Confession is our spiritual wash basin where we are cleansed from the residue and filth of living in a sin-fallen world.

Through confession, God is faithful to forgive us and cleanse from all transgression making us fit to approach God once more.

This morning as you enter into prayer with God, have you washed the filth of sin from your life? Will you approach God stained with unconfessed wickedness, or stop by the Laver and take a spiritual bath?

*Most Holy God, help us to understand the serious nature of entering Your Presence. Give us wisdom to know the importance of confessing sin and washing the stain of wickedness away before approaching You. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** When you enter into prayer, are you aware that you are approaching God? Do you cleanse yourself of sin before entering into His presence? Do you daily confess your sin?

**Application:** Just as it is important to bathe our bodies daily, it is important to bathe our spirits. Confession of sin should be as normal and regular as taking a bath or shower. Keep short accounts with God concerning sin, confess every day to avoid the effects of sin "build up".

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Go and Learn What Jesus Desires

Matthew 9:13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (NKJV)

Jesus commanded the prideful, religious hypocrites to "go and learn" what this means: "I desire mercy not sacrifice". For those of us guilty of pride or hypocrisy at times, perhaps we should go and learn this too.

First, it helps to put the statement into modern context. We would be more likely to understand if it were stated, "I desire mercy over acts of religion". But wait! Doesn't Jesus desire, even command us to do certain "religious" things?

At the time Jesus spoke these words, wasn't it God's law that the Jews sacrifice (a religious practice of giving certain possessions back to God)? Yes. So wasn't the Lord contradicting Himself? Of course not. Then what was He saying?

Jesus was always trying to teach the disciples and the crowds that the "internal" was more important than the "external". When the "inside" (the heart) is right, the outside takes care of itself. Jesus taught a higher standard of internal transformation rather than external religious conformation.

We're commanded not to commit adultery (an external constraint); but Jesus said don't even lust (an internal act) or you have already committed adultery. If you don't lust (internal), you won't commit adultery (external).

We're told not to murder. Our higher New Testament standard is not to hate another person at all. If we don't hate (internal), we won't murder (external). We are commanded not to lie, but greater still, not to be dishonest in anyway. If we're not dishonest (internal) we won't lie (external).

Let's look at two real men in the Bible for comparison. One man had the externals right but failed internally. The other man struggled externally, but had the right heart attitudes. The first man:

- Was a very successful politician who brought peace to his land
- Was a successful businessman
- Was known world-wide for his wisdom
- Built the world's most magnificent church building for God
- Was the richest man who ever lived

And yet the Bible says this about him:

1 Kings 11:9-12 So **the Lord became angry....**, because his heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the Lord had commanded. Therefore the Lord said...., "Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, **I will surely tear the kingdom away from you** and give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days....; I will tear it out of the hand of your son. (NKJV, names dotted out on purpose)

Now compare that to our second Biblical example. This man:

- Was man of bloodshed
- Was very self absorbed at times
- Committed adultery and took another man's wife

- Then murdered the husband of this woman
- Pridefully disobeyed God by taking a census of his nation

But the Bible has this to say:

Acts 13:22 And when He had removed him, He raised up for them... as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I have found... **a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.**' (NKJV, names removed by me)

Huh? God was angry at the guy who, by outward appearances, had it all going right. But the wife-stealing murderer was a "man after God's own heart". Of course the two men described are King Solomon, and his father, King David. What a remarkable contrast between how we would judge them versus how God, who knows the heart, judged them.

Why did God favor David who seemed really messed up at times, over Solomon, who by all appearances was tremendously successful?

Solomon's "externals" were right,  
but he ignored the "internals".  
David's "internals" were right even though he  
struggled with "externals".

David immediately repented when confronted with his sin. Solomon went after other gods even though all his success was the result of God's blessing. David lamented and confessed his wickedness. Solomon disobeyed God even after being warned multiple times.

In light of this, Jesus statement, "go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice'", could be explained to us in these words:

"You've got it wrong. I don't care about your outward Christian acts as much as I care about whether or not your motives and attitudes for doing them are holy. Get your heart right and your conduct will follow."

It takes three sentences to clarify (in our vocabulary) what Jesus said perfectly in six words. Jesus didn't just state those six words alone. He tells us to "go and learn it". This is partly because we are so spiritually dull and partly because we have to practice what Jesus said over a period of time before we come to fully understand it.

Get your heart right and an acceptable holy life will follow. That is the essence of Christian living.

*Father in Heaven, help us to understand that You are a heart-changer and that our behavior will follow our heart. Give us the wisdom to know that external behavior is important but only when it is the product of a Christ-like mind. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you find yourself sometimes measuring how "good" of a Christian you are by evaluating your external performance (church attendance, Bible reading, prayer)? Do you evaluate your spiritual status by conformity to behavior and lifestyle standards? Or by the depth of your humility, love and obedience flowing from a transformed and regenerated heart?

**Application:** This is a tough one. Christian hearts produce Christian fruit (works of righteousness). And yes, by that, we can evaluate our Christian walk. But we must be very diligent to cut that fruit open and see if, and how many, worms are crawling around inside. Christian "sacrifices" (good works, adherence to standards) must be motivated by a pure desire of obedience to God and in no way be a source of personal merit, personal glorification or self-righteousness.



1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## **Humble, Exalt and Cast**

1 Peter 5:6-7 - Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. (NKJV)

Peter is specifically admonishing the younger folks to be humble and submissive to God. He tells them they need to spend some time being submissive in order to be prepared for the work God has ordained for them. Then when they have marinated in humility for a while, God will be ready to "exalt" them; that is, God is ready to use them. They are ready to fulfill the plans God's has for them.

If Peter wrote this verse today, I wonder if he would be addressing it specifically to the younger crowd? In Biblical Israel there was an assumption that certain immaturities were primarily "youth" problems. No doubt a lack of humility still plagues our youth today. But it certainly is NOT unique to our youth. So let's discover what Peter was saying.

### **Therefore humble...**

Peter is not making a polite request. He is giving us a command. In fact, God very mercifully commands our submission now while it still remains OUR choice.

### **EVERY person will humble themselves under the mighty hand of God. It's just a matter of timing.**

It's a question WHEN. You can willingly do it now or be forced to under condemnation at the Judgment Throne of God. We can do it now in obedience and enjoy the blessings of God; or we can be forced to our knees moments before departing to eternal condemnation (Rom 14.11-12).

### **Yourselves...**

You can not do this for anyone else, nor can someone be your substitute. This is a personal act of submission and the lessons to be gained are unique to each and every one of us.

Each of us individually must work out our salvation in fear and trembling and personally decide to humble ourselves now, or wait to be humbled later.

### **Under the Mighty Hand...**

We humble ourselves under God's mighty hand. Not His oppressive hand, or burdensome hand, or condemning hand. His mighty hand. For the humble, God's mighty hand is a hand of strength, power and protection. Submitting to God is not scary or giving up anything. It is gaining the greatest of security and provision from the mighty hand of the Creator of Life.

We are to get UNDER His hand, not on top stomping God's fingers trying to get our own way. There is no hand like God's hand. Being safely hidden under it is the safest place in the universe. It's like crawling under your favorite blanket times a million. It is the ultimate personal state of security, blessing and provision.

Being under God's hand is to be protected by God's hand. Who can bother you there? What man or demon can move God's hand? God's hand is the ultimate spiritual bodyguard and there is no safer, more secure place.

### **That He May Exalt You...**

Humility and submission are key ingredients in preparing us for God's service. What does Peter mean here by exalt? We typically think of it as lifting up or focusing

attention on. Of course as Christians, only Deity is worthy of this type of exaltation. The other meaning for exalt is to "intensify the use of".

When we have been properly humbled and have learned submission to God's authority, we become ready for the specific use that God has prepared for each of us before the world was created. Our purpose in life is ready to be revealed and fulfilled (Eph 2.10).

### **In Due Time...**

Or in other words, **when God gets good and ready**. Part of the very essence of humility and submission is to wait on the timing of the one in authority over you. Waiting and patience are uniquely Godly traits and are rare commodities in Christians today. Waiting is rare because of our "instant", can't-wait mentality.

### **Immediate gratification is the lure of modern life.**

Patience is rare because few people have the courage to ask God to teach them patience. Go ahead, ask God for patience. I dare you. Better grab Aunt Millie and the dog and run to the storm shelter. There's only one way to learn patience and that is by enduring the storms of life.

### **Casting All Your Care on Him...**

A heavenly benefit of finding refuge under God's mighty hand is that He allows (commands!) us to cast our cares on Him. This idea both amazes and puzzles me. Here is the Creator God of the Universe saying "cast your cares on me. I will take care of them for you." And we don't do it!

### **It's the one "too good to be true" that's NOT too good to be true!**

Why don't we take God up on this offer, or worse yet, why don't we obey this command? We are in essence sinning by not doing it. It is a strange phenomenon. The only logical reasons are:

- We don't believe God
- We don't trust Him
- We don't want to because we like our burdens
- We scared too because we've never tried
- We think God can't handle them
- Or, we think we can handle them better than Him

How amazing it would be for the spiritual health of our churches, marriages and families if we would simply take God at His word and cast ALL of our cares on Him. I don't read any conditions on it. It says ALL. It's like my Dad used to say to me, "what part of ALL did you not understand?". When the Bible says ALL, God means ALL. God is the only Person uniquely qualified to use words like ALL, NEVER and EVERY.

### **Because He Cares For You!**

With typical clarity, Peter ties up his instructions by making the reason plain. It's kind of his "commandments for dummies" approach. We are to do all of this simply because God cares for us. Think of that. The King of the Universe cares for you and says:

"Humble yourself under the protection of My Hand, and I will take care of all your burdens for you. Then when you have learned humility, and to trust Me, and to rest in My care, you will be ready for Me to use you."

I wonder sometimes if it is our lack of humility that causes us to often say, "I don't know God's purpose in my life". Maybe you aren't ready for His use. Maybe you need to spend some time humbling yourself under His mighty hand. While you're there, He will take care of you.

He's quite capable you know.

*Almighty God, thank You for giving us a place of protection and allow us to submit to Your loving care. We thank you that in Your timing, You will prepare us to be used and our part in Your plans will become clear. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Would you characterize yourself as a humble and submissive person? Do you wonder what God's plan for your life is? Does it seem like God doesn't use you like He seems to use others? Can you measure a difference in humility between you and them?

**Application:** Humility and submissiveness are key Christian attributes. They indicate our level of trust in God and until we truly learn to trust God, how can He use us? If you feel "unused" by God, maybe it's because He is waiting for you to humble yourself and cast your cares on Him.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# Insignificant But Important To God

## Part: 1

Psalm 8:4 - What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? (NKJV)

With regards to influence and physical stature, man is an insignificant speck when compared to all of creation. We're a speck compared to the town we live in much less compared to the whole earth, or the entire universe.

The unbelieving world would have us to believe it all ends with that conclusion. If mankind is nothing but a product of chance and time, then the world is correct: we are nothing but a speck of insignificant dirt and in reality there is really no reason to live at all because in the scheme of things you will live, suffer and die.. the end.

The world proclaims that for Christians to think that man is somehow "special" in this universe is just the arrogant superstition of a few religious nuts. The universe is indeed mind boggling. We can barely even begin to comprehend it. Here are some facts to short circuit your brain:

- One light year, the distance light travels in a year of time at the speed of 186,000 miles per second, is just under six thousand billion miles.
  - Psalm 90:4 - For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, And like a watch in the night. (NKJV)
  - So in principle, light could travel SIX MILLION BILLION miles and to God it would be as barely any time had passed.
- Picture one tiny grain of sand in the midst of an endless sea of desert as far as your mind can comprehend...
  - Our universe is like a grain of sand in the desert of God's infinite nature
  - Our galaxy is like a grain of sand in the desert of the universe
  - Our solar system is like a grain of sand in the desert of our galaxy
  - Our earth is like a grain of sand in size compared to our solar system
    - The earth weighs 6 sextillion, 588 quintillion tons
    - The sun weighs 333400 times as much and is considered an average sized star!
    - The earth is 24,901 miles around at the equator
    - The Earth could fit inside the sun an incredible 1,303,786 times!
  - Man is less than a grain of sand in size compared to vastness of the earth

## **Physical man is without doubt insignificant in this vast universe.**

As Christians we believe that God created this universe as our "home". It is not arrogant to believe the entire universe exists just for us. To the contrary, it magnifies the greatness of our God that with a few spoken words He created this incredible and incomprehensible physical dimension called "the universe" just for us, His children.

But, could you explain to the skeptic why mankind is so important to God? How can we expect the lost to believe in a God who would send His only Son to suffer and die for us, if we can't even adequately explain why God loves us in the first place?

## **Why is insignificant man important to an all-powerful, holy God?**

- **We are his children**, created to be in His family and to be with God for eternity
  - Luke 3:38 - the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God. (NKJV)
  - Acts 17:29 - for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring. Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. (NKJV)
- We are **made in the image of God**
  - Genesis 1:26 - Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." (NKJV)
  - We are important because God made us like Himself. We are NOT God, or little gods as some would teach, but we are made in the likeness of God possessing an eternal spirit and Godly attributes like love, compassion and kindness.
- God knows **we depend on Him** for our every need and for life itself
  - Acts 17:28 - for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' (NKJV)
  - God created us dependent on Him for life and it is His nature to love and care for those who need Him
- **God loves man** and has proven His love with the ultimate sacrifice
  - John 3:16 - For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (NKJV)
  - 1 John 3:1 - Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. (NKJV)
- **God desires for man to love Him** in return! We were created to love God and enjoy Him forever!
  - Deuteronomy 6:5 - You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. (NKJV)
    - God wouldn't command us to love Him if He didn't want our love.
  - 1 John 5:3 - For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. (NKJV)
    - God doesn't make it hard for us to love Him, we just have to choose to love Him.

Man is important to God because **He created us to be in His family** and to be completely dependent on Him. He loves us and wants us to love Him in return.

Hebrews 2:5-9 For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. But one testified in a certain place, saying: "What is man that You are mindful of him, Or the son of man that You take care of him?"

You have made him a little lower than the angels; **You have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet.**" For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him.

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. (NKJV, emphasis mine)

The insignificant physical presence of man is not an indication of our lack of value in this universe. **It is an example of the awesome power and provision of God** who can speak into existence such an incredible creation for the sole purpose of providing a home for his beloved children.

The lost have no interest in a God and Savior they are not convinced cares anything about them in the first place. Take time to learn why mankind is God's most precious creation and be able to share that with others who need to know it!

*Father in Heaven, we are incredibly insignificant compared to creation, but even infinitely less significant compared to You! Yet because of Your love for us, somehow we are the most important part of Your creation. Help us to understand that wondrous truth and be able to share that blessed news with a lost and dying world that truly IS insignificant without You in their lives. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Science, and the world, would have you to believe that you are a speck of dust that came about by chance. Has that supposed "scientific fact" affected your view of why God created our universe? How important is mankind to God? He sacrificed His son for us; what does that indicate? So how important do you think all those unsaved people are to God that we are too busy or too scared to talk to about Jesus?

**Application:** Mankind is the most important part of all creation to God. Get your viewpoint of man in line with God's and see if you don't start viewing those around you a little differently.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Insignificant But Important To God

### Part: 2

Psalm 8:4 - What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? (NKJV)

Apart from God, man is a very insignificant part of this universe both physically and in composition. However, it would appear, given the evidence, that the universe was uniquely created to support life on earth. If true, man **must** be very important to the Creator.

**The anthropic principle:** the earth and the universe appears to have been designed specifically to support our life on earth.

- Unique location in our galaxy -the earth exists in a very unique location that benefits the sustaining of life on our planet
- Unique stabilization of the inner solar system - the planets are arranged very carefully in a way that allows earth to maintain its position
- Unusually circular orbit of the earth - the circular orbit around the sun is uncommon and is critical to sustain life
- Axial tilt and eccentricity of orbit - the perfect angle of tilt gives us our seasons which are necessary for weather that is life sustaining
- The presence of an "impossibly" large moon - the moon is vital to our tidal movements that sustain life in our oceans
- Unusually thin atmosphere- just the right density to maintain the presence of liquid, solid and gaseous water necessary to life
- Slowing rotation makes advanced life possible - faster rotation would create hurricane force winds, slower rotation would not allow weather to exist

The list of "perfect" conditions goes on and on. Here are some more examples if you want to do further study of the evidence: number of star companions; parent star birth date; parent star age; parent star distance from center of galaxy; parent star mass; parent star color; surface gravity; distance from parent star; thickness of crust; rotation period; gravitational interaction with a moon; magnetic field; albedo (ratio of reflected light to total amount falling on surface); oxygen to nitrogen ratio in atmosphere; carbon dioxide and water vapor levels in atmosphere; ozone level in atmosphere; atmospheric electric discharge rate; seismic activity.

These are all created just the "perfect" way to sustain life. The odds of it all occurring again, anywhere, anytime with the dimension we exist are infinitesimally small. So IF God created this universe for us, then we must be pretty important to him. What about man is important to God?

- **The promises that God has made to us**

- 2 Peter 3:9 - The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (NKJV)
- James 2:5 - Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? (NKJV)

- **All of our needs**



- Luke 12:22-32 - Then He said to His disciples, “Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing.

Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds? And which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? If you then are not able to do the least, why are you anxious for the rest?

Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothes the grass, which today is in the field and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O you of little faith? “

And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you. “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. (NKJV)

- **Our need for salvation**

- Luke 19:9-10 - And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (NKJV)

- **Our frailty and weakness**

- Psalm 103:13 - As a father pities his children, So the Lord pities those who fear Him. (NKJV)
- Matthew 11:30 - For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” (NKJV)
- We are important to God, He has made it easy for us to turn to Him, a choice

- **Our troubles, sadness and sorrow**

- Isaiah 53:4 - Surely He has borne our grief’s And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. (NKJV)
- Lamentations 3:22 - Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. (NKJV)
  - God knows we have many sorrows and troubles, so He is ready for us each and every day with a full measure of mercy and compassion BECAUSE we are important to Him

- **The temptations we deal with**

- Hebrews 2:18 - For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. (NKJV)
- 1 Corinthians 10:13 - No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. (NKJV)

We are as important to God as we are small compared to the universe. God created us, created our home and provides for us.

*O God, thank you that we are important to You because we would have no reason to live otherwise. In Jesus Name. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you meditate on how important man is to God? Can you explain to others WHY God loves mankind and would send His Son to die for us?

**Application:** Mankind is the most important part of all creation to God. Get your viewpoint of man in line with God's and see if you don't start viewing those around you a little differently.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Spiritual Intimacy

Heb 10: 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (NKJV)

Where are you in your Christian walk?

- You don't really know much about God.
- You know about God from what others have told you.
- You personally believe in the idea of God, but He is not truly real to you. God is a higher power, a lifestyle or set of rules to live by.
- You are faithful to the principles and idea of God, but don't experience intimacy with Him or His very real Presence in your life.
- You enjoy an intimate personal relationship with God and His Presence is tangible, consistent, demonstrable and satisfying.

As Christians, most of us identify with one of those statements but very few with the last. We all desire the tangible, intimate Presence of God, but it is elusive for the vast majority. Why?

Is it God's fault? Does He taunt us with promises of a personal relationship and then sidestep us just when we get close? Does He derive some perverse pleasure in dangling a carrot of intimacy that can be conceived but rarely experienced? Of course not.

God is faithful (Rev 19.11) and unmoved (Mal 3.6). To His children, He graciously makes Himself accessible, always available, ever accepting and eternally patient.

"God is not real to me." "I don't feel close to God."

"God's presence is not consistent in my life."

"My Christian life is sporadic and unpredictable."

**As always, the problem lies with MAN, not God.** There is nothing simplistic about our relationship with God, but often our problems in this area are much more simple than we care to admit. We simple are not willing to sacrifice our flesh and discipline our life enough to achieve intimacy with God.

Which of these things are true for you:

- Your love for God's Word is weak as demonstrated by the amount of time you read the Bible.
- Your personal holiness is of little priority as demonstrated by how infrequently you confess your sin.
- Your understanding of God's nature is shallow as demonstrated by what little time you spend worshiping Him.
- Your flesh is more important than your spirit as demonstrated by the amount of time you spend indulging it as opposed to feeding your spirit with Godliness.
- Your friendship with the Lord is neglected as demonstrated by how little time you spend talking with Him.

Notice the common thread in all these statements. TIME. SACRIFICE. DISCIPLINE.

As Americans, we tend to want everything easy, fast and without sacrifice. God doesn't operate that way (Rom 12.1-2). You can't have the world and God too. You can't serve two masters. It has been said:

**Defeated Christians have just enough world in them to make them miserable at church and just enough church in them to make them miserable out in the world.**

Choose this day whom you will serve (Josh 24.15) and forsake the world (Tit 2.11). Yesterday is past. Tomorrow will come at God's pleasure. Today has enough for us to handle (Matt 6.34). **Determine that TODAY you will:**

- Read God's Word (2Tim 2.15)
- Confess your sin to Him (1Jn 1.9)
- Spend time in worship to Him (Ps 29.2)
- Pursue Godliness moment by moment (Hos 6.3)
- Talk to God, talk to Him again and then talk some more (1Thess 5.16)
- Then be still and hear Him (Ps 46.10)

**Just for today.** Then wake up tomorrow to a fresh start and enjoy the God of New Beginnings who will be waiting with open arms to greet you.

*Father, give us the desire to draw close to you, to enjoy your Presence and the superior satisfaction of a Godly life. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you have the common roller coaster Christianity? Are you up and down, fail and fix, time after time? Have you begun to doubt that it can ever be any different?

**Application:** Spiritual consistency and intimacy with God is simple, but not simplistic. We overcomplicate it to excuse the obvious - like we do about being overweight or out of shape. News flash: eat less, exercise more. It's the same with our spiritual health. More God, less world. Time, discipline and sacrifice. It merely boils down to how much we truly want it and value it. Easy? No. Simple? Yes.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## The Bible Talks About Itself

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (NKJV)

We continue our Sword Training today looking at what the Bible has to say about itself. To start with, let's look at some Biblical claims that leave **no room** for a "neutral" opinion that the Word of God is a "good" book, but not inspired or authoritative. Upon reading the Bible, a person is left with a CLEAR decision:

Either the Bible **IS** the supernaturally, miraculously inspired Word of God;  
**Or** it is a book full of lies, inaccuracies,  
false claims and nonsense.

**One of those conclusions must be true.** It is intellectually, academically and logically ludicrous to accept it is as a "nice" book full of good "moral" teaching, but reject it as the ONLY TRUTH revealed to man by a Living God who **demand**s a response from us. **The Bible claims:**

- **To be the inspired** Word of the Creator of the Universe, nothing less (2Tim 3.16-17)
- To be the **ONLY** source of **truth** to mankind (Psa 86.11; 119.142,151,160; John 14.6; Matt 5.18;24.35
  - John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (NKJV)
- To contain **ALL** things **needed to live** a pleasing and acceptable life according to its Author (2Pet 1.3; John 6.63; 6.68; Rom 8.11; Heb 11.6; Col 1.9-10)
- To have the **true historical account** of the creation of man and the universe (Gen 1; Rom 1.20; Col 1.6; Rev 10.6)
- To **reveal the final outcome** of our existence; the events that will occur, and the ultimate choice of destination: a literal hell or heaven for all eternity (1John; Titus 1.2; Rom 2.5-9; Mark 9.43-48; Rev 21.1; 2 Pet 3.13; 1Thess 4.13-18)

Readers, let's discard this nonsense about the Bible being a "good book"... but **NOT** the supernaturally inspired Word of God. If Biblical claims are not true, then the Bible is deceptive, absurd nonsense **and should be REJECTED in total.**

What other book would you call "good" if you believed it was inaccurate, untrustworthy and full of claims that were obviously false? Calling the Bible "good" while rejecting its clear teaching about man's responsibility to God, is nothing more than an attempt to soothe our conscience; or it may be a belief held in ignorance.

**Reject the Bible as false and full of lies; or accept what it says as the Truth.**

God, nor the Bible, gives us the luxury of believing some portions of it, while ignoring others. It is logically absurd, intellectually dishonest, and emotionally cowardly to accept its "good moral principles" but deny its commands for obedience and repentance.

Now, for those who accept the entire Bible, let's take a look at a few more things it has to say about itself.

- The Bible has **the power to effect man's spirit** where human psychology can only attempt to have influence down to the level of the mind (Heb 4.12)

- The Word of God gives us the power to defend against attacks of temptation and sin (Matt 4; Eph 6)
  - Psalm 119:11 Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You. (NKJV)
- The Bible will **enrich our lives and transform us** more and more into holy people (1Tim 4.15-16; Phil 4.8; 1Pet 2.9)
- The Bible is the **ONLY** source of assurance of salvation (1John; Acts 4.12; Psa 3.8; Rom 1.6)
  - 1 John 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. (NKJV)
- The Bible is our comfort, guide, teacher; **our standard** by which all things are tested and measured (2Tim 3.16; 2Thess 2.16-17; 1Thess 4.18; Rom 15.5)
- The Bible is **our protection** from the false ideas, deceptions and religions of man (1John 2:26; 2Peter; 1John 4.1)
- The Bible, when read, **will impart blessing** to the reader and can only be understood by those whom God indwells spiritually (Rev 1.3; 22.7; Luke 11.28; 1Cor 1.21,25; 3.19; Eph 5.8)

The words of the Holy Bible are the very words of God. In His mercy He has given us His revealed plan for our lives. The more we know about it, the more pleasing our lives will be and the greater victory we will have over sin.

*Heavenly Author, Help us to see the necessity of accepting or rejecting the Bible in its entirety. We ask for Your wisdom, understanding and discernment as we sincerely seek the Truth. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you partially accept the Bible, while rejecting some of it? Have you ever considered how illogical that is? If you accept the Bible as God's Word, are there ANY parts of it you question?

**Application:** It is vital to thoroughly contemplate this issue of accepting ALL the Bible, or none of the Bible. If the Bible contains lies, errors and false claims, why believe ANY of it?

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## The Reflection of You

Proverbs 27.19 As in water face reflects face, So a man's heart reveals the man.  
(NKJV)

Looking into still water is like looking into a mirror. What you see reflected back is exactly what is there. You can't fool the mirror, you can't change the image, you can't filter it, you can't trick it. The reflection is exactly that of the original.

In the same way, looking into a man's heart is the true reflection of what he really is. In the secret place of your heart, the image of the real you is reflected. In the same way you can see into a mirror and an image appears, how do you "look" into your heart to see the true image of yourself? Scripture gives us many ways to know what is in our heart.

### **What your life produces, good or evil, clearly reveals what is in your heart**

Luke 6.45 45 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

The fruit of our lives clearly reveal the true contents of our heart. It is impossible for an evil man to produce a good life. To the contrary, a life of righteousness reveals that a man is following God and that his words can be trusted to be genuine and sincere. We are able to fool people for while, to spin things favorably and even to put on a good appearance for a period of time. But in the end, an evil heart produces evil. There is no way around it.

Is your life full of goodness and truth? Then be confident in God's presence knowing He is pleased with you. To the degree that evil and wickedness are the hallmarks of your choices, you can ignore the deceptive efforts of your own self-rationalization that strive to downplay the depths of sin that has produced the evil results. Your choices, actions and the resulting harvest, speak loudly concerning the true nature of what is in your heart.

### **When you squeeze a lemon, you get lemon juice.**

What is inside, will come out when the pressure is on. There is no hiding the true nature of our hearts when placed in front of the mirror of life's trials.

### **Whether or not you can control your mouth reveals what is truly in your heart**

James 1.26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.

The inability to control your tongue reveals great deception. Religious efforts are useless when not surrendered to God's will and accompanied with the power to overcome sin obtained through the washing of regeneration (Titus 3.4-5). The tongue has great power and this small part of the body can control the entire course of a life (James 3.1-12). Whatever is in your heart is manifested in your speech: when you speak, how you speak, where you speak and IF you speak.

Does your tongue bring edification, blessing and praise? Or is it used for strife, gossiping, discontentment, grumbling and whispering? If the heart is the mirror to a man's true image, then the tongue gives the light to that reflection. Tame your tongue, and you will change your whole life.

### **Unbelief reveals evil in our heart**

Heb 3.12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;

Unbelief produces fear, doubts God, and causes us to easily depart from what the Living God has declared as true. Unbelief betrays a heart that believes more in itself, than in the Word of God. It is the deathblow to all things Christian for unbelief in even one thing God has revealed to us, casts doubt on everything He says.

### **Submission to authority shows our true nature**

Col 3.22-24 Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

Our response and voluntary humility to those in authority over us reveal whether or not we fear God and understand where our true reward is. We should be respectful and obedient to all those in authority over because they were put there by God (Rom 13.1). There is no conditional submission granted in Scripture. We are to be submissive even if our boss isn't fair, our slave master is harsh or we don't agree with the Elders. God does not judge us based on how they rule; we are judged by our attitude of submission offered "as unto the Lord".

Do you find submission to be an offensive word because you're a person who does things "your way"? *You're not going to be told what to do, especially if you're right, and they are wrong. Why should you have to obey them?* Are you submissive only in pleasant circumstances or when you agree with those over you? If submission is absent, or extremely hard for you, the mirror of your heart is reflecting some serious need that you should pray about immediately and ask God to reveal.

### **Giving up and losing hope reveals your heart**

2 Cor 4.16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

We are to have an eternal perspective on our circumstances. When faced with the trials of life they are but a momentary and light "pinch" compared to eternity. This understanding allows us to have great courage and steadfastness when faced with life's problems. We realize that while our outward body is decaying and dying day by day; each day brings us one step closer to eternal glory and unimaginable happiness in the Lord's presence.

When you give up, when you lose heart and become discouraged, you proclaim to those around you that you really don't believe God is faithful; that you really don't understand your eternal reward; that you doubt God's full assurance to see you through any trial and that He is allowing what is best for us at all times.

### **Caring for others proclaims what is in your heart**

1 John 3.17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

We of all people on earth are truly blessed with an abundance of material things. What kind of person sees a brother in need and sends him on his way with a "God bless you" without helping him, despite his ability to do so? Our compassion and sympathy for those truly in need reflect our love and gratitude to God who graciously gave us all we have in the first place (1 Cor 4.7).

### **Love and good deeds done in truth reveal a man's heart**



1 John 3.18-21 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

Does your heart condemn you? John tells us that we are not to love with our words only; they are to be solidified with our actions and done according to God's truth. If our Christianity is mere lip service, then our hearts condemn us before God. But if your heart does not condemn you because of your love and good works, then you can have confidence in the presence of God knowing that you are a good and faithful servant (Matt 25.23).

James 1.22-24 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.

Your heart reflects who you truly are. God's word has given us many ways to view the "mirror" of our heart. **What do you see today?**

*Lord God, give us a clear look into our heart. Reveal to us anything that displeases you. Help us today to change what is in our heart, and then it will change our life. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** When you look in to the mirror of who you really are, what do you see? Do you see YOU? Or Christ? Do you understand that question?.

**Application:** Our goals as Christians is to attempt to be so Christ-like that are reflection is a picture of Him. The only way to do that, is to know Him, spend time with Him and obey Him..

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Using The Sword of the Spirit

### Part: 2

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (NKJV)

All the knowledge, training and confidence in the world won't do you a bit of good if you don't actually pick up a weapon and use it. Today we will look at the Master Swordsman and learn from His example on how to wield the Sword of the Spirit.

In the Gospels we find the account of the Lord's severe temptation by Satan (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). Jesus was enduring an extraordinarily long fast, led into the wilderness alone by the Spirit of God (Mark 1.13) to be tested. In His weakened physical condition, Jesus was confronted with temptation by the most devious, clever, and manipulative being in all creation – that Old Serpent, Father of Lies and Great Deceiver: Satan.

**Jesus leads by experience.** He experienced all things with regards to sinful temptation and showed us how to deal with it effectively. We have no excuse to sin. We cannot say "well the Lord just doesn't understand what I am going through". Oh yes... He does.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. (NKJV)

Jesus is our Savior, and our great Leader; who like all great leaders, led by example. We'll look at how He defeated temptation and sin under the most extreme circumstances. He hadn't eaten for 40 days, He was alone, He was fully human; and none other than the Prince of Darkness decided to handle this temptation himself (Matt 4).

- "Jesus, you haven't eaten in 40 days. If you're the Son of God, it should be nothing for you to turn these rocks to bread."

Well that sounds reasonable and harmless. Jesus was the Son of God. He could feed 5000 families with 5 loaves of bread. So what's that big deal? Satan was just asking the obvious, right? "Make yourself something to eat Jesus. Shouldn't be much of problem for the Son of God".

Satan was tempting Jesus to depend on Himself instead of depending on God. He was taunting Jesus into becoming self-sufficient with regards to His humanity. He was trying to trick Jesus into **ruining God's plan to save mankind** by having Jesus use His divine power to care for Himself as a human. This would negate God's requirement that a "man" (Jesus, fully human) had to live a perfect, sinless, fully human life in order to be a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world (1John 2.2; Rom 3.25; Heb 5.3).

So Jesus pulled out His Sword: **"It is written..."**

Jesus used the Word of God to defeat sin and defend Himself against temptation. In this, He demonstrated the proper offensive use of our spiritual weaponry.

Now, let me stop here and state the obvious. It is a little difficult to say "It is written" **if you don't actually know what is written**. This underscores the incredible importance of regular, intensive, daily, unrelenting Bible study. The more you read God's Word, the more you become saturated with it, the more you memorize it, the more you understand it... the more victory you will achieve over sin because you will draw your sword at the moment of temptation and destroy with "It is written..."

Matthew 4:4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" (NKJV)

Notice two things here. One, **Satan immediately moved on**. He didn't persist with that specific taunt. It was effectively defeated. The Sword of the Spirit is powerful. It is not a dull knife or a stick. It is a razor sharp, two-edged destroyer of temptation.

**Used properly, it is effective and powerful.**

Second, Jesus used the **appropriate** Words given the temptation at hand. This also emphasizes the necessity of intense Bible study. The typical Christian is familiar with a handful of popular Bible verses and that's about it. Not being familiar enough with Scripture to employ effective verses for a given temptation is tantamount to **shooting a tank with BB gun**.

Imagine if Jesus would have said "It is written, thou shalt not steal!" because that was one of the only 5 verses He knew. Encouraged by the display of Biblical ignorance, I can hear Satan's response... "huh? What in the world does that have to do with anything? You better get to making that bread!"

No, Jesus employed Scripture that destroyed the basis for the temptation. Physical bread only gives physical life; what good is physical life without spiritual life? Hence, Jesus' response: "Man shall live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God". That's real life. That's real food. Real bread.

- Then Satan tempted Jesus to use His Divine Power this time attacking the Lord's ego. "Hey Jesus, you're such a hotshot with all your angels and power. Prove it! Throw yourself off this building and call some angels to rescue you."

Satan was using the old "I dare you" or "you're too chicken" plays on human pride. What is really being said is "I don't believe you can really do it; and if you don't prove to me you can, I'm going to tell everyone". All too often our response is, "oh yeah, I'll show you!". Not Jesus.

"It is written, you shall NOT tempt the Lord your God". And that my friends, was that.

- Unsuccessful in tempting Jesus' physical needs and ego, Satan now turns to tempting Him with materialism, power and fame. Satan, who at the moment is the ruler of this world, offered to give it all to Jesus, if only the Lord would worship Satan just one little harmless time.

The Father of Lies and Deception was at his best here. Satan **seemed** willing to give up the kingdoms of the world, but he knew that they would revert right back to him if Jesus would worship him. If Jesus would have worshipped him, it would surrender this world right back to Satan one second later because the Lord would have become sinful.

**Like a mouse who gets the "prize" on the mouse trap for a few seconds then pays for it with his life, Jesus would have forfeited all by taking the bait.**

Sound familiar? It should. **Satan had already used this trick** on Adam and Eve successfully. Satan must have thought "well it worked on the perfect man once before, let's give it another shot".

In Genesis 3, Satan said to Eve, "God doesn't want you to eat from that Tree because He knows you will become just like Him when you do and He doesn't want any rivals". In essence, Satan was saying the same thing to Eve he said to Jesus, "if you do what I ask, you'll have everything". Eve was deceived and took the bait from Satan when she should have responded with "God said...". Adam however just flat out sinned and did it knowing exactly what he was doing (1Tim 2.14).

Instead of “becoming like God” (Jesus temptation: gaining the whole world) they in reality had surrendered themselves to Satan (Jesus temptation: worship Satan) and death entered creation. **Jesus was hearing the Great Lie, all over again.** He didn’t fall for it.

Matthew 4:10 Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’” (NKJV)

And with that, Satan was rebuked and Jesus had endured that greatest of sinful temptations successfully, leaving us with no excuse for sinning. He also left us with the perfect training example:

## It is written...

I want to close with some examples of how you can develop your battle skills employing Jesus example of using Scripture. Let me say very clearly, and forcefully that **this is not some magic trick**, spiritual formula or new revelation. Christianity is poisoned today with stomach-turning gimmicks:

- The 7 keys to instant success
- Secrets to harnessing God’s power
- The 4 principles of getting what you want from God
- The Prayer of This
- The Miracle Power of That

The Christian bookstores are full of the same Madison Avenue, attention grabbing tricks that secular marketing uses. (Well, there goes my chance of ever getting published!) That is not to say that these books are devoid of truth, or even effective teaching. **It is more an indictment on the READER**, not the writers. We have cultivated such a carnal, “entertain-me” culture, that a book entitled “What the Bible Teaches About Holy Living” **goes untouched**, while the book entitled “Seven Secrets to Your Financial Miracle” **tops the best seller list for months**.

Now, back to my point. Jesus demonstrates how to properly use Scripture to combat sin and temptation. Several things to keep in mind:

- You need to know effective verses given the temptation at hand.
- You need to have previously formulated your “battle plan” for a particular and be well trained before the attack occurs.
- You need to be alert to know when the actual attack is occurring.

Let’s say that you frequently battle the temptation of **lust**. Here is an example of Scripture that could be used to combat it:

IT IS WRITTEN: “...You shall not commit adultery. (Jesus said) that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators... nor adulterers... nor the sexually immoral... will inherit the kingdom of God. (NKJV Matthew 5:27-28; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; combined & paraphrased)

I have found it effective to not only think these words, but to actually say them. This serves several purposes:

- It immediately turns your mind away from the temptation and focuses it on the Bible.
- It is hard to follow up on sinful desires when Scripture is coming out of your mouth.
- It bring more of our total being into the process: mind, mouth & ears; diverting all of these from the temptation.
- Demons can't read your mind, but they can hear you. If fallen angels are fueling a temptation, they will hear Scripture and be repelled by it. (spiritual warfare; Eph 6)

Maybe you struggle with **gossip**, or running your mouth too much. Here's an example of effective Sword use:

IT IS WRITTEN: "... no (one) can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison... a fire, a world of (wickedness)... it defiles the whole body, and... is set on fire by hell. Let no corrupt word proceed out of (my) mouth, but (only) what is good..." (NKJV James 3:8; 3:6; Ephesians 4:29; combined & paraphrased)

**Cursing:**

IT IS WRITTEN: "... no evil or foolish word will come out of my mouth except those words which edify, bless, encourage or teach others because profane and idle talk increase ungodliness, and the ungodly will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Eph 4:29-32; 2Tim 2:16; 1Cor 6:9; combined & paraphrased)

**Greed:**

IT IS WRITTEN: "...the love of money is the source of all sorts of evil and will bring trouble to my life. Money can't save me and will deceive me into thinking I don't need God. My treasure should be in heaven when thieves and rust won't destroy it; and that whatever I give up to God, will be given back in eternity". (1Tim 6:10; Prov 11:4; Rev 3:17; Matt 6:19; combined & paraphrased)

While I have paraphrased the thoughts of the verses together, it is important for you to memorize and meditate on each individual verse. **Don't ever shortcut memorizing Scripture** because paraphrasing is easier.

God has supplied us with an effective weapon to use against sin: **the Sword of the Spirit**. The Bible is our door to knowing God's heart. The more we immerse ourselves into it, the more God will reveal its amazing riches to you.

*Father, thank you for providing us a weapon to fight sin. We would be powerless against sin without you. Help us to cultivate an insatiable hunger for Your Word and may You become the very center of our lives at all times. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you have battle plans for the sins you struggle with? Do you know enough Scripture to be able to fight using "it is written"?

**Application:** The Bible is not just a book. It is God's heart and plan revealed to us in written form. Determine that you will treat it as such.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## All Means All

Colossians 1:15 - He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. (NKJV)

The Bible is the one book that can get away with using all inclusive terms like "every", "all", "never" and "always". I find it interesting that when these terms are used in conjunction with mankind they are rarely flattering. There are none righteous (Rom 3.10); we all fall short (Rom 3.23); we're all sinners.

Just the opposite is true when speaking of the Godhead. God is always Holy. The Spirit is never lacking. And Jesus is first in all things. What does that mean? Preeminence means to stand out, to be first in rank, first in dignity or first in importance. That's a very lofty idea. And Jesus is not just preeminent.

**Jesus has preeminence in ALL things.  
He is the highest ranking, most important,  
first and foremost.**

When the Bible says "all" it means only one thing: ALL. Unlike us, God does not exaggerate to make a point. He says exactly what He means. He's not just trying to emphasize or bolster an idea by applying a grandiose term that really does mean what it says. In the Bible, ALL MEANS ALL.

Colossians 1:18 - And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in **all things** He may have the preeminence. (NKJV, emphasis mine)

So Jesus is to be preeminent, the most important in all things. My first inclination was to write "which things?" Then I realized I was a victim of my own finiteness. Why would I ask "which things" when I just proclaimed that in the Bible "all" means "all". Nonetheless, let's humor our collective mental frailty and take a look at some of the specific things included in "all".

- **Preeminence over all creation; over EVERY thing God has created**

Colossians 1:15-17 - He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over **all** creation. For by Him **all** things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. **All** things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before **all** things, and in Him **all** things consist. (NKJV, emphasis mine)

When God uses the word "all" five times in the same thought, we ought to pay attention. One instance of an all-inclusive term is just that, all-inclusive. But to have one used five times in row (actually six because verse 18 uses "all" again) it would seem that God is trying to get something through our thick heads.

Jesus is the firstborn over all creation. The idea here is not of someone physically born first, but of someone who is the highest ranking or most important among all. This of course is the correct understanding because Jesus was not physically born before all other people; nor was He ever firstborn in the sense that His birth marked the beginning of His existence. He is eternal and has always existed.

Why is He firstborn over all creation? Because all things that were created, were created **by Him, through Him and for Him**. So much for any argument that Jesus has not always existed as God, even while existing on

earth as fully man. Is there any part of creation He did not create? Let's see:

- All things in heaven or on earth
- All things visible or invisible
- All thrones (all governments), dominions (all possessions), principalities (all authorities) and powers (all influence)
- The Apostle Paul leaves no possible exception or doubt unanswered: Jesus is preeminent over all creation which was by Him (He did the creating), through Him (He was the authority and reason for creation) and for Him (creation would exist to fulfill His purposes).

If Jesus has preeminence over all creation, do you think that includes our life? Sometimes when we think on such grand scales we lose sight of the personal aspects. "All creation" is not just every thing out there, it is all things that have to do with our life. Which parts of our life? ALL parts.

• **Jesus should have preeminence (highest rank, first importance) in all areas of our life:**

- Preeminence in our thoughts
- Preeminence in our time
- Preeminence in our schedule
- Preeminence in our finances
- Preeminence in our relationships
- Preeminence in our work
- Preeminence in our words
- Preeminence in our emotions

If Jesus Christ is the most important, most outstanding, highest ranking, preeminent Person in all of creation, how much more should He be preeminent in our personal lives? It is very convicting when I compare Christ's preeminence in my life to His preeminence over creation. Very often my life does not reflect how important Jesus truly is.

Think with me for moment. In every area of our life that Jesus is not preeminent, who is? We are! Now think about that. What's the ugly truth? The truth is that every time and in every way that Jesus is not preeminent in our lives, we are proclaiming that WE are more important than He is. Scary. Very scary.

I realize that I don't really have a good understanding of the true importance and position of Jesus Christ because if I really believed and grasped Colossians 1:15-18, then it would be hard to think about anything but Jesus every minute of every day. Let's close with those verses again so you will linger on them and not my comments:

Colossians 1:15-18 - He is the image of the invisible God, the **firstborn over all creation**. For by Him **all** things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. **All** things were created **through** Him and **for** Him. And He is before **all** things, and in Him **all** things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in **all** things **He may have the preeminence**. (NKJV, emphasis mine)



*Most Holy God, help us to understand the preeminence of Your Blessed Son. May our lives reflect the truth of how important Jesus is. In His Preeminent name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** If someone were to judge how important Jesus is by looking at your life as a professing Christian, what conclusion would they come to? Is Jesus preeminent in some things in your life but not ALL things? If Jesus is not preeminent, who is? (hint: look in a mirror)

**Application:** Jesus already has preeminence over all creation. He will have preeminence over your life either by your own choice now, or by His choice on Judgment Day. Either way, it will happen. His preeminence in your life will increase as you meditate on this truth and ask God to reveal it more fully to you.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## But I Will Remember

Psalm 77:10 - And I said, "This is my anguish; But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." (NKJV)

I love the Psalms. They speak of the entire human experience, from the darkest disappointments to the highest joys. Whatever emotion describes your life at this very moment, the Psalms most likely have some beautiful things to say about it.

The 77th Psalm is twenty verses long, with the first ten verses describing great discouragement. The last ten verses describe how remembering what God has done will lift us from discouragement.

I want to pair up a "negative" from the first 10 verses, with a positive thing to remember from the last ten to help you better recall the ideas. See if you have ever felt any (or all!) of these negative emotions. Most likely you have experienced them all. The real question is, have you ever responded by remembering the goodness of God anytime in the past?

- (v.2) Life is so hard right now I can't even sleep and nothing seems to comfort me... **but I will remember** all the good things the Lord has done and all the wonders of God from the past (v.11).
- (v.3) I just can't take it anymore. I don't think I can handle anything else going wrong... **but I will remember** everything that God has done for me and I will tell others about it (v.12).
- (v.4) I can't rest or sleep; I'm so upset and discouraged I can't even find the right words to describe it... **but I will remember** that You O God are holy and great and there is none like You (v.13).
- (v. 5) Things used to be so much better than they are now... **but I will remember** that You are a God of wonders and strength (v.14).
- (v.6) When I think about the happy times of the past it only makes me sad because I am having so many problems right now... **but I will remember** that the Lord has redeemed me and saved my soul (v.15).
- (v.7) God, are you there? Have you forgotten me? Are you going to help me?... **but I will remember** that even the winds and water obey Your very word and they tremble at the sound of your voice (v.16).
- (v.8) Lord, don't You care about me anymore? I'm trusting in the promises of Your Word but it doesn't seem like You are fulfilling them... **but I will remember** that all of heaven and earth do Your bidding; even the rain and lightning fall at Your command (v.17).
- (v.9) God, it seems like You are withholding all Your kindness from me. Are you mad at me? Have I made You angry. It sure seems like it... **but I will remember** how powerful You are and that Your ways are so great and so holy that it is beyond me to comprehend how You do things (v.18-19).

If you've been on this earth more than a few years you've probably experienced some of these emotions. If you've got a few gray hairs, then you've most likely experienced them all. Isn't it amazing that our God knows every heartache, every emotion and every feeling that we could possibly experience.

Hebrews 4:15 - For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. (NKJV)

Jesus knows what you're going through. He not only knows, He has experienced much worse. So remember what the Savior has done for you and see if your spirits are lifted by it!

*God of Wonders, thank You for reminding us that the answer to ALL of life is to turn our eyes upon You and remember what You have done for us. Thank You for Jesus who, in His unexplainable love for us, experienced life as we know it so that He could sympathize with our heartaches and trouble. In His Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** How do you handle the trials and troubles of life? Do you complain, become bitter or just stay depressed about it? Have you ever purposely tried to recall all the things God has done for you?

**Application:** Once again, the key to life is getting your mind off of your SELF. When life is tough make a conscious effort to stop and remember all the good things that God has done, both in general and for you personally (if you can't think of any, you are indeed having a SERIOUS pity party). By the way, this works on a personal level too. When you find yourself truly down on someone (spouse, friends, other Christians), make an effort to recall everything good about that person that you can and see if it doesn't melt away some of the negative emotion. As sinful humans, we are so prone to dwell on the one "bad" thing while selfishly forgetting the 999 "good" things.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Christian Humility

Matthew 5:3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Poor in spirit" speaks of understanding our true predicament and need for a Savior. This results in a true humility that originates from a correct perspective of our position with relation to God's holiness. What effect does true humility have on us?

### A right knowledge of ourselves

- We are incapable of living up to God's standard
  - Romans 8:7-8 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. 8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.
  - Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God
- We deceive ourselves into thinking we can please God and do right apart from Him
  - Psalm 58:3 The wicked are estranged from the womb; They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies.
  - Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"
  - Ephesians 2:1-2 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, 2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience
- We will have the fear of the Lord which produces righteousness
  - Psalm 111:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
  - Job 28:28 And to man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, And to depart from evil is understanding.' "
  - Isaiah 33:6 Wisdom and knowledge will be the stability of your times, And the strength of salvation; The fear of the Lord is His treasure.
    - What is the fear of the Lord?
    - Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way; And the perverse mouth I hate.
    - 1 Peter 1:16 because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."
    - Psalm 11:7 For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteousness; His countenance beholds the upright.

### A right knowledge of Christ

- When we see ourselves correctly, then we seek to see Jesus correctly because He is our only Hope. We will seek the true way of salvation knowing that it is impossible in our effort. Christ Alone! Our hope, our joy, our security, our eternity!
- Correctly understanding to the best of our finite ability what Christ did, who Christ was, what Christ sacrificed, what He accomplished, will only cultivate our humility. Our futile efforts to please God in our own strength pale and diminish with our growing knowledge of Christ's sufficiency.
- A right knowledge of Christ leads to a right knowledge of attitude, a right knowledge of worship, and a right knowledge of our dependence on Him.

### **What does “poor in spirit” NOT mean?**

- An outward appearance of “sadness” or “humility” for all to see
  - Jesus was not speaking of a false face of humility. He had scolded the Pharisees for this hypocrisy. To the contrary, a proper humility that leads us Christ and thus His teachings on happiness will produce a countenance of joy and peace in us.
  - While there is a proper time (Ecclesiastes 3) for all things including mourning and sadness, generally speaking the light and hope of Christ should shine in us for all to see.
  - 1 Thessalonians 2:19: For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?
- It doesn't necessarily mean physical poverty, although that could be part
  - No where does Scripture teach that physical poverty in and of itself produces Godliness. The Scripture does have many warnings of the dangers of pursuing wealth and of possessing wealth.
  - The wealthy man should be certain that his riches are completely at God's disposal and pray that God will allow him to hold very loosely to that which is perishable and be willing to give it up for that which is imperishable. Scripture also teaches that we should be dependent on God for our daily sustenance (Psa 23) and that He will no doubt care for our needs. We should never trust in our wealth in any way. It can be gone in an instant, and pray God that it would be gone if it keeps us from Him.
  - Man, in his never ending ability to produce pride in any circumstance can be just as prideful about his poverty, as he can about his wealth. Jesus dealt with the attitude of the heart. He can use wealth or poverty to His glory. You need only to be available and content with either. The poor man should glory in His dependence on God and not covet wealth.

We are taught to be content in whatever situation God has providentially arranged, and glorify Him with joy and thanksgiving in all circumstances. God is above any amount of wealth, or any depth of poverty.

**Regardless of his bank account,  
every man is unimaginably rich who has Christ,  
and is wretchedly poor without him.**

Our duty is to understand that God gives, God takes away, God uses... it's all His. Can He trust us to manage (steward) His resources?

Philippians 4:11-13: Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

### **What “poor in spirit” DOES mean**

- Spiritual poverty
  - The Greek: Ptochos (toh kaas) means “poor and helpless”, “cowering like a beggar”. While this initially assaults our American sense of self sufficiency, it is an accurate picture of our true need for Christ.

- The person who truly understands their emptiness, helplessness and need for God, is ready to be used by God and to enjoy the happiness that only comes from a Savior who chose us, called us, died for us, saved us, sustains us, and grants us eternal glory with him.
- Consider the following verses and God's longing for us to know the happiness of being "poor in spirit" (remember, we are talking about Godly humility, not a sad "poor me" countenance):
  - Psalm 34:18 The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit.
  - Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise.
  - Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the High and Lofty One; Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.
  - Isaiah 66:2 For all those things My hand has made, And all those things exist," Says the Lord. "But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word.
  - James 4:7-10 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

The repeating theme is that God is pleased with and desires:

- A broken heart – Godly humility produced from a realization of our predicament
- A contrite spirit – a repentant attitude, not only understanding our need, but being truly sorry that our own sinfulness caused it
- Mourning and lamenting – a true sadness and grief over the effects of sin and how it grieves God

Humility is a growing characteristic of the maturing Christian. Our motto should be: In myself nothing; in God everything. True humility results in the continual decrease of "self" and the increase of Christ.

*Father, help us to understand what true humility is. Give us Godly understanding about our true predicament as sinners. Allow us to fully turn to You knowing that You are our only hope of salvation. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Why is humility so absent in our society? Do you understand that humility is originated in your understanding of salvation?

**Application:** Humility is not something you can manufacture. True humility is the result of understanding the essence of salvation, and who we are compared to God. Did you understand the depth of your helplessness before the Lord reached down and saved you?.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Desire Equals Discipline

Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. (NKJV)

There is an old parable about **true** desire that has taken many forms but it goes something like this:

A student approaches a Teacher and declares, "I desire to learn from you". The Teacher responds, "very well, follow me." The Teacher leads the student to the ocean and motions for him to follow into the water.

When they are about chest deep in the water, the Teacher grabs the student and forces his head underwater. At first, the student is calm, thinking, "this is just part of some test, he will let me up in moment and I will impress him". After a minute passes the Student begins to worry and struggle. Soon he is desperately trying to surface and becomes frantic.

The Teacher holds the student under the water to the point where the struggling ceases and the student almost passes out. Upon releasing him, the student angrily gasping for air shouts, "Are you crazy! You almost drowned me!".

The Teacher looks into calmly into his eyes and says, "when you desire to learn from me, as much as you desired to get a breath, then return, and I will teach you".

A drowning man will do ANYTHING necessary to get air. **True desire is equal only to what you will do (discipline) to get the object of that desire.** This desire is what Jesus meant by "hunger and thirst for righteousness".

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled. (NKJV)

Jesus tells us that "happy, contented and spiritually prosperous" (blessed) is the man who will do what it takes (discipline) to be righteous.

Matthew 16:24-25 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (NKJV)

It takes a true, undeniable desire to follow Jesus fully. Notice the phrases the Lord uses to describe those who desire to serve Him: **deny** himself; **take up** his cross; **follow**; **lose** his life. Those are acts of discipline that mark a **true** desire to follow Christ.

A person may exclaim a desire ("I want to be close to God"), but until that person is willing to do WHATEVER it takes (discipline; ie, actually spending time in prayer and reading God's Word), **it is a mere statement of sentiment**, not true desire.

## Desire = Discipline

The quality and authenticity of any desire you may have is only as genuine and sincere as what you are willing to do to get it. What will you give up? What will you re-prioritize? What will you suffer? How will you spend your time and money? What actual choices are you willing to make to get that desire? Whatever those choices are; whatever discipline you are willing to exercise... that is the genuine measurement of your desire.

If you desire to please God today, what are you actually going to do to authenticate that desire? What time will you give up? Will you pray? Will you read God's Word? Will



you serve others? Will you share the Gospel? Will you endure ridicule and persecution for Jesus Name? If you will do nothing, your desire is nothing.

Matthew 15:8 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. (NKJV)

Desire God and take definitive action to enact the disciplines necessary to achieve that desire. Otherwise it is mere lip service. Desire = Discipline

*God of Wonders, may our words honor You because they are lifted up on the wings of sacrifice and devotion. Instill in us the understanding of a true desire to be like You. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you desire a closer walk with the Lord? What are you willing to do for it? Do you want it as bad as you want food, or air, or pleasure?

**Application:** Desire is only as real as what you will do to obtain that desire. Do whatever it takes to make your desire to be more Godly true by with real changes in your life.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Find Out and Change

James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.  
(NKJV)

Find out what God has to say. And change your life accordingly.

That could pretty much sum up the committed Christian life. Bible study that doesn't change your life is just academic exercise. Prayer that doesn't change your life is just a mental ritual. The Christian walk is **dedicating our life** to learning the Truth of God, and **changing our life** to agree with that Truth.

Today there is no end of Christian books, writing, teaching, programming and activity. We can "seminar" and "conference" ourselves into oblivion. There is no shortage of dynamic, captivating preacher and speakers. We are at all time high of leaving church "feeling good" about God. Is there a parallel rise in devoted, changed lives? Are we a holy nation, a separated righteous people? Are we **confronted** with the world, or **conformed** to the world?

We have a God who NEVER changes (Mal 3.6) but requires continual and constant change from us (Rom 12.2). Why? God is Perfection. We could live a thousand lifetimes of holiness and never comprehend perfect holiness in our everyday reality. Only when we die and go into God's presence will righteousness become our reality as well (Rom 8.30).

### Every exposure to God, should result in a change in our lives.

Each day our time with God should result in a CHANGE in our hearts and behavior. Every sermon we hear should move us to transform more into the image of our Lord. Every hymn sung, every praise lifted up, every verse memorized, every Sunday School attended... each exposure to God should be reason to reflect on our life and result in change.

Early in our Christian walk, the "changes" are more apparent and usually involve stopping one thing, and starting another. We quit bad habits, choose to speak differently or decide to act differently. As we mature spiritually and walk closer to God, those changes come more often in the form of adjectives: **deeper** sacrifice, **greater** holiness, **stronger** faith, **more** discipline, etc.

**But "change" is always required no matter where we are in our walk.** We will never be exactly like Christ during our pilgrimage in this sin-stained world. Everyday is opportunity to get a step closer. Every time we are touched by God's word, enter into His presence in prayer, or exposed to His holiness in any way, it should change us to be more like His Son who is glorified by our transformation.

How can this be done? **Not passively.** You can't just read the Bible, or a devotion, or attend a conference and have it magically transform you. You can't hear a sermon or say a prayer and be changed into Christ's likeness by default. It has to be an active desire and exercise on your part. Learn the habit of asking:

## "Lord, how do you want to change me?"

Ask God to give you wisdom. He will (James 1.5). He will reveal His truth and how He wants it to change you. But you won't know if you don't ask (James 4.3). God's Word always leads us to be more like Christ, but not by accident. Ask Him. Go ahead. Find out what God has to say, then change your life to fit.

*O God, give us wisdom to know the Truth, and courage to change each time we discover it. Convict our hearts to be doers of Your Word and not just hearers. We ask you to answer our prayer to reveal what should change in our lives each time we are exposed to Your Glory. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** When you study or pray, do you purposely try to apply it to your life? If exposure to God doesn't change you, why doesn't it?

**Application:** Learn to have a focus each day: find out the Truth of God; and change your life accordingly.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Give Me, Fix Me, Restore Me, Bless Me

James 4:3 - You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. (NKJV)

When you teach the Bible and interact with a large number of responses and questions, you see patterns and tendencies that are generally true for the majority. One trend that I've seen is the preconceived ideas about HOW God is **most** glorified in our trials.

Many Christians have the idea that God is glorified when He "fixes" what we believe to be broken in our lives. We apply a Madison Avenue mindset to God's options thinking that God will enjoy greater acceptance and popularity with mankind if He is seen as the source of "success" and "victory" lives.

The problem with this notion lies in our modern definition of those two words, "success" and "victory". The common concept today, even in Christianity, is that "successful" and "victorious" are synonymous with material possessions, physical health and a lack of trials – faith in God is supposed to be directly measurable in a persons life by the amount of prosperity they enjoy.

This has created a generation of Christians who have a difficult time understanding the blessing of suffering, trials, persecution and hardship – **a blessing well understood** by the Apostles, the early church and deeply ingrained in the Reformation, Puritan and revival heritage of the Church. What would be your **first thought** about how God would be most glorified in these following situations:

- A friend is diagnosed with cancer, MS or Parkinsons - how can God be most glorified?
- A fellow Christian businessman faces losing his business and years of hard work because of a partner who cheated him - how can God be most glorified?
- A married couple faces divorce because one of them has chosen immorality and personal happiness over the family - how can God be most glorified?
- A couple's unborn child has been diagnosed with severe problems and will not survive to be born - how can God be most glorified?
- A son in the military is sent off to combat in an area where many have already died - how can God be most glorified?

These are all real scenarios that I have experienced directly or indirectly with some of you (my readers), Christian friends or those I teach or disciple. How would God be most glorified and His purpose served in the previous list of situations? Here is what I believe would be the most common answers based on my experience:

- The disease is healed and the person miraculously made whole
- The business rebounds, the cheater is exposed and the Christian gets everything back plus more
- The marriage is restored and the family goes on with a happy life
- The child is miraculously healed and born without complication
- The soldier goes to war, fights courageously and returns home unharmed

Is God glorified in each of these results? Certainly. Is there anything wrong with praying for these results? Certainly not. So what's my point?

My point is that we have difficulty seeing any OTHER answer as the most glorifying to God other than the answer that returns our lives to "happiness". Only the answers

that restore us physically, materially and emotionally are conceived as bringing the greatest glory to God. This betrays a shallowness of faith and understanding of God.

**ANY answer or solution that God allows  
brings Him the most glory, or He wouldn't allow it.**

What do I mean by that? If God chooses for us to lose our health, money or loved ones it is the perfect answer even if we don't see it, understand it or like it.

**Whatever God allows in our life is by default PERFECT  
for what God wants to accomplish, or God wouldn't be God.**

Many of you may be thinking "um, I don't get what your saying". Others of you are loading up the "prosperity verses" to send to me. We are conditioned by today's popular teaching that God is "successful" and more "attractive to the unsaved" when He is the God who restores what is lacking, fixes what is broken, and blesses us with comfort and suffering-free living. It is the Gospel that proclaims, "Jesus will improve your life".

Jesus certainly does improve our life and sometimes He does it through restoration and prosperity. But, just as frequently, maybe more, His will is accomplished through our trials and suffering. God may decide that:

- The cancer or Parkinson's patient may completely lose their health and eventually die but because of their faithful testimony and joy through their suffering, God is extraordinarily glorified and many lives are transformed as a result.
- (One of my best friends told me last week that if his disease destroyed him physically, but brought his Dad to Christ, he would gladly give up his health. That is a true understanding of how God is glorified in suffering or healing.)
- The businessman may lose everything and suffer severe financial loss but through it he rediscovers everything his business had overshadowed - his marriage, family, church and devotional life.
- The marriage may end up in divorce because of an unrepentant spouse, but through the pain and trials the other family members draw deep from the well of faith and in the years ahead they are able to counsel and pray with many others facing the same ordeal.
- The unborn child may lose the battle and never be born but through the peace, joy and faith of the parents an entire family comes to Christ who previously were uninterested and unimpressed about God.
- The soldier may go to war and lose his life fighting for what he believes in and over the months that follow the parents are overwhelmed by letters from his fellow servicemen describing the faith and courage of their son and the many lives that were brought to Christ during the soul-searching stress of combat because of his faithful witness.

Many of our Bible heroes didn't get answers that we would consider "most" glorifying to God: Moses didn't get to enter the promise land; Joseph was an imprisoned slave for many years; Job lost every single thing he had including his health; John the Baptist was beheaded; Lazarus died; most of the Apostles were dirt poor and eventually martyred; the Apostle Paul was sick, poor, beaten, stoned and imprisoned. Not exactly a list of answers that we would think of as "successful".

Our greatest example, Jesus Christ, prayed to have it "all" (his suffering and crucifixion) removed if possible but immediately followed up with an understanding

and submission to the greater glory of God: **Not my will but yours be done!** (Matt 26.39, emphasis mine).

We sometimes pray for the superficial without regards to the depth of God's sovereignty or glory. We pray "God give me money, restore my health, make everything good, fix all my problems". And while that is a natural desire, **and not necessarily wrong** to pray, we need to be ready for God's answer that may very well involve suffering.

We should be praying "Lord, I know what I would like to see happen, but what is most important is that You are glorified to the greatest possible degree. So I ask You to open my spiritual eyes and show me what will bring You the most glory even if it does not fix my problem, grant my desire, or restore what I'm missing."

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

If God receives greater glory through my greater suffering (1Pet 3.17), then suffering is the answer to our prayer (1Pet 2.19). If the Lord is magnified in the lives around us through a loss of material possession, then take it all. If the Son of God is lifted up through tragedy in my life, then let the tragedies begin (1Pet 4.16).

**It's all a question of true priorities.** Which is more important? You're comfort, restoration, healing, and prosperity; or the glory of God and the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil 3.8-10)? We need to pray for and accept the answer to prayer that brings the greatest glory to God no matter what (Rom 8.18).

1 Peter 2:21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps;

I'm going to close with a clarification because I know I'm bucking against popular teaching today. **YES**, God can be glorified by healing us, blessing us materially and restoring what is "broken" in our lives. We are all well informed of this aspect of Christianity. But if that is where we stop, then we are settling for only a portion of God's blessing, possible the lesser portion. And, we're setting up Christians to have a "faith crisis" when suffering and trials become God's will for them.

My point is NOT to tell you that I know how God is most glorified, only God knows that. My point is that God's will may include prosperity or suffering and we don't hear that taught very often in our current Christian environment because it's not very "attractive".

*Lord God, give us spiritual eyes to see that Your ways are beyond ours. You have answers that we cannot imagine. Help us to pray for the answer that brings You the most glory, and not necessarily the one that brings us the most benefit, In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are most of your prayers to God summarized in "give me, fix me, heal me, bless me, restore me"? If you were facing losing your health, can you conceive where God might be glorified MORE if you actually did lose your health? What about money?

**Application:** Be careful of perpetuating "Christian" clichés such as this one, or ones like "God helps those who help themselves" and "grace is where you leave off and God picks up". We pass these things on so frequently that everyone comes to believe they are Scripture. They only serve to simplify and limit God in our minds, and make us lazy in pursuing the depths of real truth that is not quite so easy and nicely packaged.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# Taking Up the Cross: Going to Your Death

## Part: 1

Matthew 16:24 (NKJV) Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

Jesus had a way of making things simple. The phrase "take up his cross" had instant and vivid meaning to those who were listening to him that day. Over the next few days let's see what is involved in "taking up your cross" and following Jesus.

Folks in that day were acutely aware of what a cross was and what it meant. It was a very public spectacle, and a common means of execution. Crucifixion was a horrible, excruciating way to die. Taking up a cross meant certain death. There was no mistaking it. Your life was over the moment the cross became your destiny.

In the same way, Jesus is leaving no doubt for the hearers of His words that once we choose to follow Him, it will cost us everything. It will cost us our plans, our resources, our time, our devotion and our desires. The cross takes all. No reserves.

- 1 Corinthians 15:31 (NKJV) I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.
  - We take up our cross once to determine our eternal destination but we take it up anew each day as a choice to serve God with each sunrise; to deny ourselves in favor of doing the will of the Lord.
- John 11:26 (NKJV) And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?
  - We die to our self, but in Christ we live eternally. The Christian life is always an irony: we pick up an instrument of death (the cross) and it brings us eternal life. We give up our lives but gain immortal reward. We sacrifice all, but receive everything.

The whole life of a Christian should be nothing but praises and thanks to God; we should neither eat nor sleep, but eat to God and sleep to God and work to God and talk to God, do all to His glory and praise. (Richard Sibbes)

The cross means DEATH to SELF. Are you willing to pay the price? You have no choice if you want to follow Jesus:

Matthew 10:38-39 (NKJV) And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

Do you understand and realize that the cross means death to "self"? Are you willing to make that sacrifice?

*Lord, let us learn the true nature of following You: taking up a cross that will cost us ALL. Instill in us today a true understanding of this sacrifice and a willingness to pay the price. Be with us each day as we choose again to deny ourselves, and follow You. Amen.*

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# Taking Up the Cross: Denying Yourself

## Part: 2

Matthew 16:24 (NKJV) Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

What is "the cross"? It is the cost of following Christ. It is the sacrifice required to make Him Lord. In Biblical times, the Romans required the condemned prisoner to carry his cross to the place of execution. The cross was the instrument of death that meant the end of the prisoner's life.

Likewise, "the cross" is the end of OUR life. It puts to death our old life. We take up our cross and follow Jesus to our death... then into new life. The cross is rough and heavy. You will not choose to carry a cross if you:

- are seeking comfort or pleasure
- needing to do something else that is more important
- have other plans that take priority
- are cowardly or worried about your reputation

Taking up your cross means giving up control of your life. It means forsaking any personal agendas or plans you have carefully formulated. It involves a single focus of taking on the weight and burden of the cross, leaving no time or opportunity to think of what you may want for yourself.

**You won't carry the cross if you're worried about what it will do to you.** You can't take up a cross if your personal ambitions are in play. Something has to go... you either have to drop the cross, or drop your self interest.

Romans 12:1 (NKJV) I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

Is your life a sacrifice? **A sacrifice gives up its rights**; its desires; its plans; its choices. A sacrifice offers itself freely to the fire and has no purpose other than being given up and consumed for another's benefit.

John 10:27 (NKJV) My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.

If we know Christ, we will hear His voice calling us. And He is saying "take up your cross"... surrender all; sacrifice your life for mine. **Follow Me.** That doesn't leave room for following your own desires.

Luke 16:13 (NKJV) "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

You have no choice but to deny either yourself or Christ; **you cannot serve two masters.** Serving yourself even partially is forsaking Christ. Pick one, you can't have it both ways.

Most people have just enough of the world in them to make them miserable at church, and just enough church in them to make them miserable out in the world.

Revelation 3:16 (NKJV) So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.

**"The cross" is an all or nothing proposition.** If we "sorta" take up the cross, we cannot follow because you can't keep up if you are constantly putting it down and picking it up. We are not worthy to follow if we do not dedicate and commit our whole being to it.

**No pain, no palm; no thorns, no throne;  
no gall, no glory; no cross, no crown.**

William Penn

Matthew 10:38-39 (NKJV) And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

Have you taken up your cross for good? Or do you put it down occasionally in order to pursue your own interests?

*Father, let us choose to take up the cross and deny ourselves. Help us to understand that we can't have it both ways. Reveal in us areas of our lives that we have not fully denied and threaten our grip on the cross. May we be hot, and not lukewarm or cold, in our desire to follow Your Son. Amen.*

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# Taking Up the Cross: Nothing Else

## Part: 3

Matthew 16:24 (NKJV) Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

A cross is big. A cross is heavy. A cross is awkward. You can't carry anything else when you're carrying a cross. It takes both hands to lift it; your entire body to support; and every ounce of strength, focus and endurance to walk with it.

If you're carrying a cross, you can't take anything else with you. You can't hold on to anything else; you can drag anything behind you. Your hands are not free to grasp anything else; your shoulders cannot bear another load; your legs cannot support more weight; your mind cannot concentrate on another task.

### **The cross alone. Nothing else.**

Luke 14:33 (NKJV) So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.

Notice the word "all"? I've looked in every reference source available and I can't find another definition for "all" that means anything except "all". So I'm thinking "all" means "all". All what?

- Plans
- Desires
- Agendas
- Recognition
- Dreams
- Goals
- Pleasures
- Achievements
- Possessions

We forsake (completely give up) ALL of what we have devised in exchange for what the Lord has perfectly planned for us. Yes, of course we will have "things", but with a different perspective. We manage the possessions, plans and resources that God has given us to carry out His will. We no longer claim them as our own, but claim them for our Owner.

1 Timothy 6:7 (NKJV) For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

Truth be known, we're not really forsaking anything anyway. We brought nothing into this world. We have nothing we haven't received (1Cor 4.7). We are only forsaking what we have picked up that brings death to us, and exchanging it for what gives life.

2 Corinthians 6:10-11 (NKJV) ...as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

When we grip only the cross, we truly possess all things. If we hang on to even ONE thing from our "pre-cross" days, we are not worthy of the Cross. It's a zero sum game. All or nothing. Nothing in between.

Charles Spurgeon wrote:

**“There are no crown-wearers in heaven who  
were not cross- bearers here below.”**

Matthew 10:38-39 (NKJV) And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

Are you carrying anything but the cross?

*Our God, show us clearly anything that we are carrying, dragging or hanging on to besides the cross. Give us the courage to let it go, drop it or throw it away. May our hands cling only to the cross, as our eyes are focused only on You. Amen.*

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Taking Up the Cross: Only Doers Need Apply

### Part: 4

Matthew 16:24 (NKJV) Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

To pick up something requires action. Picking up something that is heavy, rough, awkward and bulky requires decisive action.

Talking about it won't do. Listening to others tell how they did it, won't suffice.

Thinking that the idea sounds really good and you agree with it, is worthless if it does not result in action.

- James 1:22 (NKJV) But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.
- Ephesians 2:10 (NKJV) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.
- 1 Th 1:6 (NKJV) And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.

### **Action. Cross-carrying is not a spectator sport.**

"Among the plastic saints of our times, Jesus has to do all the dying, and all we want to hear is another sermon about his dying." *A.W. Tozer*

(21st century translation: the casual, uncommitted Christians of our time make Jesus do all the cross-carrying; we are satisfied with just hearing another good sermon about it.)

**Ouch.** (21st century translation: Ouch)

The old cross slew men; the new cross entertains them. The old cross condemned; the new cross amuses. The old cross destroyed confidence in the flesh; the new cross encourages it. We must get back to the preaching of the cross as the central message of Christianity. *A.W. Tozer*

(21st century translation: the Cross of the Bible takes no prisoners and calls for commitment and sacrifice; it condemns and convicts the sinner; it makes us realize that we have no power in ourselves. The modern cross of today's church is entertaining, we "feel" good when we hear about it; it encourages a life of living for yourself. We must return to the power and conviction of the Biblical Cross.)

### **Ouch. Really ouch.**

God is looking for people of action. Doers. Those who are loyal and responsive.

2 Chron 16:9 (NKJV) For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.

He wants people who will get in the game, get dirty; bleed, sweat and sacrifice. It is but a small price to pay in comparison to our eternal reward so take heart that God will give you everything you need to carry your cross!

- 2 Cor 4:17 (NKJV) For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

- 2 Pet 1:3 (NKJV)...as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue...
- Phil 4:13 (NKJV) I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

When the Lord looks back does He see you following Him bearing your cross? Or have you fallen back in the distance, cross on the ground, hands empty and busy with something else?

Matthew 10:38-39 (NKJV) And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

**Is taking up your cross still just talk?** Do you watch others instead of participating? Are you an armchair quarterback? A part-timer, a second-stringer, a "wannabe"? Do you have great ears and baby-soft hands? Are these just words or marching orders?

*Lord, make this the last time I hear about taking up a cross without actually doing it. Give me courage to bend down and grab it. Give me strength to heave it on to my shoulders and take the first step. Give me wisdom to understand the reasons why I must do it, and do it now. Amen.*

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## True Peace

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God. (NKJV)

The world as a whole knows no lasting peace, nor will it ever until Jesus returns. All the Nobel peace prize winners combined haven't brought the world one day of peace. In 1945 the United Nations formed with the mission to "have future generations free from the scourge of war". There has never been ONE day of peace in the world since.

- The 20th Century was bloodier than all of man's history combined
- There are no less than 33 wars going on right now, with more about to start
- Hundreds of thousands of unborn children are murdered every year

- Divorce, suicide, depression and murder are at all time highs

Why? Because we have the wrong definition of peace.

### **Peace is NOT the absence of conflict.**

Man-made peace made is just the time when everyone stops to reload!

We also approach peace from the wrong end. We try to start with the top down: bring nations to peace, and it will result in peaceful individuals. God starts in the hearts of individuals and works out. True peace begins in the heart of the individual and only on God's terms. If God changes the heart, the behavior changes; if the behavior of individuals changes, then communities change, society changes, and nations change.

### **Jesus came to give peace, but on His terms.**

John 14:23-27 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me. "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (NKJV)

God's peace is beyond human understanding because humans only deal with externals, **God deals with the motives, intents and attitudes of the hearer.**

Philippians 4:6-7 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (NKJV)

God's peace is beyond UNREGENERATE human wisdom. Real peace is exposing the sin behind the conflict; and applying repentance and righteousness to the situation. Let's do a little "behavior" math:

$$\textbf{(Heart + repentance) – sin x righteousness} \\ \textbf{= PEACE}$$

True peace cannot be separated from PURITY:

James 3:16-18 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. (NKJV)

Hebrews 12:14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: (NKJV)

.We live in a time of turmoil and uncertainty. Peace can only be found on God's terms no matter what level it is on: personal, community, national or global.

*Lord God, help us to see that You are the only source of peace. Mankind has tried his own way for thousands of years with no success. Instill in us the meaning of true peace. In the Name of the Prince of Peace, Amen.*



**Contemplation:** Have world events robbed you of your peace? Have personal events robbed you of peace? Do you have a true understanding of where real peace originates? Are you at peace with God first?

**Application:** God is the only source of peace. The closer you are to Him, the more peace you will have. Determine that you will do whatever it takes to make regular, substantial time to spend with God in prayer and Bible Study.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Consider the Love

Psalms 8. 3-5 When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor. (NKJV)

**Stop.** Earnestly consider with me for a few moments what great and wondrous love God has shown to us as His children.

Job 37. 14 "Listen to this, O Job; Stand still and consider the wondrous works of God.

- Consider the love of God that created us, draws us, empowers us, secures us and blesses us... then rewards us as if we did this in our own strength.
- Consider the love of God, who in eternity past knew that we would reject Him, deny Him, mock Him, shame Him and curse Him... and created us anyway that He might shower His love on us.

2Pet 3.14-15 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation...

- Consider the love of God that gave His own Son to suffer and die because of us, then blesses us with eternal life because of Him.

Heb 12.2-3 ...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

- Consider the love of God that waits on us in great mercy and patience, forgiving our pride; enduring our repeated failures; blessing us despite our most certain return to sin.

Rom 11.22 Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.

- Consider the love of God that is deeper than our love of sin; consider the love of God that is more powerful than our love of self; consider the love of God that is more effective than our lack of faith.
- Consider the love of God that grants us everything He requires for us to please Him, and then blesses us as if we met those requirements by ourselves.

**Consider the love of God that transforms and molds us into the image of His Son through no ability of our own, and then rewards us for what only He could have done.**

- Consider the love of God who has given us all we have, from our very first breath to every talent we possess and then blesses us when we use those same God-granted gifts for His glory.
- Consider the love of God that is preparing unimaginable eternal rewards... a reward that we could never earn, being the opposite of what we truly deserve.
- Consider the love of God that makes every day entrusted to Him a day of guiltless peace and joy in spite of circumstances... even when those circumstances that befall us are caused by our own sinful choices.

Rom 8.18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

**Stop.** Be still. Know God. Consider His love for you at this very moment.

*Lord, may we stop for a single moment and know that You are God. May we gaze in awe and wonder at the undeserved love You have shown to us. Lord, grant us just a glimpse of the depth of Your love. Amazing Love, how can it be, that Thou my God, would die for me. And save me. And draw me. And secure me. And bless me. And prepare for me an eternal life of inexpressible joy in Your presence. What love... Amen.*

**Contemplation:** When was the last time you truly stopped to consider all that Jesus did for you?

**Application:** If we appreciate our kids or employees stopping for a few seconds to appreciate what we do, how much more do you think God is pleased when we REGULARLY stop to consider and appreciate all He has done? Stop and do it right this moment.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# A Faithful Saying

## Part: 1

2Timothy 2.11-13 This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself. (NKJV)

The Lord did not leave us without clear instruction concerning how we should live. The Word is not ambiguous towards exclaiming who or what pleases God. We will not have as our defense that we "weren't sure" what was expected of us as His children. It has become fashionable in America of late to claim that to have "God in my life" while living in such a way that no one would know it unless we spoke it occasionally. It is now "in" to be spiritual. "What would Jesus do?" God is "awesome", "cool" and the kids are "Jesus freaks".

James 1.26-27 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Don't misunderstand me. I am thankful for any way that God uses this new acceptance of "spiritually" in our society when it results in souls being truly saved. It undoubtedly will lead to many ministry opportunities.

It is symbolism over substance, rhetoric over commitment, "feel good" over "do good" standards manifested from a watered down social gospel that is attractive but powerless.

### A gospel that does not produce Godly lives is not the true Gospel.

Over the next week let us look at this faithful saying that exclaims four things we do and how God responds.

*Lord, help us today to have a faith, and a Christianity that changes our life, our behavior, our priorities and our perspective. May our acts of Godliness match our claims of Godliness. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** In your family, church and community, do you see the Gospel of Christ producing truly Godly people easily identifiable and different from the world?

**Application:** The Gospel saves souls and changes lives. Anything short of that is not the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?  

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?  

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## **A Faithful Saying: Death with Him**

### **Part: 2**

2Timothy 2.11-13 This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself. (NKJV)

For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. Choose death to get life.

How foolish and strange our beliefs must appear to the world (1Cor 2.14). If we did not have the Bible, we could still get pretty close to what God requires simply by inverting the world's wisdom.

God uses the lowly, not the mighty. If we want to receive, we give away. To be recognized, we keep secret. For exaltation, choose humility. To be first, we go to the end of the line. To achieve greatness, seek to be least. What strange behavior viewed from unbelieving eyes!

In fact, you may take the authoritative words of our Master from Matthew 5, turn them inside out, and expose the true nature of man without God. Our Lord declares that happy is the man who realizes he is lost; who understands the awfulness of sin; who is merciful and righteous; who brings true peace and suffers for others. The world would have us to be proud, self-dependent, self-serving, getting all we can, rising to the top letting nothing get in our way. We can sum up sin by declaring it as man's desire to have and do the opposite of what God commands.

It is a faithful saying: if we die with Him, we shall live with Him. Again, we have the opposite of what we would naturally desire. By implication we have the choice of the opposite: if live without Him, we will die without Him (John 8.24).

We may choose, as most do (Matt 7.13), to live our lives ignoring His loving pleas, ignoring His sacrifice, ignoring His call, declining the free gift of salvation and tragically being forced to confess on our knees (Phil 2.10; Rom 14.11) before Him on the great and terrible Day what every man knows deep in His spirit to be true: that we have offended a holy God with our sin and we owe the penalty of death for it (Rom 6.23).

### **We can die now, or die then, but die we must!**

(1Cor 15.22)

To die with Christ is to surrender to Him, to exchange our way for His, to believe in the Son of God and fellowship in His death that satisfies that penalty we owe for our sin. Our old sinful man is put to death, covered in Christ's atoning blood (Ps 79.9; Rev 1.5-6), recreated in His likeness and being seen as righteous and perfect in God's eyes (Rom 6.5-11).

Concerning eternal salvation, we die once in Him, and receive life eternal (John 11.25-26). As for our daily life, each day we choose to die with Him (1Cor 15.31; Rom 8.12-14), to be rewarded with a true day of life in Him.

This manifests itself in transforming our lives through the daily death of "self" (Col 3.5-11).

- Death to our pride. Death to our control. Death to our hurt feelings. Death to our love of the world. Death to our selfishness. Death to our plans. Death to our lusts. Death to our griping and complaining. Death to our pity parties.
- Death to our fear. Death to our worry. Death to our burdens. Death to our anxieties. Death to doubt.

If we are dead in Him, how can we then be alive to ourselves? Our flesh and sinful desires seek to rise each day in mock resurrection power and we must crucify them daily remembering that it is impossible to be simultaneously "dead in Christ" and alive to self.

We must choose to die in Him each day, putting to death in bloody battle the flesh that so desperately wants to remain alive. It's as if that rotten stinking corpse of our past sinful man tries to claw itself out of its grave each day like a poorly made B-grade horror movie.

With the sword of the Spirit, God has given us the power to hack the sinful man to pieces and keep it in grave where it belongs. God has given the sword, but we must choose to wield it each day. As surely as Agag represented sin, we must be Samuel each day and hack him to pieces (1Sam 15.33).

### **Do you find yourself a poor swordsmen today?**

Perhaps your spiritual muscles are soft, your holy technique sloppy, your sword embarrassingly dull from neglect. As with athletic or physical skills, daily practice, instruction and time with the Master Instructor is the only way to hone righteousness, rejuvenate spiritual reflexes, and achieve Godly fitness. Have you had your workout with Him today?

Choose death in Him this moment. Receive true life from Him in return.

*Lord, help us to put ourselves to death today, to die in You. Bless us with true life as only possible with You. Grant us the superior satisfaction, peace and joy today of giving up our lives for Yours. Let our respond not end with an "amen" but with an action. In Jesus name. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** How are your sword skills? Are you spiritually out of shape? Are you willing to endure the pain of getting in shape?

**Application:** Death to self is the only way to life in Christ. Practice "dying" to your desires each day.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## A Faithful Saying: Enduring

### Part: 3

2Timothy 2.11-13 This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself. (NKJV)

This is a faithful saying: If we endure, we shall reign with Him.

To reign with Him. Have you ever thought of about that? Sometimes our picture of eternal life with God is an eternal church service singing hymns that won't be boring because we're in heaven. Or maybe you have no idea what eternity will be like, you'll just be glad to sneak through the gates.

- Rev 22.5 ...And they shall reign forever and ever.
- Rev 20.6 Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.
- Rev 5.10 And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."

God has left us with many things to ponder about our future eternal life in Heaven but He has revealed enough that we can be assured that **eternity will be infinitely more than a passive existence**. We will reign with Christ. Jesus will be Supreme Lord, Judge, Commander, King and Ruler and in some capacity we will serve and assist Him in His reign over creation.

We shall reign if we endure. **Endure what?** As with our death in Him, this enduring encompasses both the question of salvation and how it applies to our daily sanctification. God has promised us endurance in our decision of faith as part of the gift of salvation:

- John 5.24 Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.
- John 6.37 All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.
- Eph 1.13-14 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.
- Heb 10.22-23 ... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

So as to the question of endurance in our belief and faith in Christ, true believers will endure to the end and receive the gift of eternity with God. **God will see that none of His are lost.**

How does this question of endurance apply to us on a daily basis and what spiritual profit is there in this endurance? In short, what we endure for the sake of Christ allows us to relate to Him better, depend on Him more, grow to be more like Him and love Him more fully.



- (Jas 5.9-11) When we endure mistreatment the Lord is merciful and compassionate toward us. We learn not to grumble and complain when others mistreat us.
- (Heb 12.7-11) When we endure chastening and correction, we mature and grow stronger in our faith. We are assured of God's love for us for what good father does not correct and discipline His children. We are assured of God's presence and attention because we know that He has to be paying attention to us and know us in order to discipline us.
- (2 Tim 4.5) When we endure afflictions in Christ's name, we identify not only with His suffering but also with the suffering of other Christians, the Apostles and the martyrs.
- (2 Tim 2.10) When we endure suffering we help to bring salvation to others through our example of faith, trust, belief in Jesus and our commitment to God.
- (2 Tim 2.3) When we endure hardship we are fulfilling our duty as Christian soldiers. Ask any military war veteran about the hardships of warfare. We are enlisted in God's Army and as such must endure as a faithful soldier the deprivations of the spiritual war we are engaged in (Eph 6.11-13)
- (2 Thess 1.3-12) We endure tribulation and persecution because it is the evidence of God's righteousness, makes us worthy of entering the kingdom of God, and allows us to experience the peace and rest found only in the Lord.
- (1 Cor 9.12) We endure denying ourselves for the sake of not hindering the Gospel. At times we forego what is rightfully due us in order that the Gospel may more effectively and fully be demonstrated.
- (1 Cor 4.8-13) We endure mistreatment, reviling, deprivation, hard work, suffering and defamation as evidence of our commitment and obedience to Christ. Why? Because if the world hated and crucified our Master, how much will they hate and persecute us? (John 15.18; Luke 21.17)

Enduring is our path to spiritual growth. Enduring is obedience, faith, courage and love in action.

### **Enduring is our evidence and reminder of the reward to come.**

Examine your life today. Do you endure anything for the sake of Christ? If yes, ask God to increase it. If not, ask God to reveal why you have escaped what is guaranteed to happen to all true believers in Christ.

*Lord, give us the strength to endure suffering, persecution and hardship in Your name. Help us to clearly see and understand the incredible blessing it brings. Lord, though the thought of it is frightening, grant us the blessing of increased opportunities to endure. Exchange our fear for grace. Transform our lack of courage into trust. May You be glorified today through our enduring the consequences of life in a sinful world. In Jesus name. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** What do you endure for the sake of Christ? Hardship, suffering, persecution?

**Application:** If you are enduring nothing for the name or sake of Christ somehow you have escaped the guaranteed persecution and suffering that Christians are blessed with. Ask God why.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

## A Faithful Saying: Denying Christ

### Part: 4

2Timothy 2.11-13 This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself. (NKJV)

This is a faithful saying: If we deny Him, He will also deny us.

#### **"If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!"**

Ah, the famous words of Peter (Matt 26.35). No doubt in our heart and feelings, we would sincerely declare the very same words. Very soon, Peter would be tested by threat of death and he did indeed deny His Lord.

How would we fare in such circumstances? We like to think that martyrdom and persecution would be insufficient to cause us to deny Christ. Christian history records many stories of professing Christians who recanted their faith at the first threat of death or deprivation. Still others denied Christ only after enduring unspeakable tortures. Many of those repented of their denial and went on to suffer even greater sacrifice successfully.

*"If I have to die with You, I will not deny You!"* Before making such a bold assertion, ask yourself this: do you deny Him now in your everyday life? If yes, what makes you think you would not deny Him in suffering and death?

If we deny Him in the little, comfortable, non-threatening aspects of our life (Luke 16.10), what reason do we have to think we would not deny Him when confronted with sacrifice, persecution, torture or martyrdom? There are many more ways to deny Christ than just with words.

- We can deny Him with our time
  - Do you make time for the Lord every day or is He denied access to your life because of your busy schedule? Or simple laziness? Or is it just not that important to you? Do you just simply have better things to do?
  - Can you seem to make time for all sorts of "other" things but convince yourself there's just not enough time for more of God?
  - What activities can you wake up early for, scrape up money for, find the energy for or change your schedule for... but it's just "impossible" to do the same for the things of God?
    - Can you somehow find money to get that newer car or new clothes but just can't squeeze another penny out for "yet another" missionary?
    - Can you get up at 5am to go golfing but proclaim God made you a "night person" when it comes to getting up to pray and read God's word?
    - Can you manage to adjust your schedule for something pleasurable, but find it impossible to do the same for a need at church?
    - Are you just too tired to spend time with God, yet boast of your ability to "do whatever it takes to get the job done" at work?
- We can deny Him with our money and material blessings
  - Even the poorest in America are rich by Biblical standards. Do you spend your money on your "lifestyle" or do you invest it in heavenly treasure?

- Do you deny God the right to dictate how you spend HIS money?
- Is Christ magnified or denied by a glance at your check register?
- We can deny Him by our behavior
  - Are people drawn to Christ by your attitudes, integrity and demeanor?
  - Do you deny your own annoyances, irritations, bad moods, improper language and worldliness in exchange for the attributes of Christ? Or is He denied because you choose to behave however you happen to feel at the moment?
  - Is Jesus denied in others lives because of your bad temper, selfishness, aggressiveness, impatience or lack of love?
  - Is the King denied the throne of your life because you are seated very comfortably and quite contented on it yourself?
- We can deny Christ by a lack of courage or embarrassment
  - When is the last time you spoke out boldly to defend Christ's name?
  - Can you remember the last time you were persecuted in any way for proclaiming God's truth at work, to your friends, to a stranger, to your family?
  - Do you "keep quiet" when the Lord has put an obvious opportunity in front of you to speak out in His name?
  - Do you tremble at the thought of confronting sin? Witnessing? Sharing your testimony? Proclaiming what God has done in your life?

Recanting our faith under torture and persecution is not something we most likely will be faced with today or tomorrow. **But denying Christ in our everyday choices, priorities, behavior and lives is something we should give great thought to.**

If we deny Him, He will deny us.

- If we deny Him as Savior, He will deny us salvation.
- If we deny Him our time, He will deny us His fellowship.
- If we deny Him our money and resources, He will deny us His blessing of spiritual prosperity, peace and joy.
- If we deny Him in our behavior, He will deny us growth and spiritual power.
- If we deny Him in cowardice and embarrassment, He will deny us His presence.

In contrast, the blessing of proclaiming Him stands equally true... no, even greater! The Lord is always faithful!

Proclaim Him as Savior, be courageous in standing for Truth, sacrifice your time and money for Christ. Let your behavior be so Godly as to draw those around you to want to know the Source of your life. Whatever we do for Him in truth and spirit, He will reward in infinitely greater quality and quantity.

Are you denying Christ today with word? In time? By behavior? Through fear of man?

*Lord, reveal in us today any area of our lives that denies You. May our time, money, resources, talents, priorities and behavior proclaim You as Master in every way. Let us bring every area and aspect of our life into conformity with Your will so that no one around us may be denied You... because of me. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are there any areas of your life that deny Christ? How does that denial affect the rest of your Christian walk?

**Application:** All areas of our Christian life are interdependent. A neglecting of one affects all. Examine your life for "denials" of Christ and ask God for help to change.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## A Faithful Saying: He is Faithful

### Part: 5

2Timothy 2.11-13 This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself. (NKJV)

This is a faithful saying: If we are faithless, He remains faithful. He cannot deny Himself.

In its context, Paul is speaking of our Lord's perfection in all things. Regardless of our response, He is who He is. He will faithfully reward. He will faithfully judge. He is faithful. It is not an attribute or characteristic of Christ; it is the essence of His existence. He cannot deny what He is.

On a broader application to our daily life, we can take this principle and allow it to give us confidence, to live securely and to purge pretense from our relationship with Him.

In our relationships to other people, we are careful to gloss over our sin, to sugar coat our failures and to communicate in such a way that the depth of our pride is concealed by religious vocabulary. It is a great need of ours that people have a higher opinion of us than what we deserve.

Our deceptive and prideful heart would have us try to persuade God in the same manner. We go to him in prayer with carefully crafted words, feigning humility in one breath and countering with rationalization in the next. What a waste of time, truly.

### **God is not fooled by our pretense, so why bother?**

Have you ever contemplated the folly of trying to persuade God with your words attempting to convince Him of our intentions or justifying why we were unable to avoid sinning?

There is blessed freedom in living and praying with the understanding that God knows us infinitely better than we will ever know ourselves. In fact, we are in a constant battle to deceive even our own perception of our sin.

Jer 17.9 The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?

God already knows how pitiful we are. Experience the blessing of God's response to our humility. Admit you don't understand. Admit your failures, your weaknesses, your lack of faith and your complete dependence on God. Admit your lack of wisdom, your sin... all those things He already knows about you.

Admit to God that when it gets right down to it, you just don't really have the first clue and throw yourself on His mercy and love. He already knows... He's just waiting for you to figure it out. Experience the freedom and refreshment of giving up pretending you are what you are not. This is not a false, downtrodden self-serving humility. It is TRUE humility.

### **In myself nothing; in God everything.**

Are you afraid if you face this reality you will be discouraged and defeated? To the contrary, God promises great victory, salvation and freedom when we reach this point of utter bankruptcy and dependence on Him (Matt 5.3).

- Is your faith weak? God is faithful.

Duet 7.9 Therefore know that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God who

keeps covenant and mercy for a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments;

- Do you struggle in unbelief? Jesus will respond to your cry of help.

Mark 9.24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

- Are you fearful or lack courage? The Lord will give you strength.

Psa 31.24 Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart, All you who hope in the LORD.

Psa 29.11 The LORD will give strength to His people; The LORD will bless His people with peace.

- Do you lack wisdom and understanding? God will give it freely to those who ask, not doubting.

James 1.5-6 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

- Do trials and suffering discourage or embitter you? See God's purpose and reward for them.

James 1.2-3 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

1Pet 2.19-21 For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us...

A dear brother wrote me yesterday to tell me of his gratitude to God, and God's worthiness to be praised in all circumstances... despite the fact that his wife is terminally ill and he has five small children. Only God can give rejoicing in such a fire. **Count this man blessed** whom God has found worthy to receive comfort in the depths of trials. O, that God would find us worthy of such an honor!

**This is a faithful saying: If we are faithless, He remains faithful.**

Let us not pretend. God has promised to richly supply us (Phil 4.19) with everything He requires from us, and abundantly reward us (Luke 6.35) for what He gave in the first place. Where we lack, He will supply. When we fail, He will succeed. Where we are weak, He will be strong. When we fear, He will give courage. When our faith is small, He cannot deny Himself.

*Lord, help us today to forsake our need to pretend we are something we aren't. Grant us the courage and wisdom to admit our helplessness and dependence on You. Give us spiritual eyes to see our true condition so that we may fully turn to you today, having no trust in ourselves and complete reliance on You. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Can you identify areas of your life where you maintain a facade or pretense with God? Are there areas where your faith is weak?

**Application:** God has promised to be faithful, we merely have to believe it and take Him at His word.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Does Heaven Interest You?

1Corinthians 2:9 However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him". (NKJV)

Do you think about Heaven every day as if it really, truly exists?

We go about trying to "get the most" out of our lives unaware or uncaring that this is only a whisper of our true existence. As I talk to people about this, it becomes apparent that most don't truly think of Heaven as a tangible destination but more of a dreamy concept that is of little consequence in our "real" life.

I often hear comments like, "it's scary to think about", or "I don't want the Lord to return yet, there are things I still want to do here" or "I just want to experience everything this life has to offer before going to Heaven". By far the most common response I hear is "I've never really thought about it all that much".

In truth, it should be difficult for us to get our mind OFF of Heaven. Let me ask you a question that might help stir your thoughts of Heaven today.

If you were told today that in one year you will inherit a beautiful estate and several millions of dollars, all free and clear, all yours.... do you think you would spend much time thinking about it over the next year? Do you think you would tell others? Would you plan for that day? Would you long for that day? Would you have a hard time NOT thinking about it?

And yet that is a paupers portion compared to the unimaginable joys and treasures our Lord is preparing for us the day we meet Him face to face.

### **Spend some time thinking about the reality of our life in Heaven:**

- Most everything we truly love is either in Heaven, or will end up there: our Christian brothers and sisters, our saved family members, Jesus, our Father, the Spirit. (Heb 12:23, 1Pet 1:4, Phil 3:20, Matt 5:12)
- No tears, no sorrow, no pain, no regret, no sin, no temptation, no unending struggling with your flesh - the battle with sin will be over. You will live in perfect holiness, pure and sin-free for all of eternity and it won't be a desperate battle to win, it will be the simple nature of our existence (Rev 22:3-5)
- An eternity of never ending blessing and enjoyment in God's presence where everyday will be a new day of discovering God's goodness
- After a million million million years we won't be one day closer to the end or closer to exhausting God's capacity to surprise us with His greatness, creativity or love
- We will eat and drink for pleasure, not for sustenance (Rev 2:7)
- Unimaginable beauty and experiences beyond anything we could ever begin to dream of ("no mind has conceived")
- We will experience and explore God's new Heaven and new earth, all remade to perfection by God. If you think there are beautiful scenes on this earth, they won't compare with God's recreated Heaven and earth (2Pet 3:11-12)
- We will be in the direct presence of God the Father and Jesus our Savior... we won't have to be insecure about our relationship with Him anymore
- We will have a perfect body that never grows old, is never sick, is never injured or in pain (1John 3:2)

Do these truths excite you? If they are really true, we should have trouble NOT thinking about them. As Christians, our hope lies in our eternal destination that has already been decided, secured and prepared.

**If Heaven is not "real" to you, ask the Lord to show you why.**

- Is it because you have a lack of knowledge concerning what the Bible teaches about Heaven?
- Is it because you have embraced some myths about Heaven such as:
  - It will be boring because all we do is sit around and have church
  - We will float on clouds and play harps
  - We stand around the throne of God and sing praise music for all eternity
  - It won't be any fun
  - We'll be God's robots for all eternity
- Is it because you are to consumed with what THIS life has to offer?
  - Where is your treasure? In this world or in Heaven? Where are you investing your time and resources?
  - Do you love the things and pleasures of this world so much that Heaven is not enticing?
  - Are you so consumed with the pleasures of this life that it leaves no time or room to long for Heaven?
- Are you still lost in your sin and not sure if you will even go to Heaven?

Think about Heaven today. Talk to someone else about it. Begin to live your life as if Heaven is a real place, a real destination, a real eternity.

Living life, mindful of the reality of Heaven, allows us to calmly and confidently embrace the trials of this life knowing that our destination and victory has already been decided. It is so exciting to think about the wonders and blessing God has in store for us!

*Father, help us in our unbelief today to begin to grasp the reality and nature of Heaven. Help us to imagine, to wonder, to dream of our eternity with You and live knowing our destination is not only decided and secure, but already prepared and waiting. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Is heaven real? Is it a real as the place you are in right now? Do you believe what the Bible says about heaven? Why do you suppose its not more "exciting" to us?

**Application:** Like most things spiritual, the invisible things of God only become real as we spend more and more intimate time meditating on them. Heaven will become tangible and real to you the more you spend time thinking about it, reading about and talking about it.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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## God Must Be Asleep

Psalm 10.11 He has said in his heart, “God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see.”

Is God really there? Does He really hear? Is He really interested in what’s going on in my life? Has God forgotten about me? Is He busy? Has He turned away?

There are common experiences we all deal with in our Godly walk; experiences that make us wonder if God is really listening or if He is really there in the first place.

- Why doesn’t God answer me?
- Why do evil people seem to get ahead while good people suffer?
- Why does it appear that I can sin sometimes without consequences?
- Why do I feel like I’m talking to no one when I pray?
- Why doesn’t God just TELL me what He wants me to do and I’ll do it?

Sometimes our behavior and lifestyle affirms that we doubt God is really present. We sin, waste time, live for pleasure, pursue the world... and because God does not intervene dramatically, we continue on as if He weren’t really there at all; or at best, as if He were disinterested.

- The absence of lightning bolts of correction and thundering voices from heaven does not make God’s Presence any less real.
- Just because you have seen no consequences yet, doesn’t mean you will get away with sin (Gal 6.7).
- Just because God hasn’t acted yet, doesn’t mean the evil person has been overlooked.
- Just because no person sees or knows your secret sin, doesn’t mean God is distracted.
- Just because God is silent, hasn’t answered, or seems far off, doesn’t mean He is not close.

Why is God silent sometimes? Why does He linger? Are we getting away with our sin? Well these are hardly questions I can answer in few paragraphs but let me give you a few starting points for you to pursue in your own study.

- Answer: Because He is God. To question the perfection in which God orchestrates our existence is to literally assume we are equal to Him. God is God. That is sufficient for the reason why anything is the way it is (Phil 2.13; Eph 1.9; Rom 9.20).
  - He could change His response (or lack of it) if He wanted to, but doesn’t. So it is perfect the way it is.
  - He answer your prayer if He wanted to, but doesn’t. So it is accomplishing His purpose perfectly.
  - He could thunder down verbal instructions if He wanted to, but He doesn’t. So we take the revealed will of God (the Bible) and learn it more diligently. We tune our hearts ever more sensitively to the Spirits voice so we will hear God whether it comes in the form of an internal whisper or a spiritual axe straight between the eyes.

- He could punish the wicked now but sometimes doesn't. His plan is being perfectly fulfilled even through the evil of this life.

Sometimes my Dad you used to say "because I said so!" and that was reason enough for me to instantly obey. Didn't need an explanation, didn't want an explanation, didn't deserve an explanation. In relationship to his authority over my life, "because he said so" was reason enough.

**Sometimes that should be our response:**

- Because God said so
- Because God can do whatever He wants
- Because we're not to question how God does something. (this is a general principle. The Psalms show us that sometimes there is a time to question and ask)

**The very fact that God is doing something  
a certain way, makes it PERFECT by default.**

- When God lingers, or is silent, it makes us draw closer (Ps 73.28) to Him listening ever more diligently to His voice; straining our hearts towards Him in anticipation of His Presence (Isa 46.12-13).
- Our faith is strengthened when we walk daily in full trust of God's care (Isa 12.2). How is your faith built if God told you every morning specifically what you will do that day?

Thomas had to put his fingers into Christ's wounds before He would believe (John 20.26-29). How much more precious is the faith of those who have not seen them yet but believe anyway?

**Real faith is:**

- Faith when God doesn't answer
- Faith when God seems to be absent
- Faith when God isn't specific
- Faith when no one is looking
- Faith when you can't see the end
- Faith when you don't understand the purpose
- Faith in God despite your uncertainty, lack of answers and security
- God's power and glory maybe more fully demonstrated at times when He waits to reveal Himself. It becomes apparent to all that only God could be the source of the result when all human power and effort is exhausted.
  - Lazarus is a perfect example (John 11). When he died, Jesus lingered for several days until going to Him. By that time the Lord arrived, Lazarus's body had already begun to decay and stink. His sisters cried out that "only if Jesus would have been there" Lazarus would not have died betraying their true ignorance of who Jesus really was.
  - When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, there could be no doubt of God's power. Lazarus didn't "swoon"; Jesus was not just some talented doctor who revived him; there could have been no tricks; only God.

- The miracle was even more demonstrative of God's power because not only was Lazarus brought back to life, his body was restored to health and the decay of rotting flesh was completely reversed.

In reality, God is not silent or busy or hiding His face. If you are experiencing the "cold shoulder" from God, or can't figure out why He won't intervene, remember that God never changes (Mal 3.6), we do.

If God seems distant and impersonal, it's not because He has decided to ignore you; He hasn't gone anywhere. He doesn't go on vacation. He doesn't ignore us. He isn't busy somewhere cleaning His heavenly garage and forgot about us. You're not a "to do" item in His Daytimer that He hasn't gotten to yet (Matt 6.25-34).

There may be times He CHOOSES to be silent, or you may have distanced yourself from God by your own choices. If you're in a spiritual valley:

- How much intimate, quiet fellowship do you have with Him every day?
- How much have you allowed worldly pleasure and pursuits fill up your time?
- How much do you hunger for God's Word and His truth?
- How much time do you spend loving and serving others versus the time you spend doing what you want for your own benefit?
- Do you pray daily? Do you worship daily? Do you seek God daily?

**Truth be known, if God seems to be somewhere else, it's frequently because we have wandered off from Him.**

If you desire to hear God and experience His presence, then you have to give up something for it (Rom 12.1). You can't have it all. You can't have the world and its pleasures; and the full measure of God's presence (Matt 6.24).

God's not busy. He hasn't gone on vacation. He is waiting for you. When you have drawn close to God (James 4.7-10), and have cultivated a lifestyle of intimacy with Him, you will begin to understand the answer to all the questions we asked throughout this devotional; but it is knowledge and assurance that comes from sacrifice, commitment and a broken and contrite heart (Ps 51.17).

Start today. God gives you a new beginning every morning. **NOW is always the time** to turn your face to God and begin your journey back into His presence... no matter how far away you've drifted.

Lamentations 3.21 This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!"

*Our Father in Heaven, draw us closer to You today. If You seem distant, we confess it is our fault, not Yours. Grant me the conviction and discipline today to re-order my life around pleasing You. Give me wisdom and Godly understanding that my eyes may be open to the truth. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Does God seem distant and silent to you? Do you think He has purposely chosen to be, or have you drifted from Him? Is there a distance too far from God that puts you beyond returning to Him?

**Application:** Most times God's silence is probably more of an issue of our distance from Him, not His deliberate silence. How do you know? Well it's a process of elimination. If God seems distant, evaluate your spiritual walk to see if you have placed distance between you and God. If you can honestly say you have not, and God

is still silent, then maybe the Lord has a purpose in His silence. From my experience with people, I would have to have the opinion that if God seems distant, its usually an issue of our spiritual life.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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## The Walk of Love

2John 1:6 This is love: that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it. (NKJV)

The Christian life is not nearly as complicated as we have made it. It can be difficult, it can be trying, it certainly is sacrificial, but it is never complicated. It is infinitely deep in application, as divisive as a surgeons knife; and though its full measure can hardly be comprehended even after a lifetime of devotion.... it's not complicated.

This is the beautiful mystery of God; that His ways can simultaneously be incomprehensibly deep and yet so simple that a child can fully encompass and obey them.

Matt 18:2-3 Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become **as little children**, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

The Christian life is simply two things: **what God did**, and **what we should do**. Here's what God did:

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

That's how God showed love. How do we show love?

2John 1:6 This is love: that we walk according to His commandments.

God saved us. We should obey His commandments. That's the Christian life. Over and over in the New Testament obedience is equated with love and with security in our salvation. Read 1 John sometime.

**Too simple** you say? Why? Why is it our need to complicate what God has made so lovingly simple? Overwhelming? It doesn't have to be.

Most of us live our Christian lives in phases of self-effort that last from several days or weeks, to many months or years. Then we look back and become overwhelmed at our failures and the weight of sin that has separated us from God's presence. We take each of those periods or phases of our life and determine that we will "fix" it, or get it right "next week" or "next month" or "this new year".

God is concerned with your obedience **TODAY**.

Matt 6:34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

**Learn to live with a "daily" mindset.** It has been said that there are only two days in a person's life: today and judgment day.

You cannot change one instance of what happened yesterday. Jesus Himself commanded us to not worry about tomorrow for obvious reasons.

So we are left with **TODAY**. Pray that you will obey God's commandment today without concern that you may fail tomorrow. And at the end of the day, confess your failures and ask for strength for your NEW try tomorrow.

Sin and failure separate us from God's presence and rob us of our peace, joy and security. If you confess your sin each and every day, live one day at a time forgetting the past and leaving the future to God...



**If you live with a “daily” mentality, you will never have more than one day’s failure, sin or trouble separating you from intimacy and peace with God.**

We typically let days, weeks and months of sin build up in our lives bringing us to the point where we are ashamed to go to God; we’re embarrassed about how long it has been sin we “cleaned up” with God or had any real fellowship with Him.

**Start with today.** Confess your sins right this moment. Determine to obey God’s commands today. Then tomorrow you will be no more than one day from the peace, joy and security found in the intimate presence of your loving Savior and God.

Determine to obey God today. **God is the Great God of New Beginnings.** Tomorrow you get a new chance.

*Father, help us today to be concerned with only today. For your glory, may we strive to know your will and obey you this very day. We thank you now that you have graciously and lovingly granted us a new start tomorrow. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Is your life a roller coaster of spiritual failure with valleys of mediocrity followed by peaks of time “fixing” things? Has your life ever been marked with consistent Christianity?

**Application:** It’s been said that every person only has two days in their life: today and judgment day. Live the former in light of the latter. It’s not a corny sentiment. You can’t change yesterday and you have no clue about tomorrow. Learn to truly live one single day at a time in obedience and life won’t feel overwhelming.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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## Obey Your Thirst

Psalm 63:1 O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land Where there is no water.

Obey your thirst... a familiar slogan for a popular series of soft drink commercials. The message is clear: whatever you desire, get it.

Lust, indulgence and instant gratification: for over 200 years in America, each was considered to be fundamentally sinful and the identifying characteristics of the foolish, the sluggard and the immature.

For the last 40 years it has become the unofficial national anthem. Obey your thirst. Just do it. Have it your way. If it feels good do it. Go ahead you deserve it. You're worth it.

Commercial jingles universally appeal to to man's most fundamental appetites. If you drink the right beer you'll be surrounded by beautiful women. If you buy expensive clothes you'll be happy. Take a lot of vacations because you've earned it. Always eat at buffets because you deserve all the food you can eat. Sue anyone that you can for any amount of money possible that can be legally extorted because its your right. Murder an unborn baby because its your choice not to be inconvenienced.

Party, spend, get, experience and have fun... you only live once. Obey your thirst. Indulge yourself. Feel it. Do it. Don't let anyone tell you how to live your life. What does Jesus have to say about all of this?

### **Jesus says, obey your thirst. Sorry, different thirst.**

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled. (NKJV)

John 7:37 On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. (NKJV)

We all thirst. It's part of our nature. We thirst for happiness. We thirst for love. We thirst for fulfillment. We thirst for contentment. We thirst for completion. And we thirst for restoration.

John 4: 13-14 Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

The world claims to quench your thirst with materialism, pleasure, drugs, achievement or recreation. Oh, it does quench your thirst temporarily. But like the sun rising in the east, it will return like clockwork.

Revelation 7:15-17 Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Jesus offers sweet drink which quenches, satisfies and fills. And on that Grand and Glorious Day when His children see Him face to face, we will thirst no more.

*Lord God, may we discover the River of Life Who gives drink to the thirsty soul searching for meaning in this parched, dry and sin-filled world. Lead us to the Fountain to draw deep from Well of Life, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Which thirst do you have? Do you thirst for money? Pleasure? Sex? Admiration? Recognition? Jesus?

**Application:** You will obey your thirst. It just depends on which one it is.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Does Your Living Match Your Knowledge

1John 2:3 "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments." NKJV)

Recently it was my privilege to hear a sermon from a dear missionary who has faithfully served for over 50 years. He made a comment that struck me both as disturbing, and sadly truthful. He said:

*"In the church today we have more Biblical knowledge and resources than at any other time in history and it is my experience that we also have less **Bible living** than I have ever seen in my lifetime".*

As a teacher I see the same thing often. We have unprecedented access to Biblical resources and our knowledge is at an all-time high. It is important that our living match our knowledge.

- Has the holiness in your daily life paralleled and grown with the Bible knowledge you enjoy in this culture of religious freedom, books, TV, tapes, churches and an endless well of teaching and resources?
- In looking at how you spend your time, is it obvious where your love is: the Word, or the world?
- In looking at your bank statements, is it obvious where your treasure lies: in Heaven or on earth?
- In measuring your thoughts, do you desire more of God or more of this life?

1John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

**The lust of the flesh**, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life.... let's ask some comparison questions as we continue to evaluate our "Bible living". First, the lust of the flesh:

- Is your appetite for more of God's Word and more intimacy with the Savior? Or for more indulgences (gluttony, sexual immorality, entertainment, pleasure)?
- Is there unconfessed sin or willing lust that you practice in your life? Movies? Internet? Food? Drink? Sex?

### **Lust of the eyes:**

- Do you covet the things of God, or covet what others have that you don't have?
- Do you allow yourself to view and soak in the sensual earthly lusts that surround you in this culture?

### **The pride of life:**

- Do you long for recognition, accomplishment and prestige in the eyes of those around you? Or do you recognize the superior satisfaction that comes from obeying God, investing in heavenly treasure and being in right standing with God?
- Are you, honestly, more interested in what people think about you, or what God thinks about you?

**To finish, lets look at some practical indications of "Bible living" taken from 1John:**

- 2:3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments.
- 2:10 He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.
- 3:7 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.
- 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. 19And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.
- 4:2 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God
- 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.
- and finally, James tell us: 1:22-27 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to **keep oneself unspotted from the world.**

Are these verses characteristic of your daily life? If no, you may not be applying your Bible knowledge to practical "Bible living". James calls that a "hearer" who is deceiving himself and not a "doer" who is blessed by God. Become a person who DOES God's Word, not one who simply learns more of it. Let your "living" match your growing knowledge.

*Father, help us to take our abundant resources of Christian knowledge and apply them to our daily living. Help us to hate evil, obey your commands and choose holiness over the lusts of our sinful nature. Forgive us for our failures in the past. Give us strength to "Bible live" today. Give us the faith to not worry about tomorrow. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do Christian books, tapes or shows take the place of your Bible reading and pray? Does your spiritual maturity parallel the amount of Christian resources you have access to? Are you living what you are learning?

**Application:** It is a temptation of pride to become knowledgeable while our obedience lags behind. It is also easy to let Christian resources (books, tapes, TV, music) take the place of simple prayer and Bible reading. As your knowledge grows, evaluate your life. It should be growing in holiness as your knowledge about God increases.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## God Hears

Psalm 17:6 (NKJV) I have called upon You, for You will hear me, O God; Incline Your ear to me, and hear my speech.

One of the greatest blessings of being a Christian is that the God of Creation hears us when we speak to Him. **Have you ever really sat and soaked in that fact?**

As finite humans, sometimes we can only come close to understanding a spiritual truth is by comparing it to something we can grasp about our own existence. So think with me for a moment about this:

- Who would you consider the most important person alive today?
- Who would you consider the most powerful person alive?
- Who would you consider the most Godly person alive?
- Who is the one person, alive or not, that you would like most to speak with?

Now imagine that you have a set of telephones in a private office, each having a direct line to one of these four persons. You can pick up a phone anytime, and that person has promised to stop everything they are doing, and talk with you.

Would you not be on those phones daily? Would you not be constantly eager to pick them up? Would you not consider it a wonderful blessing to have this privilege?

Well, you see where I'm going with this. It's a feeble attempt at comparing a phone line to men with a spiritual line to God. But if you can imagine in your own heart the excitement of being able to contact the four persons you named, maybe it will help you to begin to cultivate the same excitement for knowing that the King of the Universe is waiting on the line for you... you just have to get "on the line".

**God hears.** Think of it. The Creator, the King of Kings, the Almighty, the Eternal God, Ruler of Heaven and Earth listens to YOU.... little, pitiful, unimportant you. **You!** who would probably have a hard time getting the local mayor to talk to you. **You!** who would find it virtually impossible to get 5 minutes with the President of your country. **You!** who can't even get some bureaucrat down at a government office to give you the time of day!

Yet you have the honor and privilege of speaking directly to God; anytime you want; as often as you want; about anything you want; and He listens intently as if you were the only person in existence.

How often do you avail yourself of this privilege? Does it excite you? Is it real to you? Scripture confirms undoubtedly that God hears, listens and responds when you speak to Him:

- Psalm 38:15 (NKJV) For in You, O LORD, I hope; You will hear, O Lord my God.
- Psalm 20:6 (NKJV) Now I know that the LORD saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy heaven With the saving strength of His right hand.
- Psalm 118:5 (NKJV) I called on the LORD in distress; The LORD answered me and set me in a broad place.
- Psalm 6:9 (NKJV) The LORD has heard my supplication; The LORD will receive my prayer.
- Psalm 28:6 (NKJV) Blessed be the LORD, Because He has heard the voice of my supplications!

- James 5:16 (NKJV) Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 (NKJV) pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

God did not command us to pray constantly and diligently because He gets some sadistic pleasure out of ignoring us. The King of all Creation is waiting right now at this moment to hear you speak to Him. Does that mean anything to you today? Do have anything to say to Him?

*Lord God, you hear this prayer. Instill in us greater understanding and realization of that fact. Open our cloudy spiritual eyes to see the depth of what it means to converse directly to the Master of the Universe. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you neglect your privilege to speak directly to the Most Important Person in the Universe? Why? Don't you believe He is there? Don't you believe God cares? Isn't God trustworthy? Then why don't you talk to him daily? Seems kind of silly doesn't it?

**Application:** Our prayer life suffers because we don't know God. It's hard to talk to someone you don't know. How do you get to know Him? Through His revealed Word (Bible), communication (prayer) and devotion (spending time with God).

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## Good Days & Loving Life

1 Peter 3:10-12 For “He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” (NKJV)

I love life. It's gonna be another good day.

When's the last time you felt that way? When's the last time you WISHED you felt that way? Do you know someone who has that kind of consistent joy and happiness? You know, those people that make you feel good just spending time with them because they are always so optimistic about life. No, not the fake kind of plastic smile and rah-rah positive-thinking approach. I'm talking about the person who truly has the joy and light of Jesus radiating from them.

Our Pastor's wife is like that. Just seeing her makes you smile because she radiates happiness and godliness on her face. Even the briefest of conversations with her brightens your day. My friend Kirk has the same effect. It's almost impossible to be sour when you're around him. I'm blessed with many Christian friends who have this joy of life. It is a by-product of the Godly leadership in our church and a Pastor who, first and foremost, lives what he preaches.

### **Joyful and happy people. Are they "naturally" that way? Is it just their personality? Hardly.**

Without fail, you will find that the authentically joyful and happy person got that way by one path: obeying God. But to obey God, you have to know what He says. The Apostle Peter in our text tells us very specifically, "Do you want to love life and see good days? Okay, here's how...". He doesn't preface, qualify or put conditions on his statements. He just writes it matter-of-factly with great simplicity and clarity. He lays out the requirements plainly:

- Refrain your tongue from evil.
  - Not a big surprise. Who will deny that our mouths typically cause us the most grief? The Bible is very clear about the evil potential of the tongue. In James 3 you'll find that you will be perfect if you can tame your tongue and will have control of your whole body. It is such a small part of us but can cause great destruction. No man can tame the tongue, it is evil and unruly, full of poison. We bless God and curse men with the same mouth. This ought not to be! But it is.
    - Psalm 34:13 Keep your tongue from evil, And your lips from speaking deceit. (NKJV)
- Turn away from evil and do good.
  - Peter has a two-fold command here. Turn away from evil, AND do good. Christians are identified by their good works and love towards other. But even more, they separate themselves by a higher standard of holiness. To the degree that we are worldly, we are not obeying this command. Evil has become acceptable and pleasurable in many forms of entertainment and media. We are so desensitized to it, that only the "worst" evil gets our attention.
    - Psalm 101:3 I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; (NKJV)

- Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (NKJV)
- Seek peace and pursue it.
  - Peace in the Bible is not like the world's version. It's not the absence of conflict. Godly peace comes from being in line with God. Sometimes that takes hard work and difficulties including confrontation. This type of peace is also found in a forgiving and patient attitude towards others. It is not easily or quickly offended and irritated. This peace comes with personal sacrifice giving preference to others over yourself.
  - Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God. (NKJV)
  - Luke 17:3-4 Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, "I repent," you shall forgive him." (NKJV)
  - Romans 12:18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (NKJV)

I am regularly asked if it is truly possible to have a happy and peaceful life. Often the unspoken implication is "and can I have it with little or no effort?". **No. It's takes hard work, commitment and obedience.** But it is available. Peter didn't say that we would have a chance, a shot, or possibility of loving life and seeing good days. He said "you want it, here's how".

Why? The end of the passage answers that. Because "the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." It is God's nature to love the righteous. There is only ONE source of guilt, discontent, confusion and unhappiness: being out of line with God. If you are experiencing any of those feelings there is only one solution and that is lining up in obedience with God's Word.

God's favor is **active** towards the righteous, **not passive**. His eyes are ON you. His ear are OPEN to your prayers. On the flip side, He's not passive about our sin either. **The Lord is AGAINST those who do evil.** He doesn't just disapprove or dislike evil. He's AGAINST it. That should scare you.

"I love life. It's gonna be another good day." Those words can belong to you through obedience and righteousness. The bad news is, **there is NO other way to ever have** this type of joy apart from God. The good news is, God is ready and waiting to empower all who humbly ask in faith and submit their life to His loving care and leadership. God promises us a love for life and good days if we obey His commands; then gives us the power to do it! **That's a good God!**

*Father in Heaven, what a joy if would be to truly love life and have good days consistently. You have shown us how and we thank You for that. Help us to tame our tongues, turn from evil and seek peace. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you one of those people that other people love to be around because you love life and are so full of joy? If not, why not? Isn't that the type of person we should all be? Is a failure in any of the areas discussed above part of the reason?

**Application:** Christians more than any other people should be full of joy and happy. Every day IS a good day no matter what circumstances surround us. We are saved.

We are going to spend an eternity in inconceivable happiness with our God. Sin robs us of this attitude of joy. To the degree you don't have this love for life, is going to be proportionate to the degree of sin you allow. Live life the way God say. Think about life the way God thinks. Speak about life the way He speaks. Give up your ways for His. Then you will be that joyful person everyone loves to be around.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Boring is Good

1Thess 4:11 “that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you” (NKJV)

“Boring” gets a bad rap now days. Our lives lack routine and the secure comfort of knowing what each day will bring to a reasonable degree.

We are constantly bombarded with advertising, entertainment, famous people and books about how you “only live life once”; get all you can get; be all you can be; take life by the throat; go for the gusto. We, and especially children, are brainwashed everyday by the media and advertisers into believing a high-speed, shoot-from-the-hip, follow-your-dreams, party-all-the-time lifestyle is the only way to enjoy life (note: you'll notice that it almost always involves spending money with whoever is telling you to “go for it”... hmmm).

The result is a world of people who are too busy, burned out, frantic, stressed-out and insecure; generally unhappy and discontent; distracted from a life-long gaze at Christ, which will produce the very contentment and richness in life they are seeking. A more tragic result is that we fill our lives with rapid-fire activity and God gets relegated to a quick 10 minutes in the morning, or right before bed... if He's lucky.

**Boring is good. Routine brings stability.  
Routine brings peace. A slower life brings security.  
Knowing what to expect  
promotes relaxation.**

Routine also makes the “adventurous” moments all the more sweeter. We have become such pleasure-junkies that it takes an ever increasing infusion of adrenaline and “experiences” to keep us “happy”. One of the greatest hindrances to spiritual growth, and consequently to fighting sin in your life, is a lack of routine in life.

What kind of routine? A routine schedule: when you go to bed, when you wake up, when you spend time with God, when you work, when you spend time with your family and when you play.

As well, we need to have routine inside our routines. For example, say you have developed a routine time for your spiritual devotions but have no plan or routine for what to do during that time. With no planing, it risks becoming boring and unproductive.

You may have routine “family time” but no plans how to spend it. With no proactive plan on how to use that time, it commonly degrades into watching TV, movies or with everyone just doing something they want to do.

The idea of a slowed-down, easy-paced, “boring” life might be a concept that is just too foreign to strike any reality with people today. STRESS is the buzz word of the day. I know of very few people who are not “too busy” or “stressed out”. There are probably even fewer people who enjoy a satisfying, fulfilling and consistent Godly life. Is there a connection? I believe the answer is obvious.

A routine and quiet lifestyle is foundational to a solid, consistent walk with God. It promotes spiritual growth. It reduces stress and insecurity. It leaves you with room to

deal with crisis's when they arise. Routine, try it sometime. You might find "boring" is the way to go.

Proverbs 17:1 (NKJV) Better is a dry morsel with quietness, Than a house full of feasting with strife.

In closing, this is one of the lessons I need to end with a bit of clarity. I use "boring" in a slightly humorous way only to compare it to how crazy life has become and how it pushes out our time with God. In reality, a "boring" life, as I describe in this lesson, is an absolutely full, exciting and thoroughly satisfying lifestyle... God's way..

To the contrary, the "exciting" life offered by the world is merely a spark, a rush, a spike that is temporary, unreliable and quickly fades. A routine, quiet life filled with love, service and God is anything BUT boring in the true sense of the word. It is a life of genuine happiness, complete contentment and thrilling expectation.

*Father in Heaven, give us the wisdom and courage to slow down and quit chasing after more, more, more. Help us to understand how a quiet and routine life will alleviate our struggle to find time for You. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you too busy? Are you stressed out? Do you have any real time for true relaxation? If someone really needed your help this week, are you so busy that you would stress out trying to find time to help them? Is there any room in your schedule for the "unexpected" needs of others?

**Application:** Examine your daily activity. Create consistency and routine. Leave room in your schedule to not only spend time with God, but to be available for Him when He needs you unexpectedly.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Opened

John 20:1 Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

The tomb is open. Jesus has risen from the dead. The stone is rolled away and the tomb is empty. Jesus Christ opened many things the day He opened the tomb and walked out of it.

- He opened His arms to the whole world that whosoever would believe in His atoning death could have everlasting life. He opened up the opportunity for all mankind to choose life over death. Through one man, Adam, death and sin had entered the world. Now through one man, Jesus Christ, hope was open to all.
- John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (NKJV)
- He opened the door for the Gentiles (that's you and me unless your Jewish) to be part of His family. Previously, only the Jews could claim to be God's children. Now through His willing sacrifice, Jesus had taken two different kinds of people, and made them one. All would be unified in the kingdom of God. All believers come together without distinction under the Kingship of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Ephesians 2:14-16 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. (NKJV)
- Galatians 3:27-28 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (NKJV)
- He opened the doors of Heaven so that we may approach the throne room of Grace in confidence with Jesus representing us. Having been made righteous by the blood of Christ, the Lord God now sees us who believe as He sees His Beloved Son. Christ's righteousness has been accounted to us, and our sin paid for by Him on the cross.
- Luke 23:45 Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two. (NKJV)
- Hebrews 4: 15-16 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (NKJV)
- Rom 4:24-25 It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.
- He opened a sea of forgiveness that is available any time your heart is truly repentant. Jesus opened fresh new mercies available each and every day flowing from the river of His compassion.
- 1John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (NKJV)

- Lamentations 3:22 Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. (NKJV)

He opened **our eyes** that we may see the truth; He opened **our ears** so we can hear His Spirit; He opened **our hearts** that we may love others; He opened **our hands** that we may let loose of the world and lift them to Him in worship.

On resurrection day, the tomb opened and Jesus Christ came forth to open the storehouse of heavenly blessings. For in Him and through Him we have our being, and are sealed by the Holy Spirit until that Day. The open tomb and open arms of Jesus remain open until the great and glorious day when He will return to call home those who name the Name of All Names.

**There's one more thing Jesus wants to open.** He's wants you to open the door of your heart and let Him enter as Lord and Master. He has opened the tomb and conquered death. Will you open your heart to Jesus and receive eternal life?

*Gracious Father, by Your Son Jesus you have opened eternal life to us. Help us to open our hearts and lives to you that Jesus Christ will be glorified. Amen*

**Contemplation:** Has Resurrection Day become just another holiday or Bible topic for you? Have you considered life without the hope of Jesus Christ risen from the dead? Have you considered the meaning of one open tomb 2000 years ago?

**Application:** Jesus opened the tomb for us. We should open our mouths and lives for Him.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Goads & Nails

Ecclesiastes 12:11 The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one Shepherd. (NKJV)

A goad. Why didn't I think of that.... What's a goad? And what are nails "given by one shepherd"?

A goad is a sharp, pointed stick used to "motivate" an animal in not very pleasant or subtle manner. A nice poke from the goad encouraged the farm beast to move in the desired direction. Nowadays, to "goad" someone, means to prod or influence them in some way into doing what we want.

The "well-driven nails" were probably more like spikes that were driven in to the hard ground to secure a shelter amidst the wind and weather. They were equivalent to our modern day tent stakes.

### **The words of the wise are like goads.**

My Dad must of have been very wise because I can remember vividly the words that would get me moving. When Dad said "I'm gonna whip the tar out you if you don't quit goofing off and get busy", I can distinctly remember that I would "goad do exactly what he toad me to do". (Now for you younger folks, getting a "whippin" meant getting a spanking, not being abused. If anything, we didn't get as many "whippin's" as we deserved).

Any verbal poke from Dad that might have resulted in some father-son bonding time "out in the woodshed" had no problem goading me into moving in the right direction. What were some of the wise words from Solomon meant to goad us towards the truth?

- Everything about life goes round and round with nothing new, and no end, so you better find purpose outside of it. (Ecc 1.15)
- What are you going to do after working hard your whole life just to have your wealth end up squandered in a fools hands? (Ecc 2.18)
- Why do you obey the law and seek justice when authorities constantly abuse power, jail innocents and set the guilty free for their own purposes? (Ecc 3.16)
- What are you living for when death comes to you no differently than a common dog? (Ecc 3.19)
- How will you deal with the fact that no matter what you do in life, it will quickly be forgotten? (Ecc 4.16)

On the surface, most people think of Ecclesiastes as a depressing, dark book - good only for a quick philosophical skim. In 25 years I have heard well less than a dozen good lessons on Ecclesiastes. That's ashamed.

### **Far from being pessimistic, Ecclesiastes is REALISTIC. And rightly discerned, it goads you towards God.**

Ecclesiastes is a goad. It contains the brutal truth about life apart from God. These truths poke and prod us towards God who offers purpose and meaning to this life. Apart from God, life is depressing, monotonous and futile.

Let's talk about nails. The nails of truth from the Shepherd are strong anchors, firmly holding us in the midst of the gusting turmoil that threaten to blow despair and hopelessness through our lives. What are some of the Shepherd's nails in Ecclesiastes?



- Food, drink and work are from the hand of God; and are a gift to be enjoyed (Ecc. 2.24)
- God has put eternity in our hearts that we may enjoy life, do good and rejoice in God's gifts (Ecc. 3.12)
- Friends are a gift from God and are there to support and comfort us (Ecc 4.9)
- Good, hard, honest work is a gift from God that allows us to have a sense of purpose and a clear conscience (Ecc 5.12)

Solomon finishes Ecclesiastes with perhaps the strongest nail which fastens us securely to God, able to withstand all that life can throw at us:

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: **Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all.** For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil. (NKJV)

Fear God and keep His commandments... six words that goad us to move away from the entrapments of the world and nail us securely to God. The wisdom of the Scripture is not always pleasant. Sometimes its like getting poked real hard, but it should getting us moving in the right direction.

God's love anchors us until that day when the winds of trouble will cease and we can rest eternally in the calmness of His presence.

*Great God, may we accept the goad as well as we accept the blessing. Grant us that we may be responsive to Your prodding and secure in the Truth you have nailed down for us, both literally and figuratively. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** How do you feel when you get poked with some wisdom? Do you respond by moving in the right direction? Or do you buck up and kick back? Do you meditate on the Shepherd's nails in times of trouble?

**Application:** Wisdom pokes, prods and directs us towards God. God's promises sustain us through the turmoil of life. Ask God to help you discern wise words, and to give you a soft and responsive heart when the goad is felt.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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## The High View of Scripture

Psalms 139:17 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! (NKJV)

What would an autograph or personal letter from the most famous person you can think of be worth to you? Michael Jordan, Elvis Presley, Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, Alexander the Great, Tiger Woods, Michael Jackson... okay, not Michael Jackson... pick the most revered or famous person you can think of. Would you value something of theirs written personally to you?

Think of the value placed today on autographs and souvenirs of the famous. The Bible is the autograph of God, a heavenly love letter written to each person individually, and to mankind as whole. Yet it hardly receives the attention a celebrity's autograph receives. Why?

Because generally speaking, we have lost the "high view" of Scripture. The Bible has been relegated to one of many "holy books" that contain some good teaching, or one of many paths to God. Anyone who elevates Scriptures to its rightful place of value is quickly accused of "bibliolatry" which means, "bible idolatry" or worshipping the Bible. This is illogical. To worship a stack of bound paper with printed ink would be taking an incredibly LOW view of Scripture, reducing it to nothing better than a carved image or worthless trinket.

The Bible deserves the highest elevation in value **because of Who wrote it and what It says**, not because of an idolatrous view of it. It is not a book of spiritual formulas or magic techniques that work for anyone who discovers them. It is the written version of God's revealed Mind, inspired and delivered by the Creator of Life and as such, is worthy of the highest reverence and honor.

Evidence and teaching are abundant concerning the proofs of authenticity of Scripture. That the Bible is the supernaturally inspired, divine Word of God is beyond scrutiny to the honest of heart that sincerely examines the evidence.

I want to address those who believe the Bible to be God's Word, but have not explored the depths of its value. I want to stimulate the thoughts of those who casually approach the Bible in innocent ignorance, unaware of the true nature of what they hold in their hands. I want to encourage the reader who struggles with the boring duty of "Bible reading" to meditate on the treasure they have yet to unlock.

**The Bible makes very unique claims about itself that leave the reader with only two options:**

- The ENTIRE Bible is the Holy Revelation of God to man and the most valued of possessions having no equal in existence;
- Or, by its own words, the Bible is full of ridiculous claims that make it unreliable and should be discarded as a fraudulent set of myths and lies.

There is no middle ground. Even a surface reading of Scripture does not leave us the option of calling the Bible only a "good book", one of many "religion" books. Like Jesus, the Bible is an all or nothing proposition.

**The Bible is either what it claims to be,  
or it is a book full of lies, unworthy of our trust and hope.**

Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, not just a good teacher with some nice moral thoughts on life. He was either who He said He was, or He was a psychotic liar and fraud. Likewise, the Bible makes claims about itself that either elevates it above all

books, or leaves it as an unworthy fake full of deceitful claims and outright lies. Let's look at some of these claims (all reference NKJV, emphasis mine).

The Bible claims to be the inspired, supernatural Word of God **containing all things needed for living this life in a manner approved by the Creator**. If the only book you ever possessed was a Bible, you would have everything you need to live a Godly life. While other books are helpful, they are only profitable to the degree in which they illuminate Scripture.

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.
- 2 Peter 1:3 as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue...

The Holy Bible is the only book that claims the divine power to pierce the depths of man's heart and discern motivations and attitudes. It claims to not only judge the actual acts of man, but is able to judge even the intent behind it. For example, a man may give a million dollars to the poor but in his heart he may only be doing it to receive the praise of men. The Bible alone claims the power (originating from the Author) to know the heart of man, to discern and reveal these intentions, thoughts and motives.

- Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The Bible is the only book ever written that claims reading it will transform the very nature of man from evil to good. Of course it is not the physical Bible itself that transforms, it is the power of God revealed in the truth of the words. Many books claim external control of man inflicting on them religious laws and obligations. Only the Bible claims to supernaturally recreate the eternal spirit in man loosing it from the bondage of sin and freeing us from the slavery of wickedness. (Again, not the paper and ink, but the power of God revealed through the written words. Let's assume this clarification for the rest of my points).

- Romans 6:17-18 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.
- 1 Peter 1:22-23 Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever
- The Bible claims to reveal the ONLY way to salvation and eternal life. It does not claim to reveal ONE way. Scripture declares THE way, the ONLY way. This claim alone is grounds to either fully accept, or fully reject the Bible in total because it is either true, or a lie. There is no middle option given.
- Acts 4:12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."
- John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.
- Revelation 7:10 and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

The Bible demands sole allegiance. The Author will not share rule with anyone, or anything else. Scripture demands that its followers be singularly loyal having no

other allegiance or trust in another. It is written by Jealous Author who demands the sole position of Lord, Master and King. The Bible's own claims leave no room for adherence to any other method of salvation but its own. It's all or nothing. (NKJV, emphasis mine)

- Exodus 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before Me.
- Deuteronomy 4:24 For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.
- Isaiah 45:5a I am the LORD, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me.
- Exodus 34:14 (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God)
- Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.
- 1 Corinthians 3:11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

### **Contemplate the claims of Scripture about itself from Psalms 119:**

- We are blessed when we read and learn Scripture
- Our heart is cleansed
- Our spiritual senses become alive
- Our strength is renewed
- We gain true wisdom
- It leads us to salvation
- We receive comfort
- We can trust the Word of God in all things
- It is worth more than all silver and gold
- God's Word is pure and faithful
- God's Word is forever settled and can be counted on to never change
- It keeps us from evil
- It is the guiding light for our life leading us to eternal life
- God's Word protects us
- It instructs us and teaches us how to live holy acceptable lives
- The Bible gives us hope and joy; a reason to live
- God's Word offers us peace in a sin-filled world

What other book would dare make these claims? They are either true, making the Bible priceless among all things; or they are fantasy, leaving us with a disappointing fraud.

Of course when we speak of "the Bible" in these terms, it is a given that what makes it valuable, what gives it power, is the Author who inspired every word. **We don't worship paper and ink.** There is nothing magical about the printed pages. The Bible is the written representation of the One who is to be worshipped and obeyed. Being the very Words of God, inspired and preserved as the revealed Truth of the Creator-King of the Universe, the Bible **uniquely** deserves the highest elevation in value and respect.

**Is this "Bible idolatry"? Hardly.** It is the bestowing of honor, reverence, respect and value where it is rightfully due. It's about time the Bible was returned to its rightful place of honor by those who claim to believe it. It is no coincidence that the lower the Bible descends in respect and honor, the more evil the world becomes.

The Bible is God's written Word, no different than if He were speaking them directly to you face to face. If you were to appear in heaven today in the presence of God, how much value would you place on the words He might speak directly to you? Open your Bible. God is speaking now.

*Our God, help us to place the proper value on Your Written Words. Give us wisdom to understand what it means to have the very Words of God recorded and preserved for us. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you find Bible reading boring? Do you approach it casually? When you read your Bible, do you realize what you have in your hands?

**Application:** The Bible isn't just another book. It is the written and revealed mind of the Living God. Learn to see it as such.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Twin Towers

James 1:25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. (NKJV)

One can hardly imagine an American (or most anyone) who does not know about the Twin Towers in New York City after Sept 11. The World Trade Center towers were symbolic of American business and ingenuity. There is a current movie called "Two Towers" that is part of the Lord of the Rings movie series. Those two towers represent dual bastions of evil threatening to plunge "Middle Earth" into darkness and death.

### **Christianity has some twin towers. One holy, one fleshly. Hearing and Doing. Desire and Indulgence.**

The holy twin towers of Christianity are Hearing and Doing. They are the bulwarks of sanctification giving us a clear methodology on how to become more Christ-like. James tells us in his Book by the same name, that we will be blessed keepers of the perfect law of liberty when **we first hear it... then do it.**

The evil twin towers of the flesh are Desire and Indulgence. Our entire world cultivates this in every form imaginable through materialism, hedonism and false religion. If you want it, go get it. "You deserve it" is an effective marketing term used almost to a nauseating extent. Every loan, credit card, purchase, vacation or luxury should be yours because... "you deserve it".

Ephesians 4:17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, **in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened**, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. (NKJV, emphasis mine)

Greed, immorality, lust... putting out the light of God in us leaving us in the darkness. Madison Avenue, Hollywood, Wall Street and the world all encourage, promote and reward you for "obeying your thirst", as the popular jingle goes.

The two sets of towers represent the two different types of people (wise and foolish) and have their foundation on two very different elements:

Matthew 7:24-27 Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house **on the rock**: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

"But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house **on the sand**: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall." (NKJV, emphasis mine)

The towers of Hearing and Doing are secure on the foundation of the Solid Rock, Jesus Christ. His sheep hear His voice and obey His commands. Hear and do.

The foolish make their homes in towers of Desire and Indulgence which are built on the shifting sands of popular opinion, lust, greed, and impulsiveness.

Notice here that the danger is not simply allegiance to the wrong SET of towers. It is obvious that Desire and Indulgence will lead us away from God. Those towers are black with sin and ominous storm clouds. It is easier (but still difficult) to recognize

and battle against them because of their flagrant unholiness. But is there danger lurking within the towers of Hearing and Doing?

Do you recall the moment the first Trade Center Tower fell? Wasn't it just incomplete, and wrong in some way to see one Tower standing? Didn't it just seem that one tower was inextricably linked to the other? It was just STRANGE to see one tower standing. Well, I admit, it's a very inadequate analogy, but picture Hearing and Doing as those towers. The Hearing Tower is standing alone. Without the tower of "Doing", the skyline is incomplete. I only give you that as a word picture to help you tie the two together. Let's look at how James describes the missing tower:

James 1:22-23 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, **deceiving yourselves**. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, **and immediately forgets** what kind of man he was. (NKJV, emphasis mine)

The person who hears, but does not DO, is deceived. He's like a person who looks in the mirror and sees that his hair needs to be washed, his teeth are yellow, his skin is filthy, he has a big disgusting pimple on his forehead, and the hair growing out of his nose could be braided... yet walks away, goes on about his business and immediately forgets how awful he looks.

Pretty revolting, huh? Well that's how we deceive ourselves... by being Hearers, but not Doers. We look in the mirror when we hear and we see the disgusting truth of sin in our lives and on our spiritual "face". If we don't DO something about what we have heard and seen, we walk away and immediately forget what the ugly sin looked like.

Desire and Indulgence. Hearing and Doing. Twin Towers of the foolish and wise. One set completely bad. The other bad if not complete.

*Lord God, give us wisdom to be doers and not hearers only of Your Word. Help us to destroy the towers of desire and indulgence in our lives so that we may build our foundation on the Solid Rock, Jesus Christ in whose name we pray, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** There is no end to the sources of good hearing today, but the Doers are few and far between. Does the Bible or a good sermon drive you to the spiritual mirror to behold the ugliness of sin, only to walk away and immediately forget what you saw?

**Application:** Beware of our world that is fueled by desire and indulgence. Only the Word, and God's Presence can defeat it. Beware of the deception of hearing God's truth, but never doing it. It will make you **feel better**, but won't actually **make you better**. Hear God's truth. Do God's truth.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?





## Ho, Hum... I'm a Christian

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law. (NKJV)  
Part of the Christian life is the illumination of God's truth in our hearts. This is much more than a knowledge or understanding of the Bible. You may understand, and can articulate your salvation, but when the implications of it truly become illuminated in your heart, **you will glory in it**. It will consume your thoughts and transform your life.

We've all seen the excitement and reaction of someone who wins the lottery or inherits a surprise fortune. We see the ecstasy of newlyweds or the person who just got an autograph from their favorite celebrity. And while all of that isn't worthy to mentioned on the same page as salvation, when is the last time you saw some one "lit up" about being saved? When is that last time you were? Ever?

1 Corinthians 2:9 But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." (NKJV)

Imagine with me a man who has been blind from birth. Have you stopped to consider the blind world? You don't know color, or depth; shadow or light. Everything experienced is only "seen" in the mind's eye or the finger's touch, and mental images are created by imagination alone possibly helped by someone's verbal description.

What would happen if this blind man received a surgery at 40 years old, and now could see for the first time in his life. "Blue" suddenly has meaning. The zoo is a visual feast. The rush of traffic, airplanes flying and fireworks are amazing! The night sky is a wonder of wonders.

**This is the essence of true illumination.** We are like blind men, hearing the truth, having a knowledge of the truth and perhaps even having "felt" the truth. But when our eyes are truly opened to it, we stand awestruck at the "wondrous" things of God!

So why the title "Ho-hum, I'm a Christian"? Because **boredom is a major indicator of a lack of illumination** in the Christian heart.

The preacher is boring.  
Sunday school is boring.  
Talking about the God is boring.  
Reading the Bible is boring.  
Praying is boring. Devotionals are boring. Christian books are boring.  
Christian history is boring.  
**Christians are boring.**

Hit home? How much of that is true for you? Are you a Christian who just can NOT understand these "excited" and over-zealous Christian fanatics? Or maybe you long to be thrilled about Christ like someone you know, but you just can't imagine ever being that way. Do you think that being openly joyous about Jesus is just not your "personality"? Then my friend, you have not reached a point where God has ILLUMINED your heart about what Jesus has done for you.

If I walked up and handed you a check for a million dollars, would you be bored by it? Would you avoid being excited because that's what the "fanatic" winners do? Would you be embarrassed to be thrilled and joyful? Would you avoid being excited because someone might say something about you?

**Jesus has secured for you eternal life in unimaginable happiness and blessing.**

How does that statement strike you? A pleasant Christian thought? A theological statement? A Bible truth? If it doesn't effect your spirit and emotions more than the thought of being rich, becoming a famous star or having your "dreams" come true... then you need to pray as the Apostle Paul did for the Ephesian church:

Ephesians 1:18 ...the eyes of your understanding **being enlightened**; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints... (NKJV, emphasis mine)

Pray that God will enlighten you and illumine (shine the light) the truth of Jesus Christ in your heart. It will change every moment of your life.

*Father of Lights, we pray You will illumine our hearts with the truth of what our Savior has done for us. We pray that our salvation will be so much more than just an intellectual knowledge of facts. We pray that you will shine the light of the Spirit into our hearts and enlighten us that we may know the hope of our calling. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Is church boring? Prayer? The Bible? If yes, don't feel alone, it is common for most. Why? Illumination... God shining the light of truth in your heart and once the light goes on, your like a blind man seeing blue sky and stars for the first time. Only God can give it and it must be sought in prayer with your whole heart.

**Application:** Do you ask God to illuminate your heart concerning His truth when you open your Bible or pray? You won't get what you don't ask for. You won't get what you won't diligently seek. You WILL get what is genuinely most important to you. We all do.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Where Shall We Go?

John 6:68 But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (NKJV)

Jesus had just asked the disciples if they wanted to quit following Him like many others recently had. They replied, "where are we going to go? You have the only thing that matters." Jesus had the words of eternal life.

Wow, think about that. **The Words of Eternal Life.** Do you really believe that the Lord has the words of eternal life? If yes, then where are you going with your life? Who else, or what else are you turning to?

If Jesus Christ has the words of eternal life, **where else will you go for eternal meaning and purpose?**

- To work? You will find no answers to life there - Ecc 2.18-23
- Money? Only rust, thieves and disappointment will be found - Matt 6.19; Ecc 5.13-15
- Illicit pleasure? Self-indulgence? There you will find only death and condemnation - Rev. 21.8
- Man's religion? A waste of time - Col 2.23

Lord, You have the words of Eternal Life. **Who else can we turn to?**

It is a rhetorical question with an obvious answer: "No one! We aren't going anywhere!" They had found a priceless treasure. They realized that Jesus had the answer to man's most pressing need: to know what comes after this short life.

**Lord, to whom shall we go?**

- There is no other way to be saved except through You (John 14.6). Shall we seek salvation in another?
- You have the only bread that will satisfy our hunger (John 6.35). Should we eat from another table?
- You have the only living water that quenches spiritual thirst (John 4.14). Shall we drink that which does not satisfy?
- You alone can empathize with our struggles (Heb 4.15). Would you have us to look for comfort elsewhere?
- You will reign forever and ever and ever (Rev 22). Should we turn and serve another?

**Who else will you turn to?** Who else is King of Kings, Prince of Peace, Savior, Master, Lord, Creator, Prophet and Priest? Jesus Christ alone has the words of eternal life.

What person, pursuit, possession or passion can replace Jesus Christ and His Eternal Word?

*Father in Heaven, who else can we turn to but Jesus? Give us the wisdom to agree with Your disciples who realized that Jesus spoke the words of eternal life. Convict us of the foolishness of turning away from Your Son for any reason. In His Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Where do you go when you wander away from Jesus? Money? Pleasure, work? Whatever you have turned to, can it speak the words of eternal life to you?

**Application:** Pray that God will give you a deep understanding of this verse. If you

understand who Jesus is, what He offers and what He demands, where else could you possibly go but into His arms?

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## **Nobody, Everybody, Somebody, Anybody**

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. (NKJV)

Melvin Graham, Billy's younger brother, recently said on a national telecast:

**I just want to be a Nobody,  
willing to tell Everybody,  
that there is Somebody,  
who can save Anybody.**

Far from a quaint, witty cliché, there's a mountain of sound doctrine in this one sentence summary of the Christian life. It covers the doctrines of sin, humility, evangelism, salvation, atonement, and God's power.

- I just want to be a Nobody
  - Seek to be a humble servant - 1Peter 5.6; Matt 18.4
  - Understand the sin nature of man - Matt 15.19; Prov 20.9; Jer 17.9
  - We must decrease, Christ must increase - Rev 5.12; John 3.30; Matt 16.25
  - Christ alone is worthy of honor and glory - Titus 2.13; Col 1.17
- Willing to tell Everybody
  - Tell the Gospel to all the world - Mark 16.15-16; 1John 2.2
  - Don't be ashamed of the Gospel - Rom 1.16; 2Tim 1.8
  - Jesus Christ crucified is our message - 1Cor 1.23; Gal 3.1; Col 1.27
- That there is Somebody
  - Jesus is that Somebody - Phil 3.20; John 3.16
  - There is only one way to salvation - Rom 6.23; John 14.6; Acts 4.12
  - Jesus is alive and well - Heb 7.25; 1Pet 1.21; 1Thess 1.10
- Who can save Anybody
  - Jesus died for the whole world - 1 John 2.2; Acts 17.30; 2Cor 5.14
  - Christ's atonement was sufficient for all - Rom 3.21; John 6.54
  - Any person can be saved unless the personally reject Christ - 1 John 5.1; 1John 4.14; 2Cor 5.17
  - God desires that all men be saved - John 3.17; Matt 10.32; 2Tim 2.4

Understanding the Biblical truth behind this quote makes it much more than just another cute Christian quip. Knowing the doctrine that girds it up, makes it worthy of being remembered and utilized. If you have trouble remembering the basic elements of explaining Christianity, this saying is a great tool.

It contains a solid four point Salvation message that can be used to share the Gospel of Christ with others, as well as remind us personally of our position, duty, Savior and mission in life.

I just want to be a Nobody, willing to tell Everybody, that there is Somebody, who can save Anybody.

*Father in Heaven, help to us understand why we should be a nobody who obeys your command to tell everybody about Your Precious Somebody, Jesus who can save anybody. In His Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Can you adequately explain the basics of your faith? Have you ever made a conscious effort to learn how to explain man's problem, and God's solution?

**Application:** We should be ready and able to defend our faith and explain the basics of Christianity.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Show, Teach, Lead, Save

Psalm 25: Show me Your ways, O Lord; Teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me, For You are the God of my salvation; On You I wait all the day.

Show me, teach me, lead me, save me.

We would like for that to be unconditional, easy and instantaneous; but like the promises of answered prayer or abundant blessings; the condition placed on it requires action on our part.

On You I wait all the day...  
**TIME. SACRIFICE. DAILY.**

Oh, doesn't our flesh and the American way in us wish we could have the microwave version of Christianity. Pop it in... get it quick, hot and convenient. But like most microwave food, microwave Christianity will be:

- Poor in quality
- Inconsistently heated
- A cheap imitation of the real thing

May we all come to grips with reality: that true, enriching, consistent and long lasting Godliness can only be acquired in slow, methodical, tested, forged, sacrificial daily portions.

There is no quick, easy or convenient way to obtain Holiness (Luke 1.74). **There is no new and improved version** . You can't make it just another line item on your schedule, just another task to get completed; it's not an accomplishment that you achieve and check off; it's not something you fix or maintenance periodically like an oil change for your car.

Our lives are filled with crisis Christianity... a roller coaster life where we ignore or humor Godliness for period of time followed by a brief intense period of getting right with God. Up and down, on and off, hot and cold... **rescue us Lord!**

Forget yesterday, you can't change it. Don't worry about tomorrow, that's in God's hands and today has enough troubles of its own (Matt 6.34). Start with TODAY. Determine that you will be able to go to sleep tonight delighting in ONE day, today, that you have lived for God. The God of fresh starts and new beginnings will be waiting to greet you when you wake up tomorrow morning.

On You I wait all the day... What is the meaning of wait? It means TIME. The recurring, inescapable theme of Godliness is TIME with the Lord. There is simply no substitute, hard as we may try to find one.

- It takes time every day with the Lord for Him to show you His ways.
- It takes time every day with the Lord for Him to teach you His paths.
- It takes time every day with the Lord for Him to lead you in Truth.
- It takes time every day with the Lord for Him to teach you the Truth.

On You I wait all the day... What is the meaning of day? It **means** DAILY. Every day. Not some days. Not chunks of days. Each day, one day at a time (Psalm 68.19).

**Determine that you will not have a New Years resolution Christianity.**

- This month I'm gonna pray every day!
- This year I'm gonna read my Bible every day!

- For the rest of my life I'm gonna wake up at 3 am and spend 6 hours with God! (that one is for us really impulsive guys!)

Sound familiar? And how does it always end up? **In failure.**

Make time for God today. Let God show you, teach you, lead you and transform you today. Tomorrow will take care of itself.

*Lord, let it be our mindset and lifestyle to take each day, truly one day at a time. Forgive us for our failures yesterday, give us the courage to not worry about tomorrow. Let us be single-minded each and every day, one day at a time, to cultivate consistent Godliness, slowly and methodically. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Is your Christian walk a daily lifestyle? Or do you find it is another thing you have to "accomplish"? Is it frustrating or fulfilling?

**Application:** Time with the Lord is the only answer to a consistent Christian walk. There are no quick fixes or secret formulas. Strive for a daily time with God.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Evangelical Hypocrites

Matthew 23:27-28 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (NKJV)

I love to read the prayers and writing of the Puritans. Their devotion to a simple lifestyle and disciplined spiritual exercises allowed them a grasp on Godliness that is difficult to obtain in today’s distracting world. Recently, one thought really caught my attention. It went something like this:

"Lord, help me to not be a hypocrite, **especially not an evangelical hypocrite**; one who loves church and worship and religion but lives an unholy life".

That really made me stop and think. Can someone LOVE church and overlook sin? Can you enjoy worship and find pleasure in the world? Can we be faithful in service and fake holiness? I had never really asked myself that. I assumed that loving church and worship naturally meant that I hated sin. Can we love Christianity and accept an unholy standard of living? The all too ugly answer is that we all do it to a degree. It's fairly easy to believe others do it, but what about me? To what degree is this true about us individually?

Jeremiah 17:9 “The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? (NKJV)

That verse is more convicting when you think about this Puritan idea of evangelical hypocrisy. None of us wants to believe we love the Lord and love sin. But our heart deceives us. We can't begin to rid ourselves of the evangelical hypocrisy in our lives until we first become spiritually honest enough to admit it exists. And it does exist, make no mistake. It's just a matter of varying degrees.

Our flesh is constantly trying to convince us that we're really not all that sinful. Our sin nature deceitfully plays up our spiritual qualities, exaggerating them into more than they are. And we are so ready to believe our own favorable opinions! Simultaneously, our minds engage in a continual game of "revisionist history" concerning our sin. Each time we recall it, it's not quite as bad as before.

Matthew 15:7-9 Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” (NKJV)

Understanding the deceitfulness of the heart is the first step in ridding our lives of hypocrisy; the art of appearing to love God but living an unholy life.

**Spiritual maturity is directly proportionate to your understanding of 1) God's holiness, and 2) sin's awfulness.**

If you have come to admit the "evangelical hypocrisy" in your life, and wonder where to go from here, start with these two things: God's holiness and sin's awfulness. They make up the fundamental aspects of life. God is calling you to holiness. Your flesh is calling you to the bondage of sin. The more you study, meditate, contemplate and learn about them both, the more you will realize that you can't tolerate both.

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other." (NKJV)

The more you understand sin, the more you will come to know that you can't dabble in it. You will realize that worldliness is utterly incompatible with a holy life. The more you understand the greatness and purity of God, the greater your understanding of how completely unacceptable it is to excuse sin in your life. Again, your spiritual maturity is directly proportionate to your understanding of sin, and God's holiness. If you struggle with a mediocre relationship with God, perhaps your understanding is weak in these two areas. Something to think about.

*Holy God, we ask in faith, not doubting for wisdom and understanding about sin. Instill in us a greater comprehension of Your holiness so that we will hate sin more and more each day. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you enjoy "Christian things" but find that you enjoy sinful pleasure equally as much? Are you just as comfortable at an inappropriate movie or smoke-filled bar as you are in a church pew? Are you as comfortable gossiping as you are worshipping?

**Application:** God's people perish from a lack of knowledge. If you tolerate or brush off sinfulness, you don't understand it well enough. If God's holiness produces no reaction in you, you need to meditate on it more frequently.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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## Sinners Only Please

Matthew 9:13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (NKJV)

On the surface it seems odd that Jesus wants the sinners instead of the "good" people. Aren't good people the type who want to follow God and believe in Jesus? Aren't Christians the "good" people?

It is very common to hear today that a person will "go to heaven" because they are good. If you ask most non-Christians they will tell you that God is going to accept them in heaven because they are nice to their friends, help people and don't do anything extraordinarily wicked. After all, a loving God doesn't send people to hell and you get to heaven if your "good" outweighs your "bad".

**If you're generally a "righteous" (good) person,  
then you DESERVE to go to heaven.**

Even Christians get trapped in measuring how "good" they are by examining how much they pray and read the Bible; or by how much they give or serve. Subconsciously they feel acceptable to God because they have earned it by being "good". This is not to be confused with the very real sense of God's displeasure or chastisement when we are indeed ignoring or disobeying Him. The type of "being good" I'm discussing here believes that God OWES us His favor because we have acted a certain way.

Any idea that being good earns God's favor betrays a lack of understanding about what true righteousness is. **True righteousness does not originate in us.** True righteousness comes only from God. It is applied to us through our Savior's sacrifice, and we are empowered to righteousness through obedience to God.

Why did Jesus not call the "righteous" (those who are good)? Because good people (in the sense Jesus was speaking) have not yet reached a point of being "poor in spirit" (Matt 5.2). To be poor in spirit is to realize that we are completely bankrupt of good, and that we have no hope of salvation unless the Savior comes to rescue us.

In the context of Jesus words, the "sinner" is the person who has this figured out. The sinner realizes who they are, and understands that they can't do anything about their condition without help. Jesus came to call those who understand their true hopelessness and dilemma.

**Jesus came to save the sinners..  
those who know they have nothing to contribute to salvation.**

The application to the unsaved is obvious. As long a person thinks their "goodness" contributes to salvation, then they have not yet reached a saving knowledge of Christ. But what about the Christian? How do this apply to you?

A Christian must reach a point of realizing that only **obedience to God through the power of God** will bring about true righteousness. Understanding "poor in spirit" allows you to let go of the frustrating treadmill of trying to merit God's favor through self-induced good works. The Christian who understands that Christ has secured righteousness for us, is free to serve God without the bondage of trying to earn His goodwill. Once saved, you are righteous because Christ is righteous.

**Does that mean we should no longer do good works?** Quite the opposite. Now we are free to serve the Lord and do works of righteousness that are TRULY good. They are not done to merit God's favor, they are done out of appreciation and obedience to Him.

The Christian no longer needs to struggle with the roller-coaster guilt trip of whether you are doing "enough" to keep God happy. God sees you as He sees Christ. We are now free to become more and more like Christ trusting God to empower us to this end.

*O God, help us to understand what "poor in spirit" means. Give us humility and contrite heart so that we can quit struggling to earn Your love with our own effort. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Does it bother you to think of yourself as a sinner? Do you struggle with trying to keep God happy by being a "good" Christian? Do you think that your salvation is secured by how good you are?

**Application:** Jesus came to call sinners. Sinners are those who are "poor in spirit".

Being poor in spirit is understanding that we are destitute spiritual beggars in need of rescuing by Savior. It is understanding that all true goodness comes from God, not from us. Do you understand those things?

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Get Off the Roller Coaster

2 Timothy 4:7-8 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Roller coaster Christianity... on track for a while... slip back into old ways... feel guilty about it... get it all confessed and fixed... back on track for a while. Big highs, devastating lows; lots of twists and turns; fear and apprehension at what the next hill or turn may hold. Up, down; Up down; On, off. Hot, cold. Guilt, embarrassment, discouragement and frustration. **Any of that sound familiar?**

Do you long for a consistent, stable Christian walk? We all know that there are the occasional "bumps", but would you like to get off the "roller coaster"? If yes, then we have to lose our impulsive nature and start developing a consistent, routine, structured and predictable lifestyle.

The world today breeds impulsiveness. We want it now. We want instant everything including Godliness. The desire to "walk the aisle" at church or make New Year's promises to get our life fixed in one big sweeping moment is originated in our impulsive nature that wants results without sacrifice, blessing without discipline.

### **We want Godliness for three easy payments on a Spiritual Visa Card.**

We think short term. Right now. Today. Fast, quick, convenient. It is hard for us to think of any process or life that requires daily discipline and year after year of small incremental daily growth.

**Impulsiveness is the killer of spiritual growth.** Consistency is a day by day, step by step process that will take your whole life to develop. It cannot be created in a day or a week or a year. It is created with a moment by moment choice of your will to act in accordance with God's will.

We have to determine to make a complete shift in our way of thinking. We have to starve our "short term" nature, and start developing a "long term" mentality. Ironically, a long-term mentality is created with a day-by-day approach.

### **It's the proverbial eating an elephant one bite at a time. The impulsive Christian wants to swallow the elephant whole.**

The impulsive Christian wants to fix everything in a short period of time with sweeping changes and promises. The extremely impulsive Christian wants to do everything to a SUPER level NOW. We want to have EVERYTHING right NOW. Impulsive Christianity (the old roller coaster) leads us to spiritual frustration and eventually discouragement because the day will come when we get sick of it and don't even want to try anymore.

### **What is the cure for the thorn of impulsiveness?**

- Discipline (doing the right thing despite feeling)
- Consistency (planning the right thing despite feeling)
- Routine (provides boundaries, security and predictability which lead to consistency)
- "Daily" living (quit trying to fix your whole life in one shot)

Let's start with the last point because that is where it all begins. Don't worry about fixing your WHOLE life. God is only concerned with what you do today. He'll forgive you for yesterday, and only He knows if there will even be a tomorrow. God is the

God of NEW BEGINNING every single day. You have a new chance to please God and grow close to Him every day, "pressing on towards the mark".

**Impulsiveness says "fix my whole life right now  
and become super Christian for the rest of my life".**

**Discipline says "Lord, what will you  
have me do today?"**

Living on a day-by-day basis allows us to turn our failures into "bumps" instead of roller coaster hills. Now don't miss this, its important. **If you live your life one day at a time, then tomorrow you will only have, AT MOST, one day's failure to deal with.** Not six weeks, six months or six years worth. A bump instead of a mountain.

Okay, that's great but most of us need something practical to sink our teeth into. I thought you'd never ask. Here are daily disciplines that will help you to begin to cultivate consistency and kill impulsiveness:

- Wake up at the same time every day.
- Spend a minimum of the first hour or more of each day with God.
- Confess your sins EVERY single day.
- As much as possible, create a daily routine.
- Pray and read the Bible with your family daily.
- Go to bed the same time every night so your body will become regulated to your morning schedule.

Let me touch on routine for a moment. Routine is boring and strictly out of style nowadays. We live in a pleasure-mad, fast paced, entertain-me-or-I-will-die world. Television, entertainment, movies, sports... our whole existence is based on what will entertain us next. God forbid you would ever be bored; or not be busy; or have to do anything monotonous; or not be able to just "shoot from the hip" every day and do whatever you feel like.

In my opinion, the **lack of routine in our daily life is the number one killer of consistency and Christian growth.** We have to "make time" for God instead of it being just a normal part of our daily life like eating or working. Routine creates boundaries; it prioritizes time; it trains the mind, body and heart to crave and expect what has become habit; it quiets the mind so you can meditate on God; it gives you security and peace.

1 Thess 4.10-12 But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.

2 Tim 2.2 that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.

In closing, let me leave you with this final thought: **You can't have it all.** That's crucial to this whole issue. If you want God, you have to give up and sacrifice to get Him. Very simply:

**Order your day around achieving  
your Godly objectives first...  
... then prioritize your other responsibilities.**

That's it. Simple to say, excruciating to execute. You have to decide what you want the most.

Remember: Impulsiveness says “fix my whole life right now and become super Christian by tomorrow. I can have it all”. Discipline says “Lord, what will you have me do today?” **Start with today. Do what God would have you TODAY.** Then wake up in the morning, confess your sins and failures, get your marching orders for that day, and enjoy THE GOD OF NEW BEGINNINGS. Each day is a new day and new chance to please God and grow close to Him.

Lamentations 3:21-26: This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “Therefore I hope in Him!”

*Lord, give us what we need to please You today, the faith to leave tomorrow in Your Hands, and the courage to forget about yesterday. Help us to live our lives in humble obedience to you, one day at a time. Amen.*

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## The Walk of Futility

Ephesians 4:17-18 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; (NKJV)

The Apostle Paul exhorts the Ephesians to no longer walk the walk of futility that the world offers. What kind of walk is this? How are we to understand? What is the "Gentile walk"?

It is the walk of hopelessness, the walk of despair, the walk of the world... the walk of "what's the use?".

### **Take a walk with me.**

It's midnight, no moon and its pitch black. Let's walk out the front door of the house and allow me to put a blindfold on you. Put your hands behind your back while I handcuff them.

Now forgive me, you'll feel a little stick in your arm as I inject you with a very toxic poison. I have instructions on how you can save yourself, but you won't understand them because they are in a language you don't know.

Now start walking. You can't see. You know you're dying. You don't know what direction to go, but in despair you start fumbling ahead, calling out and frantically seeking any hope for your situation.

That is the walk of futility. That is the walk of the sin corrupted world, groping about in the dark, helpless and hopeless and lost but desperately searching for anything to dull the pain and despair. That is the walk of the Gentiles.

The wisest man who ever lived (besides Jesus) tells us in brutal honesty about the reality of life apart from God. King Solomon wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes to expose the lie that happiness can be found apart from God.

**Happiness can't be found in wealth.**  
**Happiness can't be found in power.**  
**Happiness can't be found in pleasure.**

There's nothing you can do about it. The futility of life is true no matter how much you would like to ignore it, or disbelieve it. Life without God is like walking blindfolded, handcuffed and poisoned with no clue as to what can help you even while you examine anything and everything as a possible solution.

Pursuing happiness from the world will alienate you from God. Everything about this sin-saturated world is counter to the holiness of God. Notice the power and brutal truth of Paul's words:

Don't walk like the world who have no hope; who don't truly understand anything about life; who live totally estranged from God because of how ignorant they are; and are blind in all ways to the truth.



So if all that is true, why do Christians still "walk like the Gentiles" to such a great degree? Why do we look like the world, talk the world, act like the world, want what the world wants and live like world... all the while claiming to NOT be worldly (walking like Gentiles)?

- Are Paul's words unclear? "Without hope; no understanding"... is that somehow vague?
- Do we simply not believe what he said? "Estranged from God; ignorant; blind"... was Paul wrong?

**Could it be that we love the world too much?** Maybe we don't grasp the true nature of sin. Are we worldly because we spend more time pursuing it than God?

It seems to be an insanely simple choice: futility, ignorance, blindness, despair and punishment **OR** salvation, holiness, righteousness, blessing, joy, peace, love and eternal life.

And yet, we regularly choose the "walk of the Gentiles". Go figure.

*God in Heaven, help us to walk Your walk and not the world's. Illumine our hearts with Your truth and dispel the darkness of futility. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** How's your walk? Do you often feel discouraged and struggle with a lack of hope? Are you easily recognizable as different from those who make no claim to follow God?

**Application:** Discouragement, despair, hopelessness and joylessness are signs of a Gentile walk. Christians should be different from the rest of the world in all ways, not just in some vocabulary.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# Does God Exist?

## Part: 1

The fool has said in his heart, there is no God. Psalm 14:1

Does God exist? This is one of the most asked, most wondered about and generally most poorly answered questions in all of history. Could you answer someone today if they asked you?

The most common answer is "well, you just have to believe by faith. You can't really know for sure". You've never seen God. You can't touch God. You can't "prove" God exists. So if you can't "prove" it, then you can't expect people to "blindly" believe in God. So everyone is left to "believe or not believe" that God exists; whatever you feel like without rhyme or reason.

Isa 44.6 Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God."

What if you could show that God exists as surely as you could prove, say, the fact that George Washington was President? What if you could demonstrate God exists 100 times more convincingly than the fact that Alexander the Great was a conqueror or that Egypt had Pharaohs?

1. Was Napoleon Bonaparte a French dictator?
2. Was Plato a philosopher?
3. Was Abraham Lincoln president?
4. Were you really born in the town you say?
5. How can you prove wind exists?
6. Are there atoms?
7. Was there really a Holocaust?
8. Does God exist?

Why does a person without hesitation believe there is a simple and irrefutable answer to the first seven questions? Anyone who would disagree with the obvious answer to those questions would be considered either deceived, deranged, stupid, or a liar.

How can you be so absolutely sure of the first seven answers? **They can't be scientifically proven.**

The true nature of science is the ability to repeat and demonstrate something while observing and recording it. You cannot "scientifically prove" anything in history, any one-time occurrence, or anything else that cannot be reproduced at will. Most "scientific proof" today concerning our origins, creation, God, the Universe or a host of other "life" questions, is strictly theory presented as "science" to give it an air of authority.

You have never seen or touched most of the subjects of those first seven questions. Some of them have never been seen by anyone ever. You can't recreate and demonstrate them at will. Yet their existence is not questioned. Why?

## Evidence

There is historical, legal, scientific, social and logical evidence to answer these questions. The answers are sensible and supported with convincing evidence, so we believe them without question.

The amazing thing is that there is exponentially MORE historical, scientific, social and logical evidence that God exists; and yet that fact is questioned or ignored by the majority of the world.

Romans 1. 20-21 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Why would seemingly reasonable people ignore the overwhelming evidence of God's existence? Because examining the evidence requires us to make a decision about it. For the next few days, I will take you through some of the more simple and easy to understand types of evidence.

1 Peter 3.15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.

The next time someone asks you "How do you know there is a God?", you can be ready to give a defense for your belief in His existence.

*Our God, give us a portion of wisdom and understanding so that we can boldly give evidence of Your existence. May we know You exist even more convincingly by how you change our hearts and lives today. Amen.*

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## **Does God Exist?**

### **Part: 2**

The fool has said in his heart, there is no God. Psalm 14:1

Today we continue taking a look at EVIDENCE for God's existence. We have determined that things concerning creation, origins, history, God, evolution, etc cannot be proven scientifically because they are not repeatable and observable.

It is EVIDENCE that allows us to believe the Vietnam War occurred, man walked on the moon, there is air, that atoms exist and that dinosaurs once roamed the earth. In the same manner, there is overwhelming evidence for God's existence available to the

sincerely searching heart. A mountain of books could be written about the evidence of God's existence. Over the next few days we will look at some of the more "simple" and easy to understand evidence (but none-the-less powerful and convincing).

### Logical Evidence

- For every design there has to be a Designer. It is true 100% of the time in our existence, and yet when it comes to our Universe there are those who state that it just happened. It created itself. It came into being by accident and chance out of nothing. How absurd.
- Every moment precedes another moment, every action is a reaction to something before it. Everything came from something that existed before it. Logically, this cannot proceed backwards into infinity. There has to be a beginning. That beginning has to be eternal and SELF-EXISTING.. nothing proceeds it. Logic demands this to be true. It is denying the obvious to believe otherwise.
- Chance and evolution could not produce things that were not necessary for survival such as love, beauty, music, justice, honor, loyalty, compassion. If not instilled in us by a Creator, how could they come into existence?
- If there is no God, how did the very concept of Him ever come into thought? If we are the product of random chance, then even the very thoughts you have at this moment are the useless and insignificant results of the random mixing of chemicals in your brain and thus worthless.
- If we are a product of chance and time, there can be no right or wrong, and no person can be held responsible for what they have "evolved" into. Their thoughts, choices and behavior are nothing more than the random outcome of electrical impulses and chemicals in the brain that evolved randomly by chance.
- The existence of God provides the most logical and reasonable answer to several of our most important "life" questions:
  - Order. God provides the best explanation for abstract notions, such as numbers, formulas and properties.
  - Causation. God provides the best explanation for the existence of the universe and all that is in it.
  - Design. God provides the best explanation for the complex order in cosmological and biological entities.
  - Morality. God provides the best explanation for the existence of objective moral/ethical values in the world.
- Human intelligence is evidence of a Creator. Where would the ability to rationalize, conceptualize, dream, or think abstractly ever possibly come from in a universe created by the chance arrangement of atoms?

### Scientific Evidence

Not only has science never disproved God's existence, **but the very ability to perform and understand science is overwhelming evidence for God** (order, design, predictability, natural laws, reason, observation). The infinitely complex nature of design in creation is ample evidence of a Designer. The Bible says that all creation cries out there is a God, and that no man has an excuse to not believe.

Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.

Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

The cosmological argument considers the fact that EVERY known thing in the universe has a cause. But what was the FIRST cause of existence? Everything, no matter how simple, that shows design is immediately recognized as being created by a Designer (a toothpick, an arrowhead, a chair, a house, a factory).

One of the most proven and accepted scientific principles is the **Second Law of Thermodynamics**, which states everything moves towards decay and disorganization. If there is no Designer, no Creator, how did the design that we see in creation come into existence when every scientist will tell you that all things decay and disorganize unless there is a power or force OUTSIDE of the decaying system that instills order and design into it?

As well, if the Universe was infinite, it would have logically decayed into its most basic elements long ago. All energy in the Universe would be burned out and used up if the Universe was infinite. The fact that there are stars, galaxies and organization says that the universe had to have a beginning, and that it couldn't have been very long ago.

- The design of the earth screams "Designer" (the teleological argument).
  - If it were 10% larger or smaller, life would cease.
  - If it were a tiny bit closer, or farther away from the Sun, life would cease.
  - If the moon were a little closer or farther away, life would cease to exist.
  - If it were tilted at a different angle, life would cease.
  - If our atmosphere were slightly different, life would cease.
  - Water in its exact current form is absolutely essential to everything in life.
  - Even dust has perfect design and without it, life would cease. (blue sky, rain, erosion)
- The Human body is overwhelming evidence for God
  - The eye is infinitely more complex than any instrument ever created.
  - One human cell is more complex than the entire industrial complex of the United States.
  - The heart is the most efficient, durable machine on earth.
  - Bones are the envy of structural engineering
  - The brain of one man (any man, no matter how simple or even damaged) is infinitely more powerful, more creative and more versatile than the total of all computing power ever created
  - DNA is supreme evidence for God existence. Think of DNA as the letters that make up a book of instructions. Without a God, chance and time would have had to...
    - Create the letters and their meanings
    - Assemble millions of them in the absolute correct order in billions of different instances which is a statistical absurdity
    - Then, even if the letters were assembled, by chance over time, in the perfect order...
      - Where did the ability to understand and read the language come from?
      - To demonstrate the power of this evidence concerning DNA, think of this... if you were to pick up a book in a language that you didn't know,

would it mean anything to you? No. Someone had to create the language, create the words, create the syntax and structure of the language, then develop all of this into a logical, predictable form of communication. And you would have to learn it, to understand it.

- So even if DNA "letters" could by some ridiculous chance assemble themselves together in the right order, they still have no meaning unless someone higher than it designed the language to have meaning!
- What person would ever read a book and not believe it had an intelligent Writer? And yet DNA is infinitely more complex and perfectly "written" than any human book will ever be? Did it happen by chance? Only those who don't WANT to believe in God would say yes.

That is just a taste of some logical and scientific evidence for God. Next time, we will look at some different types of evidence from society and life in general.

There is a God. For there not to be, is a logical, scientific and intuitive absurdity. I will categorically state, that any person who is sincerely wanting the truth, will examine the evidence and quickly be faced with no other possible conclusion. That is why Scripture says that no man has an excuse to deny God exists.

Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

*Father, instill in us wisdom and understanding about the evidence of Your existence. Even more, help us to know the evidence of Your Presence, daily surrendering our lives to You. May we be able to explain this evidence, and this Presence, confidently and boldly to the world around us. Amen.*

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# Does God Exist?

## Part: 3

The fool has said in his heart, there is no God. Psalm 14:1

It is very common to hear "you CAN NOT prove God exists", therefore God must not exist, or at least you can't expect someone to believe it based on your "proof". Really?

Have you ever contemplated what you can and cannot "prove"? Remember, in this context, when people say you "can't prove God exists" what they are saying is that you cannot produce something that will convince every person, even the most ardent atheist, to change their mind and be forced to agree with your conclusion. In reality, this can be accurately translated "I'm not going to believe you, **no matter what proof you produce** for God's existence".

How can I possibly make that sort of generalization? I thought you would never ask. Using this line of reasoning ("you can't prove God exists"), you can easily demonstrate the bias and ignorance of the argument. I would say to this person, "okay, I can't prove God exists. You can't prove..."

- that the universe wasn't created five minutes ago and that all our memories are just pre-programmed
- that every other person around us really has a mind, they may be aliens, or robots
- that the Atlantic ocean is not just an illusion that exists in our minds
- that the Holocaust and Hitler ever happened and its not a hoax
- that man ever went to the moon and the government isn't cleverly fooling us

"That's ridiculous!" some would say. Why is it, that only God, Jesus and the Bible require 100% mathematical, iron-clad, indisputable scientific proof that will convince every single person no matter how ignorant, hostile or biased; before it is accepted that you can "prove God exists" in the same way you can prove that Plato existed or the American Revolution occurred?

The obvious aggressive bias is further demonstrated when the very same people will accept Evolution and almost every other religion, scientific theory or historical account as unquestioned fact; despite the total lack of genuine supporting evidence. So its not a question of whether or not "you can prove God exists"; the evidence clearly and overwhelmingly says He does; it comes down to the predetermined answer to that question by a sinful and fallen human race.

The Bible says, God is Spirit, transcending human thought, outside the created order:

- John 4.24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.
- Isaiah 55.8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."
- Hebrews 1.10 He also says, "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end."

God exists outside of, and beyond our ability to "prove" it. **If we even possessed the ability to "prove" it, He would not be transcendent and separate from His own creation.**

## **The CREATOR must, by default, be a certain degree "higher" and "separated" from His creation.**

Man can no more "prove" (in the sense people expect) that God exists, than a house has the ability to "prove" its Builder exists. The Builder (creator of the house) must be a certain degree of intelligence above that which he has created. So God is transcendent of His creation and thus He Himself has to reveal His existence and nature to His finite creation... which He does without question. This fact does not diminish the persuasive evidence of God's existence, it more fully confirms it.

### **More Evidence**

Let's look at some more fascinating evidence of God's existence. Remember that evidence comes in many forms: scientific, historical, sociological, logical, philosophical, etc. The fact that God exists is the reasonable and most obvious answer to all of life's big questions.

- Throughout history, in all cultures of the world, people have been convinced there is a God.
  - Can evolution or chance account for the fact that every culture has believed in God in some form? How would natural selection instill in man (and why not into animals, bugs or plants) a innate sense that God must exist?
  - Reasonable answer: because God does exist, He created us, and He instilled this innate knowledge into our beings.
- Mere time and chance don't even begin to answer the complexities and issues of life. Time and chance can't begin to answer:
  - The existence of life.
  - Where love, emotion, justice, morality, beauty and music came from.
  - How we began.
  - Where we are going.
  - Why do we exist.
  - Is there any meaning to life.
  - Reasonable answer: God exists and has the answer to all these questions.
- Morality, justice and loyalty cannot begin to be explained in biological or chemical terms. The very fact that we can reason, conceptualize and think abstractly transcends what electrical impulses or chemical reactions in the brain can produce. It is obvious to all that man is different than animals; that our ability to think and reason and judge set us apart from simple biological life forms. We have a mind, a personality; a part of us that makes us unique from every other person that has ever existed.
  - Reasonable answer: God created us with an eternal spirit that is separate from the physical body
- God has clearly revealed Himself in written form
  - The Bible's authenticity and inspiration is undeniable (again, because of overwhelming EVIDENCE).
  - This same Bible reveals to us the character and nature of God.
  - The Bible gives us clear instructions on how we must respond to God.



- Reasonable answer: God exists and had revealed Himself to us through a written document called the Bible.
- Laws are proof of God. Everything in our existence conforms to laws of physics and society.
  - Societies are governed by laws.
  - Businesses are governed by laws.
  - Every family, organization, country and group are governed by laws, written and unwritten.
  - Even "lawless" people can't exist outside of the laws of physics.
  - What person doesn't think that ANY law HAD to be created by, and enacted by source of higher authority and/or intelligence?
  - The laws of physics that govern the universe are specific, immutable and undeniable.... and yet there are those who believe they came into existence out of nothing.
  - Reasonable answer: God created those laws and instituted them outside of our control; which obviously they are.
- To NOT believe in God, you would have to believe:
  - This physical universe is eternal and self existing.
  - That life was created out of non-life.
  - The mind was created from NO mind.
  - That intelligence was created out of an absence of intelligence.
  - That morals were created with no need, conception or reason for morals.
  - That man's conscience was "evolved" without an possible preconception of right and wrong or accountability.
  - That purpose, order and complexity appeared without any purpose, order or complexity being in existence before it.
  - Reasonable answer: God design, created and ordained all these things.
- The same person who states "you can't prove God exists" cannot prove in the same manner that He DOESN'T exist. How can someone claim the only way they can believe in God is with "proof", while choosing to NOT believe based on NO proof? He would have to be able to prove:
  - God does not exist.
  - All evidence for God's existence is incorrect.
  - The Bible is not authentic.
  - All the prophecies of the Bible are not true.
  - That atheism is credible and reasonable.
  - Reasonable answer: God does exist. These things cannot begin to be 'proven'.

Well, I could go on and on because the amount of evidence that "proves" God's existence is so extensive that it simultaneously becomes humorous and sad to see people deny the fact. Over the next two days, I will give you ten easy to understand arguments for God's existence that should give any Christian a reasonable foundation to persuade the SINCERE truth seeker and "defend the faith".

*Lord, give us understanding and wisdom to be able to persuasively give reason for the undeniable fact of Your existence. Let us then be disciplined and well trained in how to present the Good News of eternal life in Jesus Christ to those who need to hear. Help us today to be serious Christians, with serious faith and a serious hunger to know more about you. Amen.*

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# Does God Exist?

## Part: 4

The fool has said in his heart, there is no God. Psalm 14:1

Today we continue with simple and convincing evidences of God's existence. As we study these, keep two things in mind:

1. No single piece of evidence is "proof". It is the overall weight of the tremendous quantity of evidence that brings any sincere seeker to the inescapable conclusion of God's existence.
2. No amount of evidence will convince someone who doesn't want to believe. As we have discussed, you can't mathematically and empirically "prove" things that have to do with philosophy, origins, history or God. You can't MAKE someone believe the evidence. But the sheer quantity, quality and persuasiveness of the evidence for God is so overwhelming, that only the heart set against God in the first place, can ignore the obvious conclusion.

We will look at the first five of ten common evidences for God's existence.

### 1 The Cosmological Argument

Every thing that exists must have a reason or cause that brought it into existence. No one argues this (unless of course they are talking about the origin of life and the universe, then all logic goes out the door).

If everything must come from something that preceded it, then there must be something, or some ONE, who was first, with nothing existing before that. This entity must be eternal, must exist because of itself and be the originator of all that came after it.

Revelation 22.12-13 "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last."

The "first" being must by default be more intelligent than its creation. It must be of a higher order and exist outside of its creation.

This "entity" is of course God, and makes perfect sense.

### 2 The Teleological Argument

The teleological argument considers that fact that all design must come from a Designer; that all law must be originated with a Law-Giver; and all order must come from an intelligence and power that created that order.

Once again, no person looks at any design, law or obvious orderly system and believes that it just "happened". We always know intuitively that it come from some intelligence higher than itself... except when it comes to life and the universe. Then all logic goes out the window and some people believe it all just happened by chance!

The universe, and life, show almost infinite complexity (design); perfect order; and all creation is bound to the immutable laws of physics. The only logical conclusion is that God created it.

Romans 1.20-21 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God,

they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

If you look at a toothpick, a deck of cards, a house, or the National Football League Rules & Regulations... you would never question the existence of a designer that created them. How foolish to look at life; which is infinitely more complex and perfectly ordered; and question the existence of its Creator-Designer.

### **3 The Anthropological Argument**

Despite today's animal rights movement and earth worship religion; it is plainly obvious to all open eyes that humans are of a higher order than animals or plants.

How can Evolution, chance or time begin to explain the impassable chasm between the "smartest" of animals and the intelligence of man? Man can reason, think abstractly, conceptualize and be creative. We have emotions for justice, honesty, loyalty, dignity, art, love and many others. With no possible "survival-of-the-fittest" need, how would such emotions and thoughts ever come into existence?

What animal ever built hospital to care for the sick; laid a road; built a house or computer? What animal gives charity to the poor or sacrifices its life in service to others? What animal communicates creative ideas or develops philosophy? What animal ever even asked the question "does God exist"?

The Bible says "God formed the spirit of man within him". And "the body returns to dust but the spirit returns to God who gave it (Zech.12.1)". The fact that man exists, and is of a higher order than the rest of creation, is powerful evidence for God's existence.

### **4 The Ontological Argument**

The Ontological argument comes in many forms but basically is this: the very fact that we can conceive of God, means that He exists.

By default, man can't conceive of something that has never existed in some form. Our thoughts and ideas may be a compilation of a thousand other thoughts, sights and experiences, but you cannot think of something that does not truly exist, whether in whole or parts.

All societies have sought out the existence of God, or a higher intelligence apart from us. Where did that universal desire come from? It could not have evolved by time and chance, there is no "need" for it biologically or chemically.

Psalm 42:7 Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; All Your waves and billows have gone over me.

God created man and instilled in him the innate knowledge that He exists and should be sought out.

### **5 The Moral Argument for God's existence**

People who don't believe in God are insincere about it. If they truly believe in natural evolution, then there can be no "right or wrong". We are all the random product of electrical impulses and mixing chemicals.

How can anything be "wrong"? Who says its wrong? You? Society? What makes them right?

If there is no Absolute Being who has determined absolute right and wrong, then nothing is right or wrong. The absurdity of the argument can be demonstrated in a simple conversation:

- Person 1: "Nothing is absolute. There is no absolute right or wrong"

- Person 2: "Are you sure?"
- Person 1: "Yes"
- Person 2: "Are you absolutely 100% sure of that?"
- Person 1: "Yes"

You can't have it both ways. If there are no absolutes, you can't be absolutely sure there aren't any. If you can't be absolutely sure there aren't any, then there is a chance that there is.

Romans 2.15-16 ...who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

The fact is, without a source of absolutes, life is random chaos. God has ordained what is absolute right and wrong and the ultimate appeal is to His authority.

**Man is moral because deep down these Absolutes have been programmed into us.**

This can easily be demonstrated with a few questions. If these questions were asked to the general world population, the answers would almost be universal. Why? Because in our hearts, God has written laws of morality. We can ignore them, suppress them and argue against them; but deep down, everyone knows the answer to these questions:

- Should all elderly, sick and retarded people be killed because they don't contribute to society and "survival of the fittest"?
- Should all babies who are not perfect when born be killed so they don't "infect" the human race?
- Should it be perfectly legal and accepted to molest, abuse and torture children?
- Should we kill all people who can't work?
- Should we have the freedom to exterminate all poor countries who don't contribute to the world economy?
- Should men be able to rape and molest any woman he wants?

Of course the answer to all these questions are obvious. But why? If we are just random products of evolution, the answers are NOT absolute and therefore not binding. It would truly be a savage world of "survival of the fittest" without absolute ideas of right and wrong.

But its not that kind of world. For the most part, life is not "kill or be killed" like the animal world (although there are men who act like animals, no doubt). The answers to these questions ARE absolute because our Creator instilled basic moral laws into our hearts, even if they are ignored.

Tomorrow we will cover five more points. Take some time and really ponder these issues. Why? Because it will strengthen your faith, solidify your resolve to serve the God that you know exists; and will help you communicate these truths to those sincere seekers of God's truth.

*Father, the evidence is overwhelming. You exist. And You have revealed Your nature and will to us in Your Word. May we be serious and committed in our effort to know You more fully, to obey You more earnestly, and to share Your Good News to all we come in contact with. Amen.*

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

# Does God Exist?

## Part: 5

The fool has said in his heart, there is no God. Psalm 14:1

We'll finish up the series this week with five more common evidences for God's existence, and some final closing thoughts.

### 6 The Biological Argument.

- Life itself is powerful evidence for God. One of the most proven, and easily proven facts in the universe is that life can only come from life. This is an unquestioned given until you start to question the ORIGIN of life. Then men suddenly lose their minds and pretend that life came from NOTHING by CHANCE.
- How could something come from nothing? How could a rock come from nothing? How much more absurd is it to think that almost infinitely complex life came from nothing?
- The atheist, evolutionist and humanist have NO explanation for the origin of life and ignore the only reasonable conclusion: God created life.

### 7 The Historical Argument

- Providential events as recorded by man throughout history show that God has been involved in human affairs from day one. The miraculous prediction and fulfillment of Israel is obvious evidence.
- The Bible predicts that this small, unimportant, strategically insignificant, not particularly nice piece of land in the Middle East would dominate world events. Guess what? It does.
- Great societies and world empires have come and gone with not so much as a trace of them left today. But Israel remains after thousands of years. Why? Because God said it would.
- Early American history is filled with the stories of God's providential care and orchestration. America WAS at one time the greatest exporter of Christianity in the world and it was the machinations of God that brought it to fruition.
- Predictably, once America has turned its back on God, our country is in rapid decline. Just like God tells us in the Bible; evidence that God exists.

### 8 The Christological Argument

- Why would a carpenter's son from a dusty village in an insignificant country 2000 years ago make the biggest impact on the world in all recorded history?
- Jesus of Nazareth, by human standards was a nobody. He was poor, unpopular, seen as a fanatic and trouble maker; and ultimately died a miserable, torturous, bloody death at the hands of his own people.
- Why would such a man then become the most well known and influential person in all the world's history?
- Why not Alexander the Great? Or Nero? Or Hitler? Or Henry Ford? Or Howard Hughes? Or Stalin? Or Ghandi?
- The world has produced thousands of people who SHOULD have become more influential than this lowly nobody from Israel.
- But history shows Jesus Christ as a man who changed the world, changed societies, changed lives and changed hearts of men and women everywhere who hear His name and believe His teaching. Everywhere that He is embraced brings

wholesomeness, goodness, transformed lives from misery to happiness; transformed societies from cruel to compassionate.

- History shows Jesus, the Son of God fulfilling everything that God said would happen in the Bible... powerful evidence of God's existence.

## 9 The Bibliological Argument

- The Bible... written by over 30 authors in 3 languages over 1600 years yet showing perfect unity in message and theme. The Bible alone contains hundreds of prophecies predicting future events that were fulfilled to the last letter.
- The Bible is the most criticized, critiqued and maligned Book in the world, yet not one error scientifically, historically, legally or prophetically can be demonstrated.
- The Bible shows supernatural staying power being the most influential piece of literature in the history of man. It has been printed in hundreds of languages in hundreds of millions of copies.
- To date there are over 5300 original manuscripts of the Bible. There is a 99% complete purity of agreement in the different manuscripts and NOT ONE single instance of disagreement in the texts concerns any matter of belief or doctrine.
- This sets the Bible far ahead of ANY other piece of literature in the world in terms of supporting evidence, accuracy and harmony. The Koran, Plato, Confucius, nor any other piece of historical literature even comes close.
- The power, influence, accuracy and prophetic content of the Bible is evidence that God exists.

## 10 The Argument from Congruity

- All of the evidence and arguments are in complete agreement with one conclusion: God exists. Atheism offers no answers. Evolution, humanism, universalism and every other religion in the world offers no answers to great questions of life. Only God and His Bible offers reasonable answers and all of the evidence points to a Creator, a Designer and a transcendent God as its originator.

The evidence is overwhelming. To an objective observer there is only one conclusion. Consider a few more quick points:

- The Bible agrees and gives the answer to scientific knowledge that says:
  - The universe had to begin at certain point in time
  - Something had to have been the cause of the universe's creation, something can't come from nothing
  - Many laws of physics and nature were recorded in the Bible thousands of years before science discovered them.
  - Life is only possible because of an enormous number of requirements that are perfectly in balance. For this to occur by chance is statistically IMPOSSIBLE.
  - Even assuming the existence of "matter" (without addressing where the matter came from!) it is statistically IMPOSSIBLE for the simplest of life to arise by a random chance mixing of that matter.
  - Even assuming simple life did IMPOSSIBLY form by chance from that matter (which came from nowhere), it is statistically IMPOSSIBLE for complex life forms (plants & animals) to evolve by chance and time.
  - Even assuming complex life did IMPOSSIBLY form by chance from simple life forms that IMPOSSIBLY formed from matter (which came from nowhere), it is



INFINITELY more IMPOSSIBLE that human intelligence evolved by time and chance.

**Yet most people would rather believe this is what happened instead of answering to the God that created them.**

- If God did not exist and the Bible were a fairy tale then:
  - Why did 12 men fabricate and propagate the lies about Jesus Christ at the cost of their lives, health and families?
  - Why did not ONE of those 12, or any of the thousands of the early followers come forward to expose the hoax?
  - How did all of the writers of the Bible who lived in different times and locations all come up with, and fabricate a perfectly harmonious set of lies?
  - Why did those writers allow their personal failures and shortcomings to be apart of the fabrication?
  - How could a book of lies and fairy tales change the lives of millions of people and societies all throughout history?
  - How could millions of people from all walks of life, intelligence and status be fooled by such an obvious fabrication?

After five days of giving evidence, we have BARELY scratched the surface. But it is more than enough to “prove” God’s existence. **The alternative is illogical, absurd, statistically impossible and leaves man with no answers, no hope, and no reason for living.**

In closing, let me remind you of the reason for this study. You cannot force someone to believe in God. All the human powers of reasoning and persuasion will have no effect on the person who wants to live their life apart from answering to anyone other than themselves. I want these lessons to help strengthen YOUR resolve, belief, commitment and faith in the God who created you. That will in turn help you to better communicate the reason for your faith to others.

**"In the beginning God..." (Gen.1:1)**

*Lord, help us to be well-trained defenders of Truth. Give us wisdom and understanding to know the reason for the hope we have in You and be able to communicate it to others. May we stand firm on the overwhelming evidence You have provided for us to believe in You and Your Son. Amen.*

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## The Eyes of the Lord

Proverbs 15:3 The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good. (NKJV)

The Lord is looking at you this very moment. What is your immediate reaction to this? Do you see eyes of severity, condemnation or chastisement? Or do you envision gentle eyes of love and patience, pleased with what they see? Your initial reaction should be very revealing about the condition of your spiritual life. Stop for a moment and take a few seconds to meditate on this.

The reality that the Lord is everywhere, watching every thing, has two sides from our perspective (yet even the “negative” side is positive in reality):

1. **Positive:** The Lord sees all the good work, sacrifice and love we offer in His Name no matter if anyone else notices or not.
2. **Negative:** The Lord sees all wickedness: spoken or not, secret or not, public or private... all of it.

**The eyes of the Lord are in EVERY place.  
They see EVERY thing.**

*Psalm 139:7-8 **Where can I go** from Your Spirit? Or **where can I flee** from Your Presence? If I ascend into heaven, **You are there**; If I make my bed in hell, behold, **You are there**. (NKJV, emphasis mine)*

No matter what type of life we lead, no matter how holy, no matter how sinful, the Lord sees it all. We cannot deceive Him, divert Him or in any way distort the absolute truth of our life. We may even convince ourselves that we are something we are not (Jer 17:9), but God stills sees us exactly as we are. There is no place, no time, no action, no thought or motive that is veiled from His gaze.

There are four versions of you:

1. who you think you are
2. who other people think you are
3. who you think other people think you are
4. and who God knows you REALLY are because nothing is hidden from Him: no motive, no attitude, no intention.

Even if we are successful in deceiving our self, the Lord sees absolutely all. What effect does that have on your daily life?

- Encouragement and motivation
  - Be encouraged and draw strength from the fact that the Lord’s eyes see every good work and every act of love. No matter how unnoticed, how un-thanked or how ungrateful others may be, take heart that God sees it all and will not forget even one act of selfless service no matter how trivial.

Gal 6.9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

- God saw those hours you spent last week helping the widow that lives across the street.
- The Lord was watching when you gave up your golf last Saturday to spend time with a fatherless boy.
- He was watching when you lost that promotion at work because you refused to bend the rules a little.
- He sees you every week when you clean the bathrooms at the church so the money that used to be spent on a janitor is now being sent to a missionary.
- Jesus knows about you buying bargain clothes for yourself so you could help that church in Pakistan where most of them struggle to have any clothes at all.
- God is observing you endure the criticism at work for taking a stand against the wickedness that is going on.
- The Lord sees the time you spend every week praying and preparing for your kids in your Sunday school class even while you patiently endure griping from one of the kid's parents.

- Accountability and deterrence

- The Lord's eyes are everywhere... this should strike fear in our hearts when it comes to our sinfulness. In the same way that no good thing escapes His eye, neither does a single sin. This fact should very effectively help us to say "no" to sin, to avoid tempting situations and to be convicted very quickly when we do fail.
  - The Lord sees your true motives behind that "news" you just shared with someone "so they could pray" for the situation
  - Jesus tearfully watches you when you think no one is around to see you looking at those immoral pictures, that sinful website or that wicked movie.
  - God sees in technicolor the lust in your heart towards that co-worker or person that just walked by.
  - You know that thing you keep doing over and over, you know... yeah, that thing. The Lord's eyes sadly sees that too, every time you do it.
  - God sees those numbers you are writing down on that tax return.
  - Jesus is watching you "privately" complain again about your boss, your church, your life.

The Lord's eyes are in every place watching both good and evil. **Tell yourself that many times a day.** Cultivate a lifestyle and a spiritual alertness that contemplates the reality and the effect of knowing that God's eyes are always watching. It is both a fearsome and terrible thing to the wicked... and yet a source of great strength and comfort for the holy.

Let the Lord's constant gaze help keep you from sin. Let it encourage and strengthen you when you do good that goes unnoticed.

*Father, give us true understanding that You are watching and we cannot escape Your gaze anywhere, at any time. Let this fact embarrass and convict us when we contemplate sin; and let it encourage and strengthen us when we serve selflessly. Let us understand both the Eyes of Love, and the Eyes of Conviction. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you understand this truth about God's watchful eyes? Why do you suppose you still so easily sin if you believe He's watching? Do you ever feel unappreciated and unnoticed? Did God look away and somehow not see your effort?

**Application:** God is watching. This can be scary or comforting. Imagine a police officer watching you. If you're stealing something, how do you feel? If he's protecting you in dangerous situation, how do you feel about his watchful gaze? Our reaction to God's eyes will reveal much about the condition of our Christian walk.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Daily Praying

### Part: 1

Luke 6.12 Now it came to pass in those days that He (Jesus) went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. (NKJV)

There are four basic elements of prayer:

1. **Adoration** (Titus 1.16; Psalms 99.5) – worshipping God, recognizing His supremacy, acknowledging who He is, humbling ourselves before the reality of Him
2. **Confession** (Psalms 69.5, 1John 1.8-9) – recognizing, admitting and asking forgiveness for the sin in our lives
3. **Thanksgiving** (1Thess 5.16; Psalms 26.7) – showing gratitude for God's blessing and the simple realization that we have received all that we have (1Cor 4.7)
4. **Supplication** (1John 3.22; James 4.3-4) – expressing our needs, asking and believing God will grant our requests

As our understanding in these four areas increase, our prayer life will cease being a burdensome duty (1John 5.3) and become an exciting (Phil 1.3), powerful (James 5.16), fulfilling (Acts 10.31) part of our existence that is as natural, enjoyable and satisfying as eating, drinking or breathing.

**Yeah whatever.**

**That sounds great in a devotional or sermon,  
but prayer is hard; its a chore and everyone knows it."**

I agree. For the vast majority of Christians that is all it may ever be. But it doesn't have to be! For ANYONE willing to make the necessary sacrifice (Rom 12.1-2) and persevere concerning prayer, you can transform prayer from a chore to an exciting way of life.

There are analogies that give us encouragement this is **realistic and attainable**. In general, everyone knows:

- If you're out of shape physically, you will go through a phase of real and painful struggle to get back into shape before enjoying the benefits and making it a way of life (everyone knows this is possible).
- If you're overweight, you will struggle through a very difficult time of changing eating habits, disciplining your appetites and losing weight before you will enjoy a transformed body and good health (everyone knows this is possible).
- If your finances are in shambles, you will have to endure the painful and dreary process of digging your way out of debt before enjoying the liberating blessing of being debt free and "owing no man" (everyone knows this is possible).
- When you pursue a career or profession, you must go through a long period of hard work and study, becoming educated or experienced, before enjoying the benefits of it (everyone knows this is possible).

If it's possible concerning physical things, it's just as logically possible concerning spiritual things. While it is easy for us to accept this concerning "real" life, **somehow we think prayer is different** and thus, prayer becomes "real" for very few.

- If your prayer life is out of shape, weak and flabby, you're going to get some sore prayer muscles on the road to getting it back in shape
- If your prayer life is fat and lazy, there is going to be some pain, discomfort and discipline needed to get it back into shape and good health

- If you're prayer life is in debt up to its eyeballs because you've traded it for high interest plastic spirituality, you will need to spend some time paying the debt back spiritually
- If you want a degree in prayer, to be an expert in prayer or have career in prayer... you will need to pay your spiritual dues and dedicate time to the Great Professor, the real Expert, the heavenly Trainer.

We commonly acknowledge that everything worthwhile and valuable in our life requires consistency, hard work, discipline, sacrifice and time. For some ridiculous reason we want a powerful, satisfying prayer life (that is infinitely more valuable than any physical pursuit we are willing to pay dearly for) to be effortless and convenient.

**We want powerful prayer available for three  
no-hassle credit payments on high interest spiritual plastic  
(overnight shipping available for an extra charge)**

It's a scam. Don't fall for it.

Tomorrow we will look at the first of four areas of prayer: Adoration... knowing God, understanding who God is, and recognizing Him.

*Lord help us, just for today, to determine to exercise our prayer muscles. We'll ask again tomorrow for help for another day. It's going to hurt, and I will be really sore for a while, but I trust Lord that eventually You will bring me to a place of being spiritually powerful in my prayer life, that it may become a fulfilling, exciting way of life. Let my sole reason for this desire be to bring You glory, recognizing that is it possible through Your strength alone. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you have a consistent daily lifestyle of prayer? If yes, congratulations, you're a rarity. Do you believe there are shortcuts, tricks or special skills needed to have a consistent prayer life? Do you think it's too simplistic that the answer to a good prayer life is to..... pray?

**Application:** Praying is the only way to pray. Boring and simple answer... but the truth. If you want to have a prayer life, pray. If it's important enough to you, you will. You get, and do, what you really want deep down.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Daily Praying

### Part: 2

Luke 6.12 Now it came to pass in those days that He (Jesus) went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. (NKJV)

Today we will look at the first of four areas of prayer: Adoration... knowing God and understanding who God is. By the way, this acronym of A.C.T.S. used for structuring prayer is hardly an original idea of mine. It has been around in various forms for a long time. I am simply elaborating on the points in my own words.

To help you keep perspective, here is a review of four basic areas of prayer:

1. **Adoration** (Titus 1.16; Psalms 99.5) – worshiping God, recognizing His supremacy, acknowledging who He is, humbling ourselves before the reality of Him
2. **Confession** (Psalms 69.5, 1John 1.8-9) – recognizing, admitting and asking forgiveness for the sin in our lives
3. **Thanksgiving** (1Thess 5.16; Psalm 26.7) – showing gratitude for God's blessing and the simple realization that we have received all that we have (1Cor 4.7)
4. **Supplication** (1John 3.22; James 4.3-4) – expressing our needs, asking and believing God will grant our requests

As our understanding in these four areas increase, our prayer life will cease being a burdensome duty (1John 5.3) and become an exciting (Phil 1.3), powerful (James 5.16), fulfilling (Acts 10.31) part of our existence that is as natural, enjoyable and satisfying as eating, drinking or breathing.

You may be wondering at this point how a one page devotional is going to cover the infinite subject of adoring, worshiping and understanding the reality of God. It won't. A 10,000 page book couldn't begin to scratch the subject.

But that exact thing helps to make our point today. Knowing God is not a subject to be learned like a college class. It's asking God every single day to increase the depth and accuracy of your understanding just a little more. Step by step, bite by bite, piece by piece... like a blurry picture that slowly comes into greater focus.

When you begin your time with the Lord each day try asking Him something to this effect:

*"Lord, in the very best way that I am capable of at this point in my walk with You, I acknowledge You as Creator, Master, King, Savior and Lord. Father, today I ask you to increase my grasp on that... make it clearer, make it more real, make it more accurate so that I may be in even greater awe of You tomorrow."*

Our Lord honors the sincere desire to want to know Him more fully. We are not punished for our inability to grasp the Infinite God, but blessed abundantly when our petition is for a greater measure of clear vision.

I believe at times we are dulled by spiritual complacency into assuming we "know who God is, so let's move on to other things". I encourage you to make it a daily request of God that He increase your understanding and bring you closer to the true reality of who He is. **It will transform your life.**

Here's some thoughts to spur your contemplation of God and plow up some fresh soil in your spiritual imagination:



- God created us, drew us, saved us, protects us, cares for us... then rewards us with eternal life as if we deserve it. Ever thought about the nature of our God who does everything for us, then rewards us for what He alone did?
- How awestruck are you at the fact that the Creator of the Universe, who at this moment is holding the Universe together by His sheer existence; who is conducting the orchestra of earthly events, governments, plans, leaders, societies and nations; who controls the rain, the sun, earthquakes, harvests, the sea, hurricanes and all the aspects of life on earth; who is at this moment assuring and overseeing that His will is accomplished perfectly in every act or decision made at every moment... that this same Creator will, at your request, turn His full attention on you to comfort you, teach you, guide you and bless you?
- Have you ever pondered the God, who in eternity past knew man would sin; yet created us anyway? Then He sacrificed Himself, forsaking Himself from Himself, then raised Himself from the dead while never ceasing to exist; to give us an eternal life with Him that we don't deserve and if left to us we would squander, neglect and forsake anyway?
- Have you ever tried to grasp a Savior that could never cease to be God, but for a time was a man just like us? Who knew from eternity past the torture and suffering He would endure for men he had not yet created; and instead of deciding He had better things to do with His eternity, created us anyway so that we could enjoy eternal blessing at His expense? Ever soaked in the mind boggling task of comprehending that?

Begin your prayers by entering into God's presence, asking Him to bless you with increased understanding of who He really is and a glimpse of His true reality (for that is all we could bear at any one time).

Next time we will apply the same focus to sin and confession.

*Lord help us each day to increase our understanding of Your true nature. We can spend an eternity and still not get close, but just a new taste each day is enough to keep us awestruck at Your majesty. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you ever find yourself skipping to "something new" when it comes to taking time to "know God"? Is knowing God the same thing as adoring Him? Can you adore Him without knowing Him?

**Application:** Your adoration of God is only as deep as your knowledge and understanding of Him. Your knowledge and understanding is only as deep as the time you devote to Him.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Daily Praying

### Part: 3

Luke 6.12 Now it came to pass in those days that He (Jesus) went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. (NKJV)

Continuing our look at the four parts of prayer, we come to confessing our sin.

Confessing sin is a mere pious exercise unless we understand and accept the Biblical concept of our sinful nature. As we grow in God's wisdom, we come to know that **sin is much more than just the external acts of disobedience**. We begin to understand the real underlying reason: that we are sinful by nature and must ask God to reveal our persion for sin and the ability to deceive ourselves concerning sin.

It is said that while Bible believing Christians understand and teach that mankind as a whole is sinful by nature and incapable of righteousness, but we subconsciously don't believe that about our own self.

**We rightfully believe mankind is sinful,  
but mistakenly believe that individually we are basically good.**

We subconsciously perpetuate this misconception by comparing ourselves to others who are "worse than us"; or by comparing our sin against sin we didn't commit; deciding that we aren't all that bad because of what sin we aren't guilty of.

Effective, life-changing prayer comes from time with God, your beloved best friend, having no pretense of self-righteousness and asking Him to make you increasingly aware of your ability to deceive yourself.

*Proverbs 28.13 He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.*

There are NO blessings or benefits for ignoring, rationalizing or excusing sin. The sooner we admit our phenomenal talent for excusing sin, the sooner we can begin transform our relationship with Him. To the contrary, the longer we avoid coming to grips with sin, the more destructive it is to our Christian growth.

- Psalm 51:5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.
- Genesis 8:21 ...the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth...
- Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?
- John 8:34 ...whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.
- Romans 14:23 ....for whatever is not from faith is sin.
- Ephesians 2:1-5 ...dead in trespasses and sin...

From cover to cover the Biblical message is: **man sins, God saves**. There is no use, benefit, reason or reward for ignoring the former while professing the latter.

Why is it hard to admit our sin? Because we don't truly understand sin which is the consequence of not being close to God, which is solely the result of a lack of time with Him. **Time: there is no other answer**. So we are left with our human experience as our example. In our mind, we believe that God will respond to us the people respond to us. We're afraid God will:

- Embarrass or reject us
- Throw our confession in our face later on when it suits His purpose

- Use it to berate us or beat us down
- Keep a list or a grudge against us

God is not like us! But you will never know that unless you get to know Him. When it comes to our sin, God is:

- Understanding (Ps 139.2-3)
- Merciful (Jas 5.11)
- Forgetful (Ps 103.12, Heb 8.12)
- Helpful (Ps 46.1)
- Loving (1John 3.1)
- Righteous (1John 2.1)

Learn to trust God. Feel safe in His presence. Come to a point where you are completely vulnerable and honest in His presence. When we truly seek God's will, He judges and blesses our intentions. When we seek our will or ignore our sin, He judges based on our disobedience.

*Psalms 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

- Freely confess all sin you think of
- Ask God to reveal what you cannot remember or recognize
- Ask God to increase your understanding and sensitivity to sin
- Ask God to help you understand not just the actual acts of sin, but the attitudes and motivations that are the real cause

Confession is one of the most powerful blessings of Christianity; and one of the most neglected. Confessing your sin:

- Frees you from guilt (Ps 51.7)
- Brings intimacy with God (Ps 63.8)
- Stimulates spiritual growth (2 Peter 2.1-3)
- Glorifies God (2 Pet 2.11-12)
- Brings real power to your life and testimony (Col 1.10-11)

Confess daily. Confess immediately after sinning. Keep a very short account with God. Ask God to each day to increase your sensitivity to sin.

### **Sin is like dirty window between you and God.**

**The longer you go without cleaning it, the less you can clearly see God and the harder it is to clean up.**

*Lord help us today to quit hiding, ignoring or rationalizing our sin. No matter how much we try to excuse it, it doesn't change anything and only hurts us. You know the truth about my sin even more than I ever will. Let me run to You and confess my sin. Show me today the blessing and freedom of cleans hands and pure heart. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you keep short accounts with God? Or do you allow sin to build up making it difficult to return to His presence?

**Application:** Learn to confess your sin to God everyday and then you will never have more than one day's worth of "muck" to clean up in your life. The longer you allow sin to build up, the more difficult it is to decide to "wash" it off.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Daily Praying

### Part: 4

Luke 6.12 Now it came to pass in those days that He (Jesus) went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. (NKJV)

As we come to God in daily prayer, we ask Him for a deeper, clearer understanding of His nature. To the very best of our ability, we recognize Him as Creator-Lord-King-Master-Sustainer-Judge and Father. **We carefully consider just Who it is that we are speaking to and assign to Him the proper honor, respect and fear.**

Recognizing Him, we realize that it is futile to make any pretense of goodness or righteousness about ourselves. We freely admit our sinfulness to God, humbly asking for His forgiveness, and much more than that, we rest in the freedom of knowing that He will help us overcome our sin. We can enjoy the liberty and peace that comes from freely admitting our sins and accepting God's unfailing mercy and compassion.

Now we are truly prepared to spend time in His presence. We can begin to thank Him for what He has already done, and ask Him for those things that need to be done.

Heb 13.5 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

### **Gratitude and appreciation are rare commodities in modern day America.**

We have fostered and encouraged a society who feels like every comfort of life is their right by birth; that freedom and peace are owed to them; that success and opportunity are due them simply because they exist.

We have become a nation of whiners, complainers and grippers acutely aware of and engrossed in every thing we DON'T have and constantly communicating it in every way imaginable.

- When is the last time your children expressed gratefulness for the lifestyle and privileges you have worked so hard to obtain for them?
- When was the last time one of your employee's expressed genuine appreciation for the very fact they have a job?
- When was the last time one of your students thanked you for your hard work preparing for class?
- When is the last time you remember anyone for ANY reason express tearful appreciation for anything except under extreme circumstances?

Now, let's make it personal.

- Are you thankful for your job, or just complain about your pay, working conditions and boss all the time? Have you ever expressed humble gratitude for the very fact you have a job?
- Can you rattle off a list of complaints and shortcomings about your church or Pastor? Have you ever thanked anyone for their service at your church? Have you shown appreciation to your teachers and preacher? Have you ever thanked the Sunday school teacher? Do you appreciate the church janitor, lawn keeper, handyman, trash man... the person who runs the copier, fixes meals, gets flowers, writes cards, changes diapers, greets visitors, prepares worship, sweeps the parking lot, cleans the windows, vacuums or refills the toilet paper?

- Stop and think truthfully for a moment... how many things can you think of that is "wrong" with your church versus how many things you have expressed thankfulness for before this moment? Convicting, isn't it.
- Have you thanked God for your freedom? Do you live in amazement that God has blessed us with such comfort and luxury (even the poorest of us)? Do you thank God every day for the incredible ease of our American life? Do you thank Him and truly appreciate our almost embarrassing bounty of food, clothes, houses, transportation, entertainment, comfort and material blessing?

Are you a person who is continually overwhelmed with appreciation for God's blessing, or continually focused on the one thing you don't have?

Col 3.17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

How do you feel when your children, employees or subordinates constantly demand more, complain, never thank you for anything you do? How do you feel about the attitude that it is not only their right to "have" what they have, but that they deserve more?

Do you treat God the same way?

I can remember my Dad saying:  
"All I ever hear is 'gimmee, gimmee, gimmee'".

### **Is that all God ever hears from you?**

Eph 5.20 ...giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ...

Determine that for today, you will become a person with a thankful heart and an attitude of appreciation for all you have:

- |                               |         |
|-------------------------------|---------|
| • A comfortable life          | Friends |
| • A job, any job              | Church  |
| • Freedom to live and worship | Family  |
| • Clothing and food           | Health  |
| • A roof                      | Love    |

Socks and shoes, heat and air, mouthwash, convenience stores, mail, computers, books, music, art, fingernail clippers, pencils, microwaves, stop signs, iced tea, soccer balls, flea collars, lawn mowers, telephones, hearing aids, doctors, trees, water, sidewalks, airplanes, aspirin, coffee cups, pets... and on and on.

*Note: if you found yourself refuting this list of blessings ("my life isn't comfortable"; "my job stinks"; "I'm not healthy"; "I'm not happy") then you are truly missing the point. Pray that God will change your heart and reveal these truths to you.*

Spend today recognizing all the wonderful gifts in life (big or small, obvious or subtle) that we take for granted, and worse, think that it is our "right" to have. Thank God for them.

Ps 100.4 Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.

**A life of thankfulness and appreciation is the most liberating, exciting and enriching life you can live.** Thankful to God and thankful to others.

**No matter what your situation  
or circumstance, the ONLY proper response  
is thankfulness to God.**

*Lord, help us today to become appreciative. Transform us from "complainers" and "wanters" to "thankers" and "blessers". Clear away the selfishness in us and reveal to us all the many wonderful blessings you pour on us. Let us then shower you with love and appreciation for Your goodness. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you full of thanks or complaints? Do you focus on the 99 things you have, or the one you don't? How would others describe you? Appreciative or whiner? Grateful or griper?

**Application:** In the Bible, being rich was having more food than just today's food. Having multiple sets of clothes and a house with a room for each person was considered "super rich". We classify people today as poor who live like kings compared to the truly poor. We need to keep things in perspective. Be thankful for what you have. Be thankful for every single thing you have.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Daily Praying

### Part: 5

Luke 6.12 Now it came to pass in those days that He (Jesus) went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. (NKJV)

Prayer is much more than duty. It is much more than a spiritual discipline. It is much more than petitioning God. It is both wondrously simple, profoundly life changing, and absolutely necessary.

Prayer is communication with the truest best friend you will ever know. Think of the ease, comfort and pleasure you have spending time talking with a person you consider to be a life long best friend; that person whom you trust most with your worst fears, most embarrassing failures and craziest dreams; that person you feel safe with; that person who understands you, accepts you and knows you.

**God is infinitely a better and trust worthier friend than any human will ever be.** He's just waiting on us to discover it.

We approach God in prayer recognizing Him, honoring Him, respecting Him, fearing Him and worshiping Him. We come to Him without pretense or facade realizing that our verbal trickery can't conceal our true selves from Him. So we confess our sins and glory in the restored fellowship. This brings us to a very natural state of appreciation and gratitude and we are blessed in time of thanksgiving for God's endless bounty of blessing.

Now we ask of God and petition Him concerning our needs and make requests of Him. **Will He grant them?**

### **God is not a Heavenly Supply Sergeant or Celestial Super Walmart**

There is much false teaching today about answered prayer. It's not practical to refute those teachings here, but suffice to say this:

- God is not a genie to be rubbed and commanded
- God is not bound by certain formulas or spiritual laws that force Him to do our will nor by the fact that we speak certain words in a certain way
- Biblical prosperity and abundance as applied to the Believer pertains primarily to spiritual riches and only takes the form of material wealth when God's purposes are achieved through the faithful use of that wealth
- He is not forced to honor our requests because of some silly notion that humans can "create reality" or "confess into existence" financial wealth, blessings or positive circumstances simply by speaking certain words enough times or in a specific way; true creative power through words (i.e., "let there be") is the domain of God alone. God is sovereign, not our words. Our future is in the hand of God's providence, not some mystic power of the human tongue. It is easy enough to create an illusion of this power but it is not Scriptural, nor eternal.

**So what do the Scriptures say about God answering our prayers?** (NKJV, emphasis mine)

- 1John 5. 14-15 Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, 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 the petitions that we have asked of Him.
- John 15. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.



- Mark 11. 22-23 So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.
- Luke 22.42 "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."
- James 5.16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.
- Philippians 4. 6-7 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.
- Romans 12.9-10 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

God will grant our prayer requests if we ask according to His will; if our faith is in God (not in our own words, or faith in our faith); if we obey His commandments; if we have purified our lives through confession of sin; if we don't doubt God's ability; if our motives are pure, if we are righteous, if we don't worry, if we are thankful... in short, our faithful, selfless, Godly prayers will be answered if our lives are in line with God's Word.

### **If our lives are in line with God's Word, we don't tend to ask for things that are not His will.**

It's a **positive** spiritual catch 22: if our lives are in line with God's Word, we won't tend to ask God for things that aren't His will. If we ask according to His will, He gives us what we ask.

We could list many verses that show the conditional nature of answered prayer. Can we be confident God will answer if we ask in faith, not doubting, according to His will? **Yes.** But how do you know His will?

**Time. Time with God every day getting know Him better.** The more we know God, the closer we are to Him, the more we understand God's will. Getting to know God is the key to answered prayer.

Let's put this down on our level. Think of the one person you know most intimately... your wife, a brother or sister, a lifelong best friend, whoever. Are you not fairly confident that you know what the answer to any given request you might make of this person? Can you not confidently guess their response to something you ask of them because of your close relationship to them?

As a child, did you not have a pretty good grasp on how your parents would answer your request to get something, do something or go somewhere? Did you tend to avoid asking those things you knew they would say "no" to? Why bother, you knew the answer would be "no".

I pretty much know how my wife is going to answer something. So I rarely bother asking her things I know she will say "no" about, or things that I know she doesn't care if I ask her or not. I just go forward knowing what her answer will be and respond accordingly. I know her "will" in other words. Why? Because I live with her. I

see her everyday. I talk to her everyday. I can talk to her about anything. I know her will, she knows mine.

**Every human analogy applied to God's truth is weak.** But I think this one is adequate to help us understand the whole idea of "whatever we ask God in faith without doubting according to His will" He will answer.

Spending time with God allows us to:

- Know His will more accurately and with greater depth over time
- Ask in faith not doubting
- Confidently expect it to be answered
- Avoid "failed" prayer because we won't even bother to ask those things that aren't His will

**Think of the beautiful, simple logic here: if you ask something that you know is God's will (because of your intimate friendship with Him) of course He's going to answer your prayer because of the very fact that it is His will in the first place!**

As with all things Godly, there is no shortcut. Our nature wants the blessing of answered prayer without sacrifice, without time and without discipline. Won't happen. Daily, consistent, disciplined fellowship in prayer, worship and study is the answer and the only answer to praying with confidence.

*Lord, help us today to make time to get to know You, and thus know Your will. Then may we in faith, without doubting, make our requests known to You that You may be glorified through the answer. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you know God well enough to know His will? If it is unreasonable to expect to know a person well that you spend very little time with, how much more unreasonable is it to believe that about God?

**Application:** If you want to experience a life of answered prayer, live a holy life and ask God for things according to His will. If you don't know His will, spend more time with Him until you find out what it is..

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Recognize Who You're Talking To

Isaiah 2:10 Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust, From the terror of the Lord  
And the glory of His majesty. (NKJV)

When you approach God in prayer, the first order of business is to contemplate Who you are about to speak to. The world is much too casual today about God describing Him as "the man upstairs" or "the big guy", whether from embarrassment or ignorance.

God is portrayed in Scripture as awesome (Duet 10:17), terrifying (Psa 90:7) and the common response to His presence is to fall flat on your face (Rev 7:11), unable to stand in the presence of His holiness. God is so holy (Lev 11:45), so majestic (Job 37:4), so powerful (Psa 66:1-4) that we should feel like crawling under a rock and hiding from Him rather than face His unfathomable purity.

If we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, do we have to be scared of God? No, not in the sense that we cannot know what to expect from Him. In other words, we don't have to be "gun-shy" in God's presence as if He were irrational and unpredictable.

**We can know what to expect from God  
as long as we are in line with His Word  
and have a proper reverence for Him.**

**Should we fear God?** Most certainly. We have almost lost the concept of healthy respect and fear in our culture. If this is foreign to you, let's say you're standing in the middle of the road and a city bus is racing 90 mph straight at you. It would benefit you to have a healthy fear of its power and the potential consequences of ignoring it. Do you need to be afraid of it? **Only if you ignore it or treat it casually.** If you respect its power and presence, then you need merely to step out of the way of its path.

**You don't have to be afraid, but you do  
need a healthy, fearful respect.**

Today's culture of relevant truth and arrogant individualism would leave you talking about your rights and the nerve of anyone to judge you for standing in the way of the oncoming bus even as it ran you over. In the same way, many will still be asserting their right to ignore God while passing through the gates of eternal condemnation.

Anytime you express the Biblical idea of "fearing God", you will be faced with accusations of being harsh, judgmental, negative, old fashioned and Puritan. This torrent of criticism causes many to back down from the plain Scriptural truth of God's nature. Is God loving and patient? Absolutely. Is God merciful, compassionate and kind? Beyond measure. But that is only part of His character.

- God will not share His rightful place with anyone  
– Isa 48:11
- God is jealous and will not tolerate competition  
– Deut 4:24
- God is not intimidated by man – Job 38:2
- God is judgmental of sin and wickedness – Mal 3:5
- God's anger burns against the sinfulness of men  
– Num 32:14
- God's wrath will be poured out on those who hinder the Gospel of Christ – 1Thess 2:14

- God will send you to an eternity of punishment in hell if you choose to ignore Him - John 3.18-19; Psa 9.17; Matt 18.6-9

When we enter into God's presence through prayer, it is not a casual thing. It should be a routine and consistent part of our life, but never flippant or casual.

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction. (NKJV)

A proper fear of God results in our obedience and humility. A healthy fear of God will help us avoid sin and disobedience. It helps us to truly understand the gulf that separates us from God, a gulf that is only traversed through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. The fear of God is the acknowledgement that He has provided **only one way** of reconciliation, **only one path** to His presence and that is the narrow way of atonement through the Lamb of God who died that we might have life (John 20.31).

As you enter into prayer today, take some time first to contemplate Who you are about to speak to. Meditate on the attributes of God: love, mercy, kindness, compassion and forgiven. But also on His jealousy, judgment, intolerance of sin and demands for righteousness.

*Majestic and Fearsome Lord, help us today to see You fully. Give us understanding of the infinite chasm that separates Your Holiness from our best attempts to be good. Instill in us a proper fear and reverence of You. May it cause us to understand Your love and mercy even more. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you think it is an old fashioned notion to "fear God"? Do you treat God like your buddy, or a kindly old Grandfatherly type? Or, do you merely approach Him without much thought at all? Would you characterize your prayer time as casually presenting your wish list for today to the "man upstairs"?

**Application:** God forbid that we ignore His whole nature. God is love, but also Judge. God is patient but full of wrath. God is merciful but also jealous. Resist today's trend towards a "feel-good", shallow concept of God. He encompasses all things holy, both loving and fearsome. We can only feel good about Him, when our understanding lines up with His truth.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Peace & Assurance

Isaiah 32:17 The work of righteousness will be peace, And the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. (NKJV)

Being assured of your salvation has many facets. There is no simple checklist or magic formula. The Bible does however say that we can KNOW we are saved:

1 John 2:3 Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. (NKJV)

The book of 1John discusses many aspects of the assurance of salvation. Obedience is a common thread in showing our love for God and demonstrating our truly reborn spirit.

The "work of righteousness" could be summed up by obedience in all things Godly. Righteousness produces peace. How? By revealing sin and replacing it with holiness. Righteous is Godly light that always exposes the darkness of sin. The pursuit of righteousness is the life of a Peacemaker that Jesus speaks about in the Beatitudes (Matt 5). This peace does not always come "peacefully" because sin must be slain first; and it does not depart with ease or cooperation.

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God. (NKJV)

The infusion of righteousness **produces** peace. The **effect** of righteousness is quietness and assurance. The "quietness" is akin to the meekness Jesus also spoke of in the Beatitudes. Meekness is calm, supreme confidence and control produced by the Holy Spirit. It is the gentle, supernaturally confident attitude that comes from trusting the Holy Spirit to guide us; allowing us to be unmoved by our external circumstances.

Matthew 5:5 Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. (NKJV)

Righteousness, peace and meekness all combine to testify in our spirit of the new birth, the regeneration of our eternal spirit (Tit 3.5); a new nature that is both responsive and sensitive to God (John 10.27); preserved by Him until the day of our glorification in His Presence (Rom 8.30).

Assurance comes in two forms: an objective examination of our behavior and attitudes compared against Godly standards (the fruit of the Spirit, Gal 5.22); and a "feeling" of assurance that is directly parallel to our level of intimacy and fellowship with God.

Righteousness brings peace because it displaces sin. With that peace comes a quietness of spirit because our eternal issues are settled and we do not have to live in guilt towards God. The result is a great assurance of our salvation. If there is a lack of peace, calmness and assurance in your life today, your righteousness might be the first culprit.

*Righteous and Holy God, help us to understand that You offer peace and assurance, but only on Your terms. We are grateful that you offer peace and assurance; and You graciously grant us the guidance and power we need to live righteously in order to gain assurance. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** If you lack the assurance of salvation, have you considered that a lack of righteousness and holiness could be the reason?

**Application:** Examine your life in light of God's word. Assurance is possible (1John).

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## When Bad Times Call

Psalm 112:7 He will not be afraid of evil tidings; His heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD. (NKJV)

War. Disaster. Economic Depression. Lawsuits. Disease. Job Loss. Unfaithfulness. Injustice. Crime.

How much fear do these invoke in your heart? In the inevitable cycle of societal history, strength of character produced from adversity, is replaced with generations that rely on drugs, therapy, materialism and the escape of pleasure to deal with life. It is not an arguable point that in the world today there is a critical lack of emotional stamina, personal responsibility and strength of character in general.

The loss of a job is emotionally catastrophic and immediately we look to see who is going to “do something about it” (usually the government). A decline in lifestyle and material comfort is cause for depression and an increase in welfare. Any accident is grounds for a lawsuit; someone is “going to pay”. There is an expectation of cradle-to-grave safety and security and it is seen as “unfair” when it is interrupted.

Is there a reason for this mental weakness and emotional frailty? History says yes. In the chronicles of society, the more a group depends on God, the greater their strength of character.

**As hard-earned strength of character  
produces prosperity and blessing,  
security inevitably shifts to the blessing,  
instead of remaining in the One Who Blesses.**

Psalm 52:6-7 The righteous also shall see and fear, And shall laugh at him, saying, “Here is the man who did not make God his strength, But trusted in the abundance of his riches, And strengthened himself in his wickedness.” (NKJV)

Given the temporal, fragile nature of riches, comfort and pleasure, **which can disappear in an instant of tragedy**, it becomes critical to examine where your trust is placed.

How would “bad news” (evil tidings) affect you today? Where is your hope and trust? In a bank account or in the King of the Universe? Do you trust in prosperity or the Prince of Peace? Is your hope in God or the government? Is your security in the Lord of All Creation or the lottery?

If you lost every penny you have today, found out you had cancer, your house burned down, and your family was gone... would you be left in the arms of a loving, faithful God? Or would you be left alone because all that you surrounded yourself with, is gone?

Matthew 6:19-21 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (NKJV)

For the successful and talented, it is tempting to think “**I did once, I will do it again**”. So the fear of loss is lessened in light of trust in your own abilities. What if those abilities to produce, to make money, to be successful were gone today? What if you’re a singer, and you lose your voice? What if you have the Midas touch but the economy collapses? Maybe you’re a model and your face gets disfigured; or an athlete who develops muscular dystrophy... what would you be left with?

What if you are one of those multi-talented, super successful, hard working, everything-you-touch-prospers kind of persons? What would you be left with after a phone call today from your doctor informing you that you have a debilitating disease that will leave you helpless, bedridden and dependent in a few weeks?

This is not meant to be a gloomy, guilt-trip, emotional manipulation. It is meant to encourage you **to examine where your trust is now, before tragedy reveals it.** It is meant to help us meditate and contemplate on what would be left if everything we have, everything we are, everything we can do... were to be suddenly lost.

**There is NO BAD NEWS that can bring  
despair and hopelessness to the heart  
that is steadfastly trusting in God.**

There is no tragedy, no loss, no stock market plunge, no war, no disease or no fire that is greater than the love and security of being safe in the arms of Jesus. To the contrary, **when our trust is in circumstances instead of God**, even the littlest disturbance or potential bad news becomes a source of anxiety, worry and stress.

Jeremiah 17:7 “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, And whose hope is the LORD. (NKJV)

Put your trust in the God who is above **anything** life can throw at you. The greater the trial or loss, the greater God’s faithfulness.

*O Caring God, give us the wisdom to see the frailty and futility of trusting in anything but You. Grant us the courage and faithfulness to put our hope in You. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Have you given serious thought to your response if you were to lose everything and be made helpless? What would you be left with? Despair and hopelessness? Or God?

**Application:** Ask God to reveal to you where your trust is placed today. If it is in anything but God alone, ask Him to give you the understanding and discernment needed to see the truth.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## It's Who, Not What

Proverbs 6:16-20 These six things the LORD **hates**, yes, seven are an **abomination** to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren. (NKJV, emphasis mine)

Sin must not be as bad as it used to be. A few thousand years ago, God wrote down how He hated it. Think of your sin... now compare it with what the Bible says (NKJV, emphasis mine):

- Zechariah 8:17 Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; And do not love a false oath. For all these are things that I hate,' Says the LORD."
- Proverbs 21:27 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination; How much more when he brings it with wicked intent!
- Psalm 5:6 You shall destroy those who speak falsehood; The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

Do you have the same opinion as God concerning sin? Do you abhor it? Is it an abomination to you? If behavior and lifestyle are any indication, very few people truly hate sin. Society doesn't recognize sin at all except for the very "worst" sins (and even then it's often called a "sickness").

As Christians, we have been desensitized because of overexposure to sin, and underexposure to God's presence. We determine how "bad" a sin is by comparing it to other sins. In other words, envy is not as bad as gossiping, is not as bad as lying, is not as bad as fornication, is not as bad as murder. We allow the nature of the sin to determine how bad it is.

In our daily life, sin most definitely has varying degrees of consequences (adultery has more consequences than a moment of being unkind). But the eternal consequences are the same for all sin.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NKJV)

"For the wages **of sin**"... not "the wages of really bad sin according to societal standards". Why does Scripture make such a blanket statement about sin? Isn't murder worse than jealousy? That's where we miss the point. We are **measuring sin against other sin** to determine how "bad" it is. God sees sin in all its ugly fullness while we see just the superficial characteristics. That's why His opinion of sin is so harsh and intolerable.

**The heinousness of sin lies not so much in the nature of the sin committed as it does in the nature of Who it is committed against.**

Stop and ponder that statement. The word heinous is grossly overused by the news media but it is most appropriate here. Heinous means "shockingly terrible, brutal or cruel". There are not words strong enough in our language to convey the destruction and grief caused by sin.

The awfulness of sin is not determined primarily by WHAT the sin is (although that is part of it). The true nature of sin is based on WHO is being sinned against. Read the following examples and notice as the severity of the transgression increases even while the sin committed stays the same:

- Joe slaps his twin brother across the face.

- Joe slaps his boss across the face.
- Joe slaps his mother across the face.
- Joe slaps a police officer across the face.
- Joe slaps his commanding officer in the military across the face.
- Joe slaps the President of the United States across the face.
- Joe slaps a helpless infant across the face.

Why is slapping your sibling not as "bad" as slapping the President? Why is slapping a defenseless, innocent baby that much worse? The actual sinful act never changed. The severity of the transgression is determined by Who the sin is committed against. Here's one more example to help clarify the point:

Stealing is a sin. By it's very nature (taking something that is not yours), stealing is wrong. On a human level, it's worse to steal the last loaf of bread from a poor widow than it is to steal a loaf of bread from a grocery store. The sin is the same, but the severity of the transgression increases based on WHO is stolen from. (Analogies always break down if pushed far enough, but the idea is adequately demonstrated in the examples). Read our statement again:

**The heinousness of sin lies not so much in the nature of the sin committed as it does in the nature of Who it is committed against.**

Make sense now? Are you beginning to understand why sin is so awful in God's eyes? Sin is the reason His Son died a horrible death. Because of sin, Jesus (who is infinitely more innocent than even a baby) was tortured and murdered. Each sin you commit is bad because all sin is bad by definition. But each sin you commit is heinous (shockingly terrible) **because it is committed against the King of Kings, Jesus Christ**, who had to suffer and die for your sin and mine. **It's WHO we sin against (Jesus) that makes ANY sin an abomination to God.**

It is imperative that Christians recapture the true nature of sin. The next time you sin, don't base your contrition (sorrow for sin) on what the sin was, but on WHO the sin was against... Jesus Christ.

*Most Holy God, grant us an enlightened heart that we may see sin as You do. Help us understand that sin is terrible because it is committed against Your Son, in Who's Name we pray, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do have the same opinion of sin that God has? Do your "little" sins not bother you much, or at least as much as your "bad" sins? Do you measure sin against other sin in order to determine how "bad" it is? Have you ever realized that WHO the sin is committed against determines its awfulness?

**Application:** The Church needs to regain a correct understanding of sin. We stay a couple of steps behind the world. That allows us to feel righteous by comparison. The typical Christian today is barely recognizable from the rest of the world because of our view of sin. Our view of sin is low because our view of Who we sin against is low.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Jesus Matters

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (NKJV)

I walked into the High School of one of my teenage children the other day only to be quickly "ditched" because they feared their friends might actually see them with their Dad, which of course is the height of shame and embarrassment for a teenager. At first I passed it off as humorous adolescence. But as I approached my child and the group of friends, I saw the look on my kid's face that really did say plainly "go away, I'm embarrassed for my friends to see you with me".

Now, I'm just an average Joe when it comes to looks and clothes. Nothing spectacular, but nothing particularly embarrassing either. What was at first humorous had suddenly become offensive and hurtful.

I had faced this once before in the mall with my oldest son. As our family entered the shopping mall, I noticed he quickly lagged behind and created an obvious distance between us. I turned and asked him if he was embarrassed to be with his family, to which he responded "I can't let my friends see me hanging out at the mall with my parents!"

Well I decided to cure that by letting him choose between "embarrassing" and "really embarrassing". So with volume and clarity worthy of my 10 years as a Drill Sergeant in the Army, I announced to the entire mall: "everyone look over here. My teenage son (and I added his name loud and clear) is here at the mall with his parents and doesn't want you to know it!"

I will give my boy one thing, he figures things out quick and has my sense of humor. He instantly closed the gap between us and was happy to enjoy the rest of the day at the mall in our company even putting his arm around me!

Back to the high school scene. What was at first humorous had now become hurtful. Later that day I was contemplating why it wasn't so funny to be treated that way by my own child. It was because they had treated me, their father, **like I didn't matter**. It was obvious that the opinion of casual and very temporary friends was more important than "honor thy father" was..

Dad, the person who had loved, cared for, provided for, sacrificed for and protected this child for over 14 years. I was an embarrassment. What I had done for them wasn't important. I didn't matter. At that moment, my child was more concerned with the feelings, opinions and approval of the friends. The friends mattered. I didn't.

Every time we sin, we are saying:

**Jesus, You don't matter.**

**My desire does.**

Every time we are embarrassed to

    speak of Jesus, we are saying:

**Jesus, You don't matter.**

**My reputation does.**

Every time we avoid speaking up about our relationship  
with Jesus because it is uncomfortable, we are saying:

**Jesus, You don't matter.**

**My comfort does.**

Later on I tried to explain to my child why the behavior was inappropriate and ungodly. I explained to them that their friends are fickle, they will come and go and that, relatively speaking, their friends have done NOTHING for them.

I went on and reminded about all the love, sacrifice and devotion that a parent shows. I compared the two and demonstrated **how wrong it was to be ashamed of the one who has given all, and embrace the one who has given nothing.**

When we choose our own way (sin) we are saying to Jesus "I know you have given all, but its more important that I have my own way. You don't matter. And what's more, its embarrassing to have You hanging around. Someone might see us together."

Ephesians 4:30-32 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. (NKJV)

Most parents have been, or will be grieved by their children at some point. You get treated like you don't matter; your feelings, desires and your authority. None of it matters.

To grieve the Holy Spirit is to treat Jesus like He doesn't matter. The Holy Spirit proclaims Christ, illuminates Christ and points everything to Christ. So to ignore Jesus Christ, grieves the Holy Spirit. When we sin, when we are ashamed of Christ, when we behave as if He isn't there, we are loudly proclaiming that Jesus doesn't matter.

*Father, help us to understand how we grieve the Holy Spirit. May we never act like Jesus doesn't matter, in whose name we pray, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** When you are with your friends, family and coworkers, are you embarrassed to have Jesus around? Are you afraid someone might see you with Him? When you sin or ignore Jesus, do you admit that you are telling Jesus that He doesn't matter?

**Application:** Sin is much more than doing something wrong. It is the blatant disregard of the presence of Jesus Christ and the willful decision that what He thinks, what He has done and what He wants doesn't matter.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# Set Before You Today

## Part: 1

Deuteronomy 30:15 See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil; (NKJV)

The great leader, Moses, was nearing the end of his life. God was giving Moses final words and instructions to pass on to the Israelites. The choices **they** faced are still very much applicable to **us** today, particularly as individuals. We have a choice between righteousness or sin; obedience or disobedience. Chapter 28 of Deuteronomy specifies blessings and consequences for the nation of Israel that hinged on their actions as a nation.

The consequences listed speak of cursing, hardship, confusion, futility, hopelessness, sickness and defeat. Whether nations or individuals, disobedience to God inevitably results in negative consequences. It is interesting to note one particular verse that describes a rapidly growing segment of society today: those who are fearful (of a variety of things) and those who feel hopeless.

Deut. 28.66-67 **Your life shall hang in doubt** before you; **you shall fear day and night**, and have no assurance of life. In the morning you shall say, "Oh, that it were evening!" And at evening you shall say, "Oh, that it were morning!" **because of the fear which terrifies your heart**, and because of the sight which your eyes see. (NKJV, emphasis mine)

We have elaborate psychological theories for depression, fear, anxiety and other "mental illness". It most certainly **is** mental illness, but only in the sense that your "mentality" is a product of your "spirituality". It should more accurately be termed "SPIRITUAL illness". Certainly that flies in the face of modern thinking but God pronounced the consequences of disobedience thousands of years before Freud or the first behavioral-modification prescription drug. (Note: I understand there are genuine chemical imbalances and physical conditions that cause very real depression and anxiety. While God is certainly capable of seeing a person through these as well, this lesson addresses rampant depression, fear and anxiety due to spiritual deficiencies).

If you struggle with depression, fear or anxiety, there's a good chance you either don't know God at all, or you are neglecting Him. It will take honesty and humility to truly evaluate the condition of your spiritual life. It is my experience (and also those Pastors, Elders and mature Christians that I have asked) that almost always, that persons who are consistently "blue", despondent, scared or worried, will have a weak or non-existent relationship with God. **Take that for what it's worth.**

**The solution is simple: obey God.**

I know that sounds far too simplistic in this modern age where we're assured that elaborate external forces and circumstances completely out of our control cause us to have these "illnesses". In chapter 28, God plainly reveals that blessing follows obedience. It can come in many forms, material or spiritual, but the end result is the same: happiness, contentment and spiritual peace. It is **generally** true that:

- Obedience to God brings physical blessing because a Godly person lives a healthy lifestyle (although we still suffer the effects of a sin-cursed world)

- Obedience brings material blessing because a Godly person typically works hard, is honest and doesn't waste money. (although we still suffer the effects of a sin-cursed world)
- Obedience to God brings peace and contentment because you will be free of guilt and confusion. You have assurance that your life is on the right track and has a purpose. (the sin-cursed world can bother this one)

Deut. 28.1-2 "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God: (NKJV)

These were specific blessings promised to Israel, but the spiritual application for us is clear: God blesses those who obey Him. Obedience fulfills God's plan in our life. Obedience identifies us as Christ's family.

- John 3:22 And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. (NKJV)
- Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. (NKJV)
- Mark 3:35 For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother." (NKJV)

Let's summarize our two options when it comes to obeying or disobeying God:

1. **Disobedience** - brings fear, worry, anxiety, frustration, hopelessness, chastisement and results in eternal death.
2. **Obedience** - results in peace, contentment, blessing, happiness and eternal life.

Hmm... give me a minute, I'm thinking it over. **It must be a harder decision than it appears** since so few people choose to obey God. Millions of people can't be wrong about something so obvious... can they?

*God of Blessing, we pray that You will illumine our hearts to the true blessedness of simple obedience. We ask for Your strength so that we are able to obey, and for Your mercy when we fail to obey, In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you experiencing depression, fear, frustration or hopelessness? Have you considered that it COULD be that you are reaping the consequences of disobeying God?

**Application:** Disobedience comes in many forms ranging from willful defiance to passive ignorance. But the results are the same: a life that is never quite right even at it's best. Have the courage to ask God to reveal disobedience in your life and then give you the strength and wisdom to change it.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## When Blessing Brings Shame

Luke 5:8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (NKJV)

What did Peter see? He saw in spite of his doubt, when he did things the Lord's way, blessing followed. This brought a response of brokenness and humility in Peter because he realized that his sinful pride had caused him to doubt the Lord.

Peter and the boys had been fishing all night. Hadn't caught a thing. Now, this Carpenter is telling him to go back out and do the same thing again and expect a different result. Peter at least had the respect for Jesus to compel him to obey. But you have to believe that he considered it a complete waste of time.

Luke 5:5 But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." (NKJV)

Peter's words were not untruthful, nor disrespectful. They even had a hint of submissiveness in them. But you can almost hear him thinking "what a waste of time. I'm a professional fisherman. You're a carpenter, what do you know about fishing? I have worked these waters all night and there is nothing to be caught. But, I'll be a good disciple and obey. I tried to tell Him. I guess there is some lesson He's going to teach us about empty nets when we get done." So he said to Jesus in essence, "okay, if you say so, I guess I'll do it, but we're not going to catch anything."

Peter's disbelief is obvious because He didn't prepare for a catch at all, much less a big catch. He had to make an emergency call to his co-workers to come help. He didn't expect to need help.

Luke 5:6 And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. (NKJV)

There are a great many lessons in this verse.

- The Lord controls all creation. Animals, elements and the universe respond to His every wish.
- When the Lord demonstrates His power, it is always in extraordinary fashion. They didn't just catch a few fish, or even a "good" amount... they caught an unbelievable amount! So much so that the Lord's blessing could not be contained and spilled out all around.
- The Lord is often merciful despite our unbelief, blessing us for our potential faith, not our current faith.
- The Lord rewards our obedience and our willingness to surrender to His direction even when we doubt.

To his credit, Peter responds with **a quality we should all have**: a soft and contrite heart (Psalms 51.17) that quickly recognized his sin had caused him to doubt Jesus. Peter's heart of repentance and humility would serve him well at the time of his denial of Christ. Judas lacked this quality, and chose suicide over the mercy of Christ (Matt 27.5).

Many times we suffer toil and heartache because we labor in our own strength with life's troubles. Then we finally give up after exhausting our own abilities, and "give God a chance".

**We doubt that anything will ever change  
because we have already tried "everything".**

Peter had fished all night and caught nothing. Though he was a talented, successful fisherman, he caught nothing. What trial or defeat are you facing today? Have you tried everything? Are you quite sure that there is nothing that will ever change the problems you face? If yes, you'd be wrong.

Luke 5:9 For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; (NKJV)

Like Peter, the Lord is ready for you to turn to Him, to have faith and respond in obedience to His leading. Unlike Peter, you don't need to doubt that the Lord's answer to your troubles is exactly the perfect answer.

1 Peter 5:7 ...casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. (NKJV)

We have the opportunity to turn to the Lord immediately in complete faith and trust at the moment a trial faces us. At the crossroads of trust, we choose our self and face possible shame, or choose God and rest in peace He will guide us safely.

For those times when we choose the wrong road, when our stubbornness keeps us straining in our own effort until we finally turn to God... may we be ashamed and humbled by our sinful pride that causes us to toil and doubt. Above all, let's learn our lesson and choose God first from now on.

*Heavenly Father, You never cease to amaze us with Your abundance of blessing and goodness. Forgive us when we trust ourselves before turning to You. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** How many times has God not done what He said He would do? Why do you suppose we don't instinctively and immediately turn to God in all circumstances?

**Application:** God is infinitely more capable of caring for us and handling our burdens than we are. He's just waiting for us to figure it out.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Great Treasure!

Psalms 119:162 I rejoice at Your word As one who finds great treasure. (NKJV)

Today we continue our challenge of committing ourselves to private time with God. We have learned about the importance and blessing of devotion, and yesterday, looked at some practical steps for prayer time. Let's look at some suggestions for increasing the quality of our Bible study.

A common reason for inconsistent and dull Bible study, is a **lack of planning**. When you casually open the Bible and read with no real focus or purpose, it is not reasonable to expect God to flood you with excitement and enlightenment. The Bible will come alive and give you great expectation if you treat Scripture for what it is: **the very words of the Creator and King of the Universe**. After your time of prayer as discussed yesterday, your heart and mind will be clean and prepared to read the Word of God.

Before you actually begin reading, take a minute to pray and ask God to open your eyes to understand what you are going to read. Ask Him to show you the true meaning and how to apply it to your life. Ask God to bless your reading time with excitement, expectation and illumination. While you read, continually cycle inquisitive thoughts about the text: who, what, when, where and why.

- Who's this being written to? Who is it talking about?
- What does it mean? What is the purpose?
- When was it written? Is this about all times, or only for a specific time?
- Where was the writer? Where are the locations of the places described? Where did these events occur? What was the culture of the time?
- Why did God write this? Why was in this style, by this person, in this situation? Why is it located in this part of the Bible?

Continually ask this very important question: **SO WHAT?** That's another way of saying, "what does this **mean** to my life? How will this **transform** me more into the image of Christ and bring more glory to God?". It boils down to two basic questions:

**What did the writer mean to convey to the original reader?**  
**How does it apply to my life with God?**

With your spirit prepared through prayer; your mind and heart opened and asking the right questions; you can now begin your plan to read. **There is no perfect plan** for everyone. There is no magic formula or secret. **The important thing is to actually DO IT.**

If you are one who is struggling with inconsistency, a good way to start is to have a one year Bible Reading Plan that takes you methodically through Scripture. They are very easy to obtain, and you can even purchase Bibles that already have the dates right on the pages to make it easy.

A plan that includes small portions of the Old Testament, New Testament and other Books each day, generally keeps your attention easier than just starting at Genesis and reading straight through. It gets tough somewhere around Leviticus or so. There is a good Bible Reading Plan on my website at: <http://www.seriousfaith.com/plan>

This year-long reading plan takes you through the Old Testament (once), Psalms and Proverbs (once) and the New Testament (twice)... you get a little of each every day. Don't worry that you have missed some days already. Just get the schedule and start tomorrow on the right date. If you can make time, go back and catch up the days you have missed.

If you miss a day, you miss a day. **Just move on.** Many people get discouraged and quit if they miss a few days thinking that somehow it just won't do them any good to continue because they missed. Don't let that be a reason to quit! **Just keep going.** Catch up later if you can, but don't allow the stress of missing sometimes cause you to give up. So the basic plan is this:

- Prayer following the guidelines from yesterday
- Bible reading following one-year plan

Now, for those of you a little more motivated, here are some additional suggestions. To do the whole list would take an average reader about two hours. **It's not "all or nothing"**. Choose parts of it to add to your routine as your devotional time increases:

- One hour in prayer based on the guidelines I gave you yesterday
- One hour of Bible reading and contemplation of God's Word
  - Start with a **Bible Reading Plan** (<http://www.seriousfaith.com/plan>) so that you know you will methodically read the entire Bible and not neglect any portions. Read today's selection.
  - Next, read the full chapter in Proverbs that corresponds with the day's date. For example, today is January 24th, so read Proverbs 24
  - Next, go to the corresponding "date chapter" in Psalms; today would have been Psalms 24 (Jan. 24th).
    - After reading that chapter, you add 30 to the date number (24 + 30) to take you now to chapter 54. After reading Chapter 54, add 30 again, taking you to Chapter 84; and so on until you get to the end of Psalms, **typically 5 chapters**.
    - Why all these Psalms? Because Psalms covers the spectrum of all human emotions and experience. By covering those five chapters, you will ALWAYS find something that fits perfectly with whatever you are experiencing in life at the moment. It is normally my favorite time of reading each day.
  - Next, read a chapter from Ecclesiastes or Job because they speak such truth and wisdom about everyday life
    - Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes are the "wisdom" books
  - Finally, choose a New Testament "book of the month" (but not more than 7 full chapters because of the time it takes to read it). Read the same New Testament book (or seven chapters) every day, over and over, for 30 days in order to become thoroughly familiar with it. When time doesn't permit reading the entire book, listen to it on CD while you work or drive; and read it before going to bed at night.
  - We're not just trying to see how much we can read as if greater amounts make us more "godly". Speed and quantity are NOT the goal, but you will read faster with practice. It is a natural by-product of extensive reading.

Psalms 119:9-11 How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; (NKJV)

I don't want to leave you feeling like this is "too much", so let me close with some encouragement. The important thing is to start with **something**, and **be consistent**. Don't be impulsive and try to be "super Christian". If you have experienced

inconsistency and failure up to this point, start with a goal you know you can realistically keep. Here is a **reasonable** plan to get started with:

- Following the prayer guidelines from yesterday, start with 90 seconds on each of the 12 segments described. That's 18 minutes of prayer.
- Get a Bible Reading plan. Start with today's date and its reading selection. Don't worry about what you have missed. Read the passages listed for today. It will take an average reader about 30 minutes.

By doing this, you can immediately begin with about a **one hour daily devotional! Isn't that exciting?!** You will be so blessed **and amazed** at what God will do in your life that you will soon find yourself increasing your time with God each day!

Psalm 119:2 Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, Who seek Him with the whole heart! (NKJV)

*Father, as we commit to a plan to get serious about spending regular, disciplined time in Your Presence; we ask for Your strength and power to be faithful and consistent. Bless our time with You. We ask You to make it a time of excitement, refreshment and expectation. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Is your devotion time to this point inconsistent and ineffective? Do you believe that if you make the CHOICE to pray and study, God will bless you with the "feelings" of desire for it?

**Application:** Start with a plan and time you know you can keep. Do it consistently. Let nothing be more important.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## It's Off To Work We Go

Ecclesiastes 3:12 I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God. (NKJV)

In the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon relates his experience of trying to find happiness by indulging in every possible desire. He had anything and everything that is possible for a person to possess: wealth, power, fame, achievement, success, pleasure or lusts.

When he turned to **work** for satisfaction, he found that it was monotonous, tedious and futile... **apart from God**. Having immersed himself in his career, he tried to find contentment, and found nothing but emptiness. He realized it was unfulfilling and dreary; but work done "as unto the Lord" is satisfying and joyful.

Colossians 3:23-24 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. (NKJV)

**Any work** can be joyful and satisfying if our focus is on God. Digging ditches is sacred when dug as if God had asked you to dig them. Work is just as sacred as church is, when sanctified and dedicated to God's glory.

1 Corinthians 10:31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (NKJV)

There is an environment today of complete dissatisfaction at work. We are forever in pursuit of a higher paying job that requires less effort. We believe a "cushy" job will bring us happiness. We climb the ladder of upward mobility in the vain pursuit of the "perfect job" that will fulfill us and bring contentment. It doesn't exist.

**No job, work or occupation done for the purpose of self-fulfillment, instead of honoring God, will ever bring contentment.**

To the contrary, there is **no such thing as a bad job** when done "as unto the Lord." I'm not talking about an immoral or sinful situation where you should NOT be at a job because it is ungodly. Assuming no moral or Biblical prohibition is involved, there is no work too menial or unimportant that it cannot be done to God's glory.

Surveys repeatedly show that the overwhelming majority of people disdain their jobs and are constantly looking for a "better" one. While there is nothing wrong with changing jobs, stop and think of your reasons for wanting it. Is it the natural progression of experience and increase in skills? Or are you looking for that next job because you think somehow you will be happy, if only you had a better job?

1 Timothy 6:6-7 Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. (NKJV)

If you find yourself anxious for a job change today, ask to reveal the true motivation behind it. If you have not learned to be content in whatever circumstance you are in, at any given time; a new job is no going to change things.

*Our God, help us to find contentment apart from circumstances, including our jobs. Help us to understand that any job, any task and any responsibility is holy if done whole heartedly for your glory. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Why do you have a job? If you're unhappy, are dedicating your employment to the Lord? If you're a stay at home parent, do you struggle with your "job" being unfulfilling? Do you understand "as unto the Lord"?

**Application:** No matter what job, role or responsibility you have, if done for the Lord, it can be sacred, fulfilling and a source of joy.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## When Will We Ever Learn

Luke 5:5 But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." (NKJV)

How much heartache and burden do we needlessly endure because of our tendency to trust God **as a last resort**?

We are such pitiful creatures. Even though God has proved Himself trustworthy without fail, we still want to "toil" in our own power. What a great burden of futility we could avoid if only our first response was to immediately turn to God in all things.

Who among us does not have a painful circumstance that God has sovereignly appointed (2Samuel 16.10-11) to test how quickly, how easily, and how consistently we will turn to Him when faced with yet another round of battle?

Perhaps for you it is a wayward child or unfaithful spouse; or maybe someone is unjustly attacking your reputation. For many today, it is an ex-spouse and the battles over money and children. For others, it may be a private sin or internal struggle. But for all of us, it is that easily identifiable, recurring, relentless circumstance that threatens to steal our peace, rob our joy and discourage us about life.

Whatever form it takes, it will tempt us to respond from our flesh (Mark 14.38). Our emotions and self interests are a cruel taskmaster. It is the rare person who immediately responds by surrendering the entire situation to God, again and again, as many times as it takes.

**Most of us "toil" over adversity our way, until we are left with no hope but to turn to God.**

And that's not necessarily always bad. I believe God frequently allows us to labor and struggle in our own futile effort for several reasons:

1. We are left with no other hope but Him
2. It will be very clear that we have no ability within ourselves to control life
3. God will receive the maximum glory because we are left with no doubt as to the WHO finally took care of things
4. It develops in us a stronger, proven, more observable faith in God

As we mature spiritually however, our life **should** be increasingly marked with a quicker and more habitual response to forego our futile efforts and surrender our burdens to God immediately, seeking His response and leading.

**Turn to God first, then let Him decide what effort He would have you undertake.**

When we speak of casting our burdens on the Lord, that doesn't imply we don't have any responsibility or effort on our part. We do, but most of the time we get it backwards. We try every last thing we can think of, and follow every knee-jerk impulse spawned by our emotions. Then, when that doesn't work, we finally turn to God and ask Him to care for us.

Luke 5:6 And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. (NKJV)

**Plan ahead.** Before the trial comes again, determine NOW that your first response will be to turn to God and ask "Lord, what would you have me to do?" And if He says "cast your net", then you know that your effort will not be in vain.



Develop the habit and discipline of denying your emotions and natural tendency to direct your own life. Learn to instinctively turn immediately to God in every circumstance. The only way to develop this spiritual discipline is through practice (Psalms 9.10), so start today.

*Our God, if only we would not waste time, and just turn to You immediately. Give us the wisdom to know Your Will and the courage to follow it. Give us the common sense to trust You, instead of ourselves. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Is God the last resort for you after your own abilities fail? Is He anything but the FIRST choice in every circumstance?

**Application:** God is infinitely more capable of caring for us and handling our burdens than we are. He's just waiting for us to figure it out.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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## Perilous Times

2 Timothy 3:1-5 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! (NKJV)

In the last days, good will be called evil and evil will be called good. Mankind will have a "form" of godliness but it will be false because their hearts will be so wicked they won't even recognize how evil their behavior is. Who would deny that in general even professing Christians are typically tolerant of an embarrassing level of sinfulness?

Let's look at some Biblical contrasts between wickedness and righteousness.

Proverbs 28:1 The wicked flee when no one pursues, But the righteous are bold as a lion. (NKJV)

Wickedness keeps a person restless and unsettled. The guilty conscience worries about being caught at any moment and sees every person as the one who will uncover secret sin.

When we stand righteous before God through repentance and prayer, we are bold in the face of every situation. When we are in close fellowship with God, we don't fear discovery of concealed sin and hypocrisy.

Psalms 10:3 For the wicked boasts of his heart's desire; He blesses the greedy and renounces the LORD. (NKJV)

The wicked person brags about being free of Godly constraints, and proudly proclaims exactly what they think of anyone who would dare "judge" them for their sinful desire. How many times have you heard someone say that it is "nobody's business" what they do?

Psalms 34:17 The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles. (NKJV)

The righteous are heard by the Lord, who is ever listening for our cries of help. The Lord is ready and able to deliver the righteous from their troubles.

Psalms 37:12 The wicked plots against the just, And gnashes at him with his teeth. (NKJV)

The wicked constantly look for ways to persecute the righteous because holiness exposes sin. A wicked person feels guilty in the presence of the Godly and instead of responding in repentance, they seek to destroy the one who exposes wickedness by their very presence.

Proverbs 15:8 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright is His delight. (NKJV)

Nothing a wicked person does pleases God, no matter how holy the act may appear on the surface. The prayer of the righteous is a joyous thing to God, it is His delight.

I highlight these verses to demonstrate that the Bible clearly divides the wicked and the righteousness. There is nothing relative about it. It is not uncertain or debatable. The wicked are condemned and the righteous are blessed.

**The wicked and the righteous are clearly defined,  
and the consequences plainly stated.**

We live in a world today where the line between wicked and righteous has been blurred. It is "intolerant" to define the difference between good and evil. It is "judgmental" to declare an absolute right and wrong. It is "mean spirited" to call anything sinful.

The result is a world that finds the words "righteous" and "wicked" to be old-fashioned, "religious" terms. But the Bible clearly divides all people into one or the other. The blessings of righteousness are clearly pronounced. The condemnation of wickedness declared without ambiguity.

...For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God...

Read that list again (lovers of themselves, etc.). There is not one behavior on that list that is not defended today as acceptable given the right circumstances (relative morality). The whole idea of wickedness is reserved either for the most severe extremes in taboo behavior or is hypocritically applied to anyone who is intolerant or judgmental enough to declare that God has set an absolute standard of right and wrong. Just about any "lifestyle" or "personal choice" is considered "nobody's business" as long as "it doesn't hurt anyone else". The only person considered wicked is the person who dares call anything "sinful".

In the last days perilous times will come where mankind will have a form of godliness that cohabitates quite comfortably with sin. Those times are no doubt upon us.

*Father, we pray for Your strength and guidance in these perilous times. It is becoming harder and harder to stand up for Your truth. We pray for courage as the world grows more wicked every day. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you tolerate a certain level of wickedness in your life? What is your standard of holiness? Other people, or God?

**Application:** Wickedness is not relative. God has given us an absolute standard regardless of the world's standard. Do you know what that standard is?

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Checks and Balances

2 John 10-11 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. (NKJV)

The Apostle John instructs the "Lady" (verse 2) that love and obedience are not sufficient in the absence of truth. She had practiced hospitality (love) in accordance with Christian commandment (obedience) but John tells her not to receive those who bring a false doctrine (truth).

Love, obedience and truth are **the three pronged criteria** for balance in the Christian life. All three must exist.

John 4:24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (NKJV)

Truth is what brings meaning and value to love and obedience. Love without truth is dangerous because it lacks discernment and may passively promote things God has not approved. It is popular today to downplay the importance of doctrine and standards of behavior (holiness), all in the name of love. Obedience without truth is futile because we may be sincerely doing the wrong thing, evidenced every day by millions who follow false religions.

1 Corinthians 13:3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. (NKJV)

Love is our motivation. Love is the foundation of all things Christian. God IS love. Love is not a characteristic of Him, He embodies what love is.

Obedience without love can be legalistic and a futile attempt to gain God's favor. Truth without love is just an academic exercise of knowledge that reaches the head, but not the heart. Truth without love is merely academic exercise.

James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (NKJV)

1 John 3:24 Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. (NKJV)

Obedience demonstrates our love to God, is evidence of our salvation and reflects our submission to a Holy God. Love without obedience is lip service. Truth without obedience is merely head knowledge.

Love, truth and obedience are three standards that all of our Christian beliefs and activity should be measured by. Disregarding or over-emphasizing any of them, leads to the divisions and fads that are so common today.

"Love only" produces a powerless, wishy-washy, standardless Christianity. "Truth only" cultivates an elitist academic religion where debate, discussion and the latest ideas replace service and good works. "Obedience only" leaves us with a dead, legalistic Christianity bordering dangerously on earning your salvation by keeping a checklist.

Examine your own walk of faith. Is any part out of balance? Do you obey God's word? Do you love with God's love? Do you measure all things with God's truth?

Lord God, we pray for wisdom and discernment so we may have balance in our Christian walk. Let us learn to love in spirit and truth; obey the

truth in love; and pursue truth applied with love in obedience. In Jesus Name, Amen.

**Contemplation:** What happens when one of these three are ignored, or gets over-emphasized? Are you afraid to confront sin because you "love" the person? Do you hear the truth but don't obey it? Do you obey God feeling like you have earned favor from Him?

**Application:** Learn to cultivate a mindset that filters your Christian walk equally through the filters of love, truth and obedience. All three must exist in balance in true Christianity.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## The King Has Left the Building

Judges 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes. (NKJV)

It sounds as if the Israelites had a really good arrangement. There was no King over them to tell them what to do and they were just going around doing the right thing. The future King of Israel would be appointed by God and would have absolute, unequaled, unquestioned authority. Disobedience would mean death. He would rule with complete power. But those days were to come.

At this point in history, there was no king and everyone just did what they thought was right in their own eyes (although they should have had Godly priests to follow but didn't). It's like a teacher who leaves a classroom of students alone by themselves. There is no authority present and the students do whatever they feel is right. Sounds wonderful, except for those four little words that completely changes the entire picture:

### **In his own eyes.**

There was no holy, absolute Godly authority in Israel (despite the priests), and each man did what was right... in his own eyes. Read that carefully. There is an infinite chasm that separates these two thoughts:

each man did what was right

VS.

each man did what was right in his own eyes.

Every Israelite had become a law unto themselves, each deciding what was right and what was wrong. Do you think there was any danger of people being just slightly biased in their own personal judgment of right and wrong? We have a fancy term for it today: moral relativism. Definition: right and wrong are not absolute but based on changing circumstances and opinions. What's wrong for you, might not be wrong for me depending on the circumstances.

Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? (NKJV)

If it is true that the heart is deceitful, and of course it is, do you think it effects what is right "in our own eyes"? The plain fact is, there is probably not a sin imaginable that we could not justify to ourselves in some manner. Not true you say? Every kind of evil you can imagine is defended today. Sickness, mental illness, childhood trauma, addictions, uncontrollable impulses, chemical imbalance, etc are all used as justifications to re-label sin as something else. It's not a question of IF an evil is committed, but WHY it was done that determines if something is right or wrong.

Ironically (and predictably) our main verse, Judges 21:15, follows a bizarre chain of events enacted by men deciding what was right "in their own eyes" (Judges 17:6):

- Judges 17 - Micah sets up himself up illegally as a priest of God and begins idol worship
- Judges 18 - more Israelites accept the false priest and idolatry eventually stealing his idols because they believe in the "power" the idols possess
- Judges 19 - a Levite, the true priests of Israel - sinfully takes a mistress who immediately engages in prostitution and defames him Instead of dealing with the offense, the Levite begs her to come back home
  - He goes to the harlot-wife's father to stay for a while in his home

- When the Levite finally goes back home, he stops in town called Gibeah to stay the night because the other cities of "God's" people were too dangerous
- In good old Sodom and Gomorrah tradition, some men of Gibeah hear there's a visitor in town and demand that the Levite be sent out to them for some sinful "greeting time"
- In a shameful display of cowardice, the Levite and the master of the house in which he was staying, offer to send out their daughter and mistress instead. How polite!
- The Levite's mistress ends up being the victim of choice. She is raped and abused all night and left for dead at the door
- The Levite finds her the next morning, and upset that such an "evil thing" had been done (what hypocrisy!) takes a knife and chops up the woman in 12 pieces and sends them throughout all the land along with a note of indignation about what had happened. It's not clear from the text if she was actually even dead for sure before he went to chopping on her
- Judges 20 - all of Israel is outraged this has happened (while ignoring the sinful Levite's actions). They convene to hear an exaggerated and twisted version of the facts They gathered for war against the town of Gibeah, and the tribe of Benjamin
  - The tribe of Benjamin is given a chance to hand over the actual men who had killed the woman, but in their pride, they refuse. They would rather have war, than see justice for a few criminals
  - God allowed the outnumbered Benjaminites to humiliate the rest of Israel by killing 40,000 Israelites in the first of two military assaults
  - Once humbled, God then turns the tables and allows the tribe of Benjamin to be completely destroyed
- Judges 21 - After destroying every man, woman and child of the tribe of Benjamin except for 600 men that fled into the wilderness, the men of Israel are now worried that one of the 12 tribes would be lost completely because they had made a vow that none of their daughters would marry a Benjaminite So they sent a small assault force to a town called Jabesh-Gilead and kill every single person except 400 virgins whom they kidnap and bring back to "give" to the men of Benjamin as wives
  - They still needed two hundred more wives, so they instructed the remaining men to steal their wives from another group of people so that the Israelites wouldn't violate their vow to not "give" them wives. Stealing would not be giving and thus they could remain "righteous"!

**This what men do when they do what is right in their own eyes!**

For the most part our modern world is without The King and men do what is right in their own eyes. In this civilized and advanced age, we would never be guilty of such bizarre and blatantly evil behavior though, right? Consider this and answer that yourself:

- You can kill an unborn baby and get applauded; but disturb a turtle's egg and go to jail.
- You can't mention Jesus in public schools but you can teach witchcraft and "lifestyle alternatives".
- People are offended by a cross at a fire station during Christmas but declare a cross sitting in a container of urine "art".

- Teaching abstinence before marriage is intolerant bigotry while rampant fornication, adultery and homosexuality are personal lifestyle choices.
- It's censorship to ask for any standard of decency on TV or movies but "freedom of speech" for a naked women to sensually cover herself in chocolate sauce on stage in front a live audience at taxpayer's expense.
- Tolerance of all religions, all ideas and all "lifestyle choices" is the heavily promoted with "intolerance" being the vilest of acts... except for the blatant intolerance of the ideas of God which are only tolerated as long as they don't actually hinder what you want to do.

The Israelites were without a King. The majority of the world is without the King of Kings today. They did what was right in their own eyes and were guilty of the most obvious, blatantly hypocritical, wicked behavior. Their heart was deceitful and desperately wicked.

Is mankind still the same today? You decide.

*O Holy God, without the King of Kings we are left to do what is right in our own eyes and we agree with You that man's heart is desperately wicked. Forgive us of thinking we know what is right and illuminate our hearts to what is truly right in Your eyes as we learn to submit our lives to the King. In the name of the King, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Is your heart desperately wicked and continually evil? Do you know what is right and wrong? Where does your standard come from? In the honest privacy of your thoughts, do you think you would live a righteous life if you were in control of things? Your answer to this will reveal much about your understanding of the nature of sin.

**Application:** Don't fool yourself. If you were left to do what was right in YOUR own eyes, you would be just as evil as anyone we have discussed today. Understanding this is crucial. If you don't wholeheartedly believe it, ask God to increase your understanding about the sin nature of man and illumine your heart to the reality of life "without the King" and the danger of doing what is "right in your own eyes".

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## What's the Use?

Ecclesiastes 2:17 Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind. (NKJV)

In other words, what's the use? Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever got to that point in your life where you just truly feel like "why bother?"

Life, apart from God, will certainly leave you feeling that way. There is no security or peace in money, jobs or relationships. You can lose your health, job, money, family or possessions in the snap of a finger.

No matter how diligent, talented or successful you are, in 30 seconds disaster could take it all away. Your house could burn down. You could become disabled or disfigured in a car wreck. The doctor could call to tell you that you have cancer. Divorce papers might show up. The cops could call to tell you your child has been murdered. The boss could walk in and tell you that you have no job. A stock market crash could wipe out 20 years of investment. A lawsuit could ruin you.

### **So what's the use? There isn't any. Apart from God.**

Have you ever thanked God that you don't have to feel like "what's the use?" It's amazing that people can even get out of bed when they don't trust in God. Life would be truly futile and despairing. It is such a blessing to know that we have a Father in Heaven who loves us, cares for us and watches over us.

Have you ever contemplated how wonderful it is to have a purpose in living? It is so blessed to realize that God will care for us through every hardship, every trial and every tragedy. Not only will He care for us, but He will use those times to strengthen us, and when the trial is over, we are actually better off for having had endured it! (Rom 8:28)

Far from being futile and hopeless, Christians get the unique opportunity to anticipate that any hardship or loss will actually be a blessing from God. The greater the trial or suffering, the greater the gift from God. He will use it to transform us in to the image of our Savior and will reward us for our faith in Him. As usual, our Amazing, Magnificent God, takes what sin has ruined, and transforms it into unique and exclusive blessing for His children.

**Without God, life is truly useless.** There really is no reason for living from day to day. For Christians, every moment has a use. Every act, every decision, every choice, every effort.... every breath we take is saturated with purpose, and a reason to live life with joyful anticipation!

*Our Father in Heaven, thank You for giving meaning to our life. May we live every moment to its fullest potential so that You will be glorified. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Think of work, duties, responsibilities... all the daily aspects of life. Do you sometimes feel like "what's the use?"

**Application:** Everything we do can have purpose, meaning and blessing if consecrated to God. Learn to dedicate your every moment to God and see if He does not bless life, and give it new meaning.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# Fear God: the Conclusion of the Whole Matter

## Part: 1

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter:  
Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.  
For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether  
it is good or evil.

King Solomon had spent his whole life trying to find happiness and meaning. God had allowed him unlimited resources and opportunity to find a reason for living any way he could. He pursued every possibility available to man: work, wealth, pleasure, fame, friends, love and power. In the end Solomon concluded that life was futile and useless apart from God.

Now all has been heard and here's the answer  
to a meaningful life:

### **FEAR GOD AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS**

Not only was the conclusion to "fear God and keep His commandments", but Solomon stated that this was the **whole duty of man**! Well, something is wrong here. Either Solomon was oversimplifying things, or we don't really understand what the "fear of God" is because you can't possibly sum up the whole answer to living life in six words, can you? Fear God and keep His commandments. That's it?!

Yes! That's it! Fear God and keep His commandments. That is the conclusion of whole matter - the question of life and how to live it. The reason why it seems too simple to us is because we have such a shallow, diluted and obscured understanding of what fearing God means.

Until recent times, a truly Godly person would be described as "a God-fearing man". Why? Because Saints of old had a better understanding of what fearing God meant. It has now become old fashioned, "legalistic" and unpopular to speak of fearing God. It has been determined that the truly effective way to draw people to God is to speak only of His love. We explain how the Lord will fix everything in your life that is broke and bring you happiness. We don't want to risk portraying God as scary, harsh or judgmental. So in our best human wisdom, it has been determined that speaking about fearing God will hurt the effort to bring people to Him, or bring them to Him for the wrong reason.

But, the wisest man that ever lived apart from Christ Himself said that not only should we fear God but it is the **CONCLUSION** of the question of life, and the **WHOLE** duty of man. We have a hard time believing it can be that simple.

### **Maybe there is much more to "fearing God" than we commonly understand today.**

The "fear of God" has slowly lost it's true meaning until the average Christian today thinks it is simply a deep respect for God, a fear of His judgment and punishment of sin. As a result, we don't talk of fearing God because we all know that the "correct" way to evangelize is not to try and "scare" people into believing in God.

It is true that part of the idea of fearing God does indeed involve respect and judgment but this wholly inadequate grasp of what it means is why Solomon's conclusion holds so little impact for us today. Solomon states that not only is fearing God and obeying him important, it is **the conclusion of the WHOLE matter....** it

sums up the entire duty of man! **That's a very bold statement and one worth examining.**

In this series of devotionals we will examine what it means to fear the Lord and rediscover this truth that was so central to Christianity until recent times. If the Bible concludes that it is the "conclusion" to the whole question of life, then it should be well worth our effort to find out what it means.

*Great and Mighty God, You have told us in Your Word that the conclusion of the whole matter of life is very simply to fear You and obey You. If it is really that simple, we pray that You will illumine our hearts with a deep understanding of what this truly means. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Have you ever wondered if there is a single answer to all of life's concerns? Does it seem too simple that fearing God and obeying Him could really be the "conclusion of the whole matter"? Does that sound like some quaint Christian saying that fits nicely in a Bible study but could hardly be true in real life?

**Application:** The Fear of God should be the continual mindset and spiritual filter for our whole life. The problem is, we have lost the true meaning and depth of this fear. Write down what you think the "fear of the Lord" is and keep your answer to see how your understanding progresses as we study it.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change will you make in light of this truth?

3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# Fear God: Shock & Awe

## Part: 2

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

Six short words sum up the whole duty of man. Simple, but hardly simplistic.

### FEAR GOD AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS

The idea of fearing God has been relegated to the heap of old-fashioned Christian platitudes that are good for adding some nostalgia to a sermon but hardly useful in everyday life. In fact, the idea of fearing God has been discarded with even greater fervor because it is now considered "unloving" to promote the idea of fearing God.

This is a by-product of a misunderstanding of what it means to "fear God". The common definition of this is a deep respect and fear of judgment. While it certainly encompasses these ideas, this is only a surface understanding. The fear of God is a mixture of all-consuming awesomeness, fall-on-your-face reverence and blessed security.

It's a shame that the advertising industry has watered down all of our powerful descriptive words. In a never-ending attempt to **make something new seem better than the existing**, more and more exaggeration is needed until the latest **bubble gum** is now "bursting with awesome flavor". It seemed to all start back when bread wasn't just good anymore, it became "Wonder" bread. Let's look at the idea of God being Awesome.

#### **Awesome:**

inspiring awe or admiration or wonder;  
an overwhelming feeling of wonder or admiration;

**an emotion variously combining dread, veneration, and wonder that is inspired by authority or by the sacred or sublime**

Well, I can tell you pretty confidently that a new bubble gum flavor hardly results in the feeling of dread, wonder or anything sublime. The same would be true of soda pop, music releases, clothing brands, bathroom cleaners and the latest car models.

Lest we be hypocritical, we are guilty in the Church of adopting this same worldly method of exaggerating: we have awesome praise & worship; awesome Preachers and awesome "experiences" on a regular basis. Anything that happens regularly and routinely will hardly ever deserve the true label of "awesome". In fact, it could be said that NOTHING related solely to human experience is awesome by definition. God's presence is needed to produce something truly awesome.

The military uses the term "shock and awe" to describe an unparalleled and paralyzing bombardment of firepower that leaves the enemy in such fear that they will quickly resign to defeat rather than face further destruction.

The greatest shock and awe possible  
by an earthly military doesn't begin to compare  
with the Lord God Almighty King of the Universe!

Let's try to recapture some of the sense of the fear that is the natural result of God's presence by refreshing our understanding of Awesomeness.

Psalm 47:2 For the Lord Most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth. (NKJV)

**Dread:** to fear greatly; to regard with awe; to feel extreme reluctance; to meet or face; to be apprehensive or fearful

The holiness, greatness and power of God is infinitely greater than anything we can imagine. Try to imagine the simultaneous detonation of every nuclear bomb, every explosive device and every military weapon on the entire earth. The dread felt would pale in comparison to the dread a Holy God would produce by His presence. His is a power so great, so unfathomable and so consuming that the common response of all who have been in His presence is to fall flat on their face, try to find some place to hide and wish they were dead rather be in His presence.

Isaiah 8:13 The Lord of hosts, Him you shall hallow; Let Him be your fear, And let Him be your dread. (NKJV)

**Veneration:** the profound and consuming fear produced by the presence of Deity.

The presence of God allows us to be anything but comfortable or casual (not to be confused with security). Christianity today is full of personalities who claim far too casual a relationship with the Almighty and the Lord Jesus. The frailty and sinfulness of man causes us to wither and recoil in the presence of the Holy God who knows no sin and cannot tolerate its presence.

Job 23:15 Therefore I am terrified at His presence; When I consider this, I am afraid of Him. (NKJV)

**Wonder:** having full attention or astonishment at something awesomely mysterious or new to one's experience.

Beginning with "Wonder Bread" we have lost the entire idea of true wonder. God is so far beyond our comprehension, so holy and so magnificent that to meditate on even one aspect of His nature SHOULD leave us gaping in amazement. We can begin to get a glimpse of the appropriate response of wonder by examining our feelings of earthly experience: a Space Shuttle launch, the eruption of Mt. Saint Helen's, the Grand Canyon or Mount Everest. These produce a wonder and amazement in those who see it but it is insignificant compared to the wonder that God will someday produce in every single person who has ever lived.

1 Chronicles 16:24 Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples. (NKJV)

**Sublime:** to elevate or exalt especially in dignity or honor; to render finer (as in purity or excellence); to convert (something inferior) into something of higher worth.

The presence of God should render us "finer", transforming us into something of greater purity and excellence. I would venture to say that there is not a desert or shampoo that is actually capable of doing either. When we are in the presence of God and observing His holiness, it transforms us into the image of Christ for His glory.

2 Corinthians 3:18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (NKJV)

**The fear of God originates in the AWESOME nature of God** - His power and greatness is so overwhelming, it consumes us. How do you ever approach this true understanding of God? By spending time in His presence; by asking Him to reveal His nature to you; by meditating on different attributes of God.

This is the conclusion of the whole matter: FEAR THE **AWESOME** GOD (obeying His commandments comes quite naturally if we can get that first part!)

*Awesome Holy God, O that we could get a glimpse of the true power and wonder of You! We pray for that glimpse and the transformation it will bring to our lives. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Have you fallen victim to the watering down of our great descriptive words such as "awesome"? Do you think the diluting of our vocabulary was on accident? What is your definition of awesome? Is "fearing God" beginning to take on new meaning for you?

**Application:** To understand the Fear of God is going to take some mental reprogramming and meditation on your part. Write down your definitions of "awesome" and "fear" so you can see how they change as you grow in your understanding of the conclusion: Fear God and keep His commandments.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change will you make in light of this truth?
3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Fear God: Proximity

### Part: 3

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

Now all has been heard and this is the conclusion: fear God and keep His commandments. It says the whole "duty" of man but the original meaning is better stated by saying it is "the whole of man". In other words, fearing God completes us and makes us into what God created us for.

You may find yourself having to admit that the idea of the "fear of God" is not a reality for you. You haven't reached to any degree a point in your Christian walk where the awesome greatness and power of God creates any feelings of wonder, reverence and amazement in your heart. Maybe you've never had the urge to fall flat on your face, to hide, and be totally gripped in reverence presence of a power so far superior, so incredibly overwhelming and so consuming that you can literally feel your human strength drain away at the mere thought of God's presence.

If that seems a strange idea to you, maybe you have a "proximity" deficiency. Proximity means to be very close to something, to be within its immediate area of influence, to be near to the actual presence. **Proximity makes something real.**

#### **Proximity:**

- the region close around a person or thing
- immediately preceding or following
- very near : close : imminent

In the mornings, I like to read my Bible aloud and pray while walking the perimeter of our church parking lot. On the corner of our property, there is an electric company substation that is securely fenced in. It's that type of fence and solid construction that clearly gives you the impression you would be making a big mistake should you decide to climb over it.

All our life we are educated about the dangers of electricity. I was warned many times about the dangers of power lines and not flying a kite near them. We are instructed to stay away from fallen power lines and the awful consequences of not heeding that warning. So I have always been aware of how dangerous, powerful and fearsome these electrical lines were. Even so, because I had never been close to them, they still didn't invoke the respect from me that I have now. They just looked like metal rope strung from pole to pole running down each street. They never really got my attention.

Then I began walking close to this power substation in the morning. It is scary to think of being inside that fence! First you have this ominous hum and buzz that penetrates you completely through and through. There are these coils and metal casings with thick cables and insulators everywhere. Everything about this fenced areas says DANGER! STAY OUT! You can sense the incredible power and it leaves no doubt as to what the result of foolishness or irreverent curiosity would be.

The difference is PROXIMITY. Being close to power makes it real. Being within the immediate vicinity creates an appropriate fear. Being within the reach of its immediate effects results in a proper understanding of how feeble I am compared to



it. And no matter how well you describe it, you can't really understand it until you have been there yourself.

If that doesn't hit home with you, think about these other examples:

- **Fire** - everyone knows the danger of fire and how insignificant we can be in the face of its fury. Imagine yourself trapped in a burning building. The proximity of the fire would make it more real to you that it could ever be by just having a knowledge of it.
- **Natural disaster** - where I live, it's tornadoes. For you it might be hurricanes or earthquakes. We all have a head knowledge about the destructive power of these incredible natural occurrences. But, ask anyone who has ever been trapped in the path of a tornado, or inside a building being rocked by an earthquake if they have a different respect for them!. They will never see those events the same way again. Proximity has brought them an understanding that can never be gained any other way except by being in the imminent area of affect.
- **Automobiles** - everyone is taught the power and danger of motorized vehicles. We have seatbelts and airbags to protect us from the power of a ton of steel hurdling down the road. The human body is no match for the force, weight and destruction that can be the result of a collision. The thought of a car wreck is scary. Many of us have been in minor to moderate collisions, and we have a new found respect for the helplessness produced in that moment of crisis. For those of you who have survived major collisions, you can tangibly experience the terror of that crash just at the thought of it.

My point is, that PROXIMITY is the difference between an academic, intellectual knowledge and truly knowing something in the depths of your heart and soul.

**Proximity is the difference between  
simple knowledge and true experience.**

If the fear of the Lord is something you have trouble understanding, something you have never felt, something you have learned about but never experienced, **perhaps you have a proximity deficiency**. Maybe you have never been close enough to God to experience His awesomeness, to feel the power and overwhelming superiority of His nature that can only come with close proximity.

Remember, the natural fear of the power and greatness of God is only one aspect of the "fear of God". It's not my intent to imply that simple fear is all there is to this idea. But the natural fear in the presence of His power is the focus of this particular lesson.

How do you come into close proximity of God? By spending time with Him. By being alone with Him. By saturating your life with His Word. By focused, diligent and regular prayer. By meditation on His attributes and character. By purposely seeking His presence.

There are no magic formulas or shortcuts. To learn the true nature of the fear of God... you have to be close to Him. **Proximity changes head knowledge in to real experience.**

This is the conclusion of the whole matter: FEAR THE **POWERFUL** GOD (obeying His commandments comes quite naturally if we can get that part!)

*God of Wonders, we ask that you help us to know a proper fear of You. You have said that is the "whole" of our existence. As we come closer to Your presence, we pray that You will grant us a glimpse of Your true nature. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** How close are you to God? Would you say that your life is spent in close proximity to Him? Have you considered that your "fear of the Lord" is directly related to the distance between you and Him?

**Application:** Proximity to God is the key to just about everything in our Christian life. To whatever degree you are experiencing defeat, mediocrity or victory... examine your degree of proximity to God. Proximity to the Lord requires time, focus, meditation, solitude and discipline.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change will you make in light of this truth?

3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## **Fear God: Current Status**

### **Part: 4**

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

It is very bold to declare in six words the conclusion to the whole matter of life. Only God can get away with describing creation in 10 words, and life in six: Fear God and obey His commandments. As humans we want things to be plain, and that's about as plain as it gets.

The enacting of that truth however is far from plain. To know what the Bible means by "fear God" takes diligent effort on our part to study, learn, seek, ask and experience. The fear of God is a mixture of several elements of our response when confronted with the reality of His nature.

**God is truly awesome.** His power and presence are overwhelming, and terrifying. It is impossible for us to fully comprehend. The awesome reality of God's power would make us feel something similar to what the poor souls in the top of the World Trade Center must have felt the moment the tower started to collapse. The feeling of helplessness, insignificance and submission to the power of what was occurring had to be as tangible and intense as a human could probably ever feel short of being in God's direct presence.

For those of us who weren't there but experienced it through television, we can have an idea of that power, an intellectual observation of it, but no doubt it was real to the victims in a way we can never know. It was the close proximity to the source of power that brought true understanding. In the same way, the closer we are to God, the nearer we are to the source, the more real and tangible our understanding of the "fear of God".

### **God's power can represent salvation or destruction punishment or condemnation**

Should we have a consuming terror and dread towards God? Yes, and no. It is certainly a natural consequence as the reality of His power compared to our helplessness becomes more focused. But God brings an element into the situation that was absent for those who experienced the Trade Center collapse personally. God is an awesome and terrifying power, but as His children, He's on our side. His power is there for our safety and security!

Think of three elements that make up the fear of God:

- His power compared to ours and the natural fear it produces;
- the realization and true understanding that comes from being in close proximity to Him;
- and finally, the security, comfort and joy we have knowing that power is on our side!

### **The nature of our relationship determines the nature of our fear**

In the presence of a force or person that has the ability to determine our fate, the nature of our relationship with it makes all the difference in whether our response is

security or terror. Try to imagine yourself in each situation and the feelings you would have towards the presence of greater power:

- You drive up and over a hill on the highway. Just over the top you spot a police officer tracking your speed. You see him and:
  - **Situation 1:** your stomach sinks, your foot goes to the brake and you hope for the best because your doing 20 miles per hour over the speed limit. Now your watching your rear view mirror to see if he "got" you.
  - **Situation 2:** you quickly glance at your speedometer to check your speed but feel comfortable with the law enforcement's presence because you habitually and faithfully obey the speed limits.
- A guy twice your size and much stronger has just tied you up and thrown you off the top of 100 foot tower. You are terrified:
  - **Situation 1:** and your life flashes before your eyes as you realize you are about to die. This man has long hated you and you feared something terrible was going to happen eventually.
  - **Situation 2:** but exhilarated. Your friend owns a bungee jumping company and you have been working up the courage to do this for a long time. He got you all safely secured with the harnesses and then for a little adrenaline bonus, gave you a "friendly" push off the tower. It is intensely scary but you know you are safe and in the end, it will be a thrilling experience.
- A man with a knife has immobilized you is proceeding to cut you with it. You feel:
  - **Situation 1:** despair and panic because he broke into your house at night to rob you. Finding you awake, he tied you up and assured you of your death so there won't be any witnesses.
  - **Situation 2:** apprehensive but safe. You are falling asleep under anesthetic and a skilled surgeon is about to perform a heart bypass that will save your life.

**Our relationship to the greater power** determines how we respond. We still feel the natural fear and insignificance that comes with being helpless and weak in the presence of greater power.

**Whether the greater power is friend or foe  
is the difference between despair or security**

The closer our proximity to God, the more natural our feeling of respect, fear and helplessness. Whether or not we are in right standing with God will determine whether we feel relief and safety or guilt and condemnation. It's the difference between fearing, and being afraid. There is a very real difference between the two and what you will feel in God's presence depends on what your relationship with Him is.

Fear God: this is the whole duty of man. That Godly fear is a mixture of three things: understanding God's infinite power and nature compared to us; having that understanding deepened as a result of proximity; and being in a right relationship with God so that His power is for security and blessing, not our destruction.

The current status of your relationship with Him determines whether you will fear Him or be scared of Him.

*Fearsome God, we pray today that Your Presence will be comforting, not condemning. We ask You to reveal the true nature of our current status with You. Give us the wisdom to make the necessary corrections. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you scared of God because you know your relationship is not right with Him? Have you ever known a time when you feared Him but felt safe in His Presence?

**Application:** Your relationship with God determines the nature of your fear of Him. Imagine yourself face to face with Him today. If condemnation and guilt are mixed with your fear, take steps to get your current status with God corrected.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change will you make in light of this truth?

3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# Facts About Christians

## Part: 1

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, (NKJV)

Did you know there are certain facts about you that became true the moment you trusted in Christ and you became a new person in God's eyes?

**These facts are nothing short of wondrous and awe inspiring!** A proper understanding of them will allow us to overcome discouragement and live with joy in all circumstances (2Cor 6.10). When our flesh rises up to defeat us, speaking words of despair and tempting us to quit, we must drown out that flesh-inspired voice and recall the FACTS about being a Christian. These facts will quickly render our flesh powerless to quench our spirit!

In the first chapter of Ephesians we find many of these marvelous facts which, in reality, are blessings of God bestowed upon His children in order to glorify His Son. Let's take a look at a few:

- **FACT:** you are **blessed with every spiritual blessing** - 1.3
  - God has given us everything we need and more! He has left nothing unfinished, unprepared or unsettled. He has taken care of every aspect of this life, and the one to come.
- **FACT:** you were **chosen by God** before the foundation of the earth - 1.4
  - Think of that. God chose us before the world was ever created. He doesn't explain the reality of that to us in full, but it leaves us awestruck at the thought. (Note: This is not a study of Calvinism, so let's just enjoy the simple truth of the verse for now.)
- **FACT:** you are **holy and blameless** before God because of Christ - 1.4
  - God sees you as He sees Christ. Your sin was removed and placed on Christ. Christ's holiness has been accounted to you.
- **FACT:** you were **predestined to be adopted** by God - 1.5
  - God had already decided that you were going to be one of His adopted children. He predetermined for His "own good pleasure" that you would be in His family.
- **FACT:** **you were redeemed** by the blood of Jesus Christ - 1.7
  - Christ has bought you back from the slave trade of sin. He paid the purchase price for you and you now belong to Him.
- **FACT:** **you are forgiven** of all your sins - 1.7
  - Your sins are forgiven. When God sees you on the Day of Judgment, you will have no sin that needs to be paid for.
- **FACT:** you have **obtained an inheritance** from God - 1.11
  - As a child of God, you will receive an inheritance from God. We so easily get excited about a financial inheritance from an earthly family member, how much more exciting is an eternal inheritance?

- **FACT:** you are **sealed with the guarantee of salvation** by the Holy Spirit - 1.13-14
  - You are sealed with the guarantee of salvation from none other than God Himself in the person of the Holy Spirit. Could you ask for a better guarantee?
- **FACT:** your **spiritual eyes have been opened** to God's truths - 1.18
  - The truth of God that was once nonsense to you is now a heavenly treasure. You're spiritual eyes are open and God can now illumine your heart concerning eternal truths.
- **FACT:** Christ is your head, and you are **part of His body** which He fills "all in all" - 1.23
  - Christ is now the head of a body that you belong to. You are part of His Body. You have a purpose, a function and a responsibility in life now. He will fill you "all in all" in order to be successful in your heavenly assignment.

If you were the child of a Rockefeller or Bill Gates, it would not be difficult for you to imagine all of the privilege and benefits that an inheritance would bring. How much greater are the benefits and blessings of being a child of the King of the Universe?

*Most Holy God, open our spiritual eyes to see the riches and blessings of being adopted by You. Help us to see past our weak flesh and gaze into the spiritual reality of our inheritance as Your children. Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Are you easily defeated and discouraged in your Christian walk? Do you do things for God because you "have to" or because "God said so"? Do you have a continual joy, excitement and expectation about being a child of God? Or do you have an attitude that you will just accept your lot in life because that's what Christians have to do? Do you have the feeling that all the joy will come "later" in heaven, we just have to suffer in silence for now?

**Application:** Paul had discovered these great FACTS and believed them. That is why he could be joyful in ALL circumstances, truly joyful. If life is a "drag" that you are just enduring dutifully, maybe you haven't discovered these amazing facts about the Christian.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change will you make in light of this truth?

3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## More Facts About Christians

### Part: 2

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, (NKJV)

Did you know that every Christian has certain past, present and future facts that are absolutely true about them? Oh, not your everyday facts that are common to all men. No, these are wondrous eternal facts that well up out of the riches of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

In the first chapter of Ephesians, dear Christian, you find out that you are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus. You were chosen before the world was ever created to be holy and blameless in God's eyes, predestined to be adopted as one of God's children and to receive a King's inheritance. You were redeemed by Christ, bought out of your sin slavery, sealed with the guarantee of the Holy Spirit - having your spiritual eyes opened to the mysteries of God!

**Don't pass over that too quickly.** There is enough in the last paragraph to drown you in the sea of Christ's unsearchable riches! As if that were not plenty, let's look in the second chapter for more facts:

- **FACT:** you were dead in sin, but **now you are alive** in Christ - 2.1
  - You were dead in sin! Dead! Dead, dead, dead. Sin was your fate and destiny. You were hopelessly enslaved and condemned to eternal separation from God. Now you are alive in Christ! You are alive and your destiny now is an eternity with Jesus!
- **FACT:** you are **seated in heavenly places** with Christ Jesus - 2.6
  - You now share Christ's exaltation and pre-eminent (above all) glory. You are spiritually seated with Christ already having had the blessings of salvation bestowed on you.
- **FACT:** you are a **product of God's personal work** - 2.10
  - You are no mere commoner. You are no accident. You are a product of God's own workmanship, purposely created and crafted by Him for His purposes.
- **FACT:** you are now **created** in Christ Jesus **to do foreordained good works** - 2.10
  - Like your salvation, your sanctification and good works are predestined and orchestrated by a loving God who has planned them specifically for you alone.
- **FACT:** you are a **new person** at peace with God and reconciled to Him - 2.15-16
  - You are no longer at war against God. God has no debt to collect from you. You have been reconciled to God and returned to His presence as a new person.
- **FACT:** you now have **direct access to the throne** room of the King of the Universe - 2.18
  - You may now directly approach God because He sees you as He sees Christ. You now have access to very throne room of Heaven.



- **FACT:** you are no longer a stranger, but a **citizen of heaven and a member of God's household** - 2.19
  - You are not a foreigner, no longer a stranger to God. You are now one of His children, adopted into His family, welcomed into His Home.
- **FACT:** you are **part of the holy dwelling place of God** - 2.22
  - You are now part of the Body of Christ whose parts make up the temple that God in the Spirit dwells in.

Have you ever taken time to contemplate or to even become aware of the benefits you now possess as a Christian? We know our insurance benefits, our employment benefits or our government benefits. We know the benefits we have because of our national citizenship. If you're from a wealthy family, you may know the benefits of your inheritance or status.

They all shrivel in comparison to the LEAST of your blessings as a Christian. This is so much more than just another Bible lesson or pleasant encouragement. These are the truths that allow us to overcome this sin-corrupt world, to live in joy through all circumstances and reveal to us the love and glory of our Savior.

*Ancient of Days, help to see the vast riches of these truths. As we come to understand them more, we ask You to well up in us the glory that Jesus so richly deserves. In His Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Can you list your job benefits? Can you describe the benefits you have because of your citizenship in your country? Can you name the blessings, benefits and inheritance you have as a Christian? Which of these would you say is most important, secure and lasting?

**Application:** If you whip through these facts with little more than a "that's interesting" or "that's nice" attitude, you need to ask God to illumine this truth in your heart. As Christians, we enjoy an incredible amount of blessing and benefits. We have an unimaginable inheritance awaiting us. It should thrill you, inspire you and motivate you.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change will you make in light of this truth?

3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# The Facts About the Facts

## Part: 3

Ephesians 4:1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called... (NKJV)

In Ephesians, the Apostle Paul prepares the readers with many facts about being a Christian, truths that apply to every person who has experienced genuine salvation.

In Chapter 1, you find out that you are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus. You were chosen before the world was ever created to be holy and blameless in God's eyes, predestined to be adopted as one of God's children and to receive a King's inheritance. You were redeemed by Christ, bought out of your sin slavery, sealed with the guarantee of the Holy Spirit - having your spiritual eyes opened to the mysteries of God!

In Chapter 2, Paul says that you are now alive in Christ, no longer dead in sin. You enjoy the glory of Christ being seated in heavenly places with the Savior. You are the personal handiwork of God prepared to do good works. You are now at peace with God, reconciled with Him and can enjoy direct access to His Presence. You are a citizen of heaven and a full member of God's household being part of Christ's Body that is the dwelling place of God in Spirit.

That's a lot to chew on in two short chapters, but remember the setting of the Book of Ephesians. Paul was writing this letter to a church that did not have the advantage of having the entire New Testament, libraries of commentaries and 2000 years of preaching and study. This letter was all they had with the possible exception of a copy or two of others.

Paul was giving them the full scoop about being a Christian. After laying this foundation, he then gives them some "why's" and "so what's" in the form of explanation and instruction.

### **Why did God do these things? So what do we do now?**

The rest of the book answers those questions, all carefully built on the foundation already laid.

### **The Glorification of God**

Ephesians 3:20-21 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (NKJV)

If you were ever forced to come up with a one sentence summary about the purpose of our entire existence, you would be accurate in saying "To display, reveal, proclaim and participate in the glory of God".

God's glory was fully manifested through Christ, and through Christ we have received the wonderful blessings Paul described - which we then turn right back around and use to bring glory to God.

**It all started with God's glory, it is sustained by God's glory, it displays God's glory and it will return to God's glory in full.** What is "it"? His household.

Revelation 5:13 And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying:

“Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!” (NKJV)

### **To unify us**

Understanding these facts about adoption into God's family unites us in common belief and hope.

Ephesians 4:4-6 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (NKJV)

We serve one God who has one truth for us all. Knowing this truth gives a oneness of heart and mind bringing glory to God through our unity.

### **To equip us for service**

Understanding the blessings of salvation and the nature of being a new creation in Christ prepares us to do the will and work that Father has ordained for us.

Ephesians 4:7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. (NKJV)

You are a member of God's household. God has apportioned to you and gifted you with exactly what you need to carry out the responsibility He has prepared for you. God is glorified through the use of your gifts and the accomplishment of His will.

### **To empower us to live holy lives**

The Apostle Paul goes on to instruct the Ephesians to put off the old sinful man (4.17-24); do not grieve the Holy Spirit through sin (4.25-32); walk in love for each other(5.2); walk in the light (5.8); walk in wisdom (5.15); love your spouse (5.22-33); honor your parents (6.2); and be obedient and merciful in all situations (6.5-9).

What gave the Ephesians church the power to comply to Paul's instruction? It was the foundation that Paul laid in the opening of the letter, carefully explaining to them the reality of who they were, and what they were now that they had believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Your obedience to Paul's instructions brings glory to the Lord because Jesus is the reason and source of your holiness. **Glorifying God, through His Son, by the Spirit.** Every moment of our life should be compelled by this fundamental purpose of our existence.

*Holy Father, may our every breath be for the purpose of glorifying You. Help us to understand what it truly means to be a member of Your household. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Why are you a Christian? What motivates your life? Could you sum up the reason for your life if asked? Have you ever thought about why God has done things the way He has chosen to do them?

**Application:** The glory of God - Everything about our existence can be traced back to that. Why does God do things a certain way? Why did Jesus have to die? Why is

sin punished? Why is there both a heaven and a hell? The glory of God. Everything exists to display, reveal and proclaim the glory of God.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change will you make in light of this truth?

3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Handling Life - Joseph

### Part: 1

2 Peter 1:3 ...as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue... (NKJV)

In this day and age of prescription drugs, syndromes and professional therapy, I sometimes wonder how anybody who lived before the 20th century was ever happy. Without support groups, Oprah and pharmaceutical companies, it's a wonder anyone even got out of bed.

The Apostle Peter declares that the divine power of Jesus Christ has given us **all we need** to live a godly life. The Apostle Paul declares that Scripture **is sufficient** to instruct us in all ways about living a fulfilled life of good works and Godliness (2Timothy 3:16-17).

There is no doubt that Godly people of past ages were faced with the same emotions we face today - depression, pessimism, suffering, deprivation, worry, anxiety, doubt and fear. If they were without "professional" help and a pill-for-every-problem, how did they handle hard times in life? **Maybe they didn't have it as bad as we do**, so they didn't need medication and therapy. Or maybe, they had an answer that we have lost sight of.

Over the next five devotionals, let's look at some characters in the Bible that faced terrible problems and circumstances. Let's see if there is something common in the way they handled disappointment, tragedy, health problems, persecution and hard times. Did they worry? Were they depressed? Did they stay that way? Was it beyond their control? How did they deal with it?

### Joseph - a life of injustice and hardship

Joseph was the favorite of the many sons of Jacob. His brothers hated him because their father favored him. Their jealousy began a string of events that would easily merit Joseph the right to be depressed, angry and bitter about life (Gen 37-40).

- Joseph was hated and taunted by his brothers
- He was thrown in a pit and was going to be murdered by them
- He was sold as a slave into a foreign land
- He was unjustly accused of improper conduct and thrown into prison
- He was left in prison even after helping someone else get out who promptly forgot about him

**Don't brush over that list too quickly.** Five bullets points don't sound like much, but they represent years and years of non-stop hardship, mistreatment, persecution and injustice inflicted on Joseph. Except for some boyish immaturity, he seemed to be totally innocent of wrongdoing.

Joseph had no modern mental health care professionals, doctors, therapists or medications available. Given today's thinking, he should have been lost in despair and hopeless - suffering from numerous syndromes and conditions. The kinds of problems he faced would require years of counseling and therapy according to our mindset today. If anyone had earned the right to some self-pity, it was Joseph.

But Joseph lived then, not now. So how did he handle it? In all things he turned to God and took every circumstance as a way to glorify God (Gen 37-40).

- As a slave he worked hard, was honest and served his master as if working for the Lord
- He was morally pure and refused to dishonor his owner by giving in to sexual advances from his master's wife
- In prison, he was the best prisoner possible, being cooperative, obedient and helpful to others and his captors
- He forgave his brothers for their treachery and understood that whatever was happening was part of God's plan
- He was not a complainer, nor did he descend into self pity

Genesis 45:3-5 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph; does my father still live?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed in his presence. And Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come near to me." So they came near. Then he said: "I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; **for God sent me before you** to preserve life.

Joseph accepted his circumstances as God's will and rather than giving into his emotions, relied on God to sustain him. We are all too quick to turn to man-made solutions for handling life's hardships. We have come to trust human "wisdom", diversion and medication more than the Word of God. The Bible contains ALL things that pertain to life and Godliness, and is able to equip us for ALL good works and living life.

Philippians 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

For the hardships of life and their accompanying temptations of anxiety, worry, depression, doubt and fear, **God has given us the solutions and power needed to victoriously deal with them.** We have plenty of Godly examples in Scripture to show us the way. Beginning with Joseph today, and over the next four days with others, take notice of a common thread of trust and dependence on God's sovereign care in all circumstances.

**God knows what He is doing.** Whatever hardship you find yourself in today, God can use it to transform you more into the image of Christ. Do not seek **primarily** to escape it, numb it or end it. **Seek the wisdom of God to find out His purpose in it.** When we see every moment of our life as a moment ordained and used by God, **hardships become a source of growth, not dismay.**

**Hardships don't need to be medicated, they need to be consecrated.**

*Great Compassionate God, we turn to all sorts of sources other than You to explain and deal with life's problems. We ask you to remind us that You are the answer to all of life's difficulties. Grant us the courage to turn to You first, instead of as a last resort or emergency measure. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you worry, doubt or fear? Are you depressed or discontent? Has life got you "down"? What does God say about it? What is it about God that is not powerful enough, sufficient enough or caring enough to sustain you and comfort you? Why would God command us not to worry, fear, or doubt if He knew most of mankind throughout history would not have the professional help and medication we believe are so necessary today?

**Application:** God has given us everything we need to live a happy, joyful, contented and fulfilled life **REGARDLESS** of what hardships come our way. When we are less

than joyful and contented, it is always based in an incorrect or lacking spiritual viewpoint.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change will you make in light of this truth?

3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Handling Life - Elijah

### Part: 2

2 Peter 1:3 ...as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue... (NKJV)

Life is hard sometimes. No doubt as Christians we are faced with the reality of discouragement, depression, despair and worry. What, or who, we choose in response defines us as being different from the world. The world quickly turns to many means of remedy. Christians have a much greater solution available.

Elijah was a heroic prophet in the Old Testament. Who can forget his dramatic encounter with the evil prophets of Baal. He prayed that God would send fire from heaven to consume the water-saturated altar (1Kings 18) and it happened instantly. Elijah experienced God's presence in dramatic ways!

In 1 Kings 19 we find the wicked Jezebel, wife of King Ahab, threatening Elijah's life. She promised to kill him within 24 hours. It seems amazing at this point in his life that he would be intimidated by Jezebel. But he was, he really was!

1 Kings 19:3-4 And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" (NKJV)

Elijah became so worried and anxious that he prayed to God to die. Elijah really knew God well and had no doubt about His power. God sent fire when Elijah prayed, so he probably had no misconceptions about the result of praying for his own death. He really meant it, he wanted to die.

**Elijah ran scared. He was frantic and in despair.  
He reached the deepest point of depression  
in human experience.**

He was all alone out in the desert. He was physically and emotionally used up. He was wanted "dead or alive" by the King and had just humiliated the entire religious community which hadn't won him any popularity points.

Elijah had reached the end of his rope. He had had enough. If a Godly person has ever deserved to be depressed and despondent, it was Elijah. And he embraced it. He got lost in self-pity to the ultimate extreme: he wished he was dead.

What was the answer to this extreme despair? Was it any of our modern therapies, medications or self-help techniques? Was the answer suicide? Was the answer to embark on a long journey of self awareness and self focus? None of the above.

God was the answer. Elijah was God's true child, just as any Christian is today. God met him at his need and Elijah responded. He spent an adequate period of spiritual rest in God's presence. Then Elijah had a talk with God. He got to talk with God directly. Christians speak to God in prayer and communicate with Him through the Scripture, the Holy Spirit and Godly shepherds.

1 Kings 19:12 and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. (NKJV)



Elijah quieted his spirit and got his mind off himself. God communicated in a still small voice that Elijah was now ready to hear. God had drawn Elijah up out of his self-pity and taken his mind off his circumstances and depression. No matter how God may accomplish it in your life, He will always have the answer.

Next, God showed Elijah that he still had a job to do (1Kings 19:15-18). Have you ever wondered how quickly depression or worry would cease if you were busy fulfilling God's plan for your life? How much self-pity can we have when we are serving others, doing good deeds and helping spread the Gospel? How is it possible to be despondent if we meditate on eternal life in Jesus Christ and what unimaginable treasures God is storing up for us in Heaven?

**No matter where you are at emotionally,  
God still has a purpose for your life.**

Pursuing and fulfilling that purpose leaves little time, or need for anxiety and hopelessness. Elijah had reached a point that is about the lowest possible a human can experience. He truly wanted his life to end. **He was so focused on himself; his eyeballs were probably facing backwards in his skull!** This is the essence of both the problem and the answer concerning life's discouragement and anxiety.

**When we are looking anywhere except at God,  
life will quickly overpower and discourage us.**

Getting our eyes back on God is always the solution. Elijah turned to God in his darkest hour even when he was all alone. You can too. If you are experiencing discouragement, depression or worry today, look to God. He is the answer!

Look to God for help. Look to God for encouragement. Look to God for purpose. Look to God for meaning. Look to God for friendship. Look to God.

*Father, You have all the answer to life's difficulties. Teach us to look to You first. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Where do you instinctively turn when life gets hard? If God is not primarily THE answer, who/what is?

**Application:** God can use many things to help us deal with the hard times in life. But He must remain the original and first source of our help.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change will you make in light of this truth?

3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Handling Life - Paul

### Part: 3

2 Peter 1:3 ...as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue... (NKJV)

"Yeah, but you don't know what I'm going through."

That could possibly be the world's most common response following a hard-to-swallow Biblical truth.

- Rejoice in all things even suffering - "Yeah, but you don't know what I'm going through."
- Forgive, no matter how many times - "Yeah, but you don't know what I'm going through."
- Bless those who curse you - "Yeah, but you don't know what I'm going through."
- Pray for those who mistreat you - "Yeah, but you don't know what I'm going through."
- Be patient, kind, loving and joyful - "Yeah, but you don't know what I'm going through."
- Be hopeful and contented - "Yeah, but you don't know what I'm going through."

Okay, you're right, I **don't** know. Did God command us to rejoice and forgive and be hopeful - and then leave us with no success stories? Did God give us a record of someone who went through worse than we will ever experience, and yet still rejoiced and trusted God without wavering? How about Jesus? You might be thinking "no fair, He was the Son of God. (He was also fully man in all ways, but for the sake of this discussion we won't choose Jesus.)

### **Is there a Biblical example of someone who suffered an extreme amount, and yet was joyful and unwavering in faith?**

The Apostle Paul was a normal man and, by his own admission, the worst of sinners (1Timothy 1:15). Before Jesus got a hold of Paul, he was a murderer. He tracked down Christians and had them imprisoned or killed. He stood by and held coats while a crowd stoned Stephen to death (Acts 22:20). Not exactly "loving your enemy" was he? He was against God about as much as a man can be. And yet he is the one who commands us to rejoice in ALL things and be thankful in ALL things.

Was he a hypocrite? Did he walk the walk or just hypocritically telling the rest of us how to live? It's a humorous truth among Bible teachers and writers that you have to be careful what you teach or preach because the Lord is always ready to accommodate with a real live object lesson. I have experienced this phenomenon many times myself! God teaches us and prepares our heart through the gift of first hand experience. Paul was certainly no exception. He suffered, suffered and suffered some more his whole life. (all verses NKJV, emphasis mine)

### **What hardship, injustice and suffering did Paul experience?**

- 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: **in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.** From the Jews **five times I received forty stripes** minus one. **Three times I was beaten** with rods; **once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked**; a night and a day I have been **in the deep**; in journeys often, in **perils** of waters, in **perils** of robbers, in **perils** of my own countrymen, in **perils** of the Gentiles, in **perils** in the city, in **perils** in the

wilderness, in **perils** in the sea, in **perils** among false brethren; in **weariness and toil**, in **sleeplessness** often, in **hunger** and **thirst**, in fastings often, in **cold** and **nakedness**— besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

- 1 Thessalonians 2:2 We had previously **suffered and been insulted** in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition.
- 1 Thessalonians 3:4 For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would **suffer tribulation**, just as it happened, and you know.
- 2 Timothy 2:9 for which I **suffer trouble** as an evildoer, even **to the point of chains**; but the word of God is not chained.
- 2 Timothy 3:12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will **suffer persecution**.
- Philippians 1:29 For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to **suffer for His sake**;

### What was Paul's response, solution or lesson learned?

- Romans 12:10-12 Be kindly (NKJV, emphasis mine) to one another with brotherly love, in honor **giving preference** to one another; not lagging in **diligence**, **fervent** in spirit, **serving** the Lord; **rejoicing** in hope, **patient** in tribulation, **continuing steadfastly in prayer**;
- Philippians 2:17 Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, **I am glad and rejoice with you all**.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 **Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks**; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
- 2 Corinthians 7:4 Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf. **I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation**.
- Philippians 4:12-13 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. **I have learned the secret of being content** in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. **I can do everything through him who gives me strength**.

**Paul lead by example and commands us to have the same response he had - a response that he learned from Jesus.**

Yeah, but Paul doesn't know what we're going through. Well, let's hope he isn't looking because for most of us, it will be pitiful little compared to him.

*Lord God, You know exactly what we are going through. And You are the Answer, the Hope and the Source of our joy. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** How do you respond to hardship and suffering? What part does depression, anxiety, worry or pessimism have in our response? How much is too much? How long is too long?

**Application:** We're plainly commanded to have joy and give thanks no matter how hard life gets or how much we suffer. The Word of God produces spiritually and emotionally strong people who thrive and grow through hardship but it takes practice. You have to **PLAN** to respond with joy when trial come. You have to **PLAN** to look up to God when depression strikes. You have to **PLAN** to give your cares to God when worry comes a-knockin'.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change will you make in light of this truth?

3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Handling Life - David

### Part: 4

2 Peter 1:3 ...as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue... (NKJV all verses following, emphasis mine)

King David was a man after God's own heart. His writings reflect the entire spectrum of human emotion from ecstatic joy to bitter discouragement. The Psalm's are filled with him crying out to God in anguish, despair, depression, frustration and fear of danger. David was always aware that his own heart was the source of his pain, and that God was the answer to his despair.

Psalm 26:2-3 **Examine me**, O Lord, and prove me; Try my mind and my heart. For Your loving-kindness is before my eyes, And I have walked in Your truth.

David suffered from within and from without. Saul wanted him dead. His own son tried to kill him. He was guilty of adultery and murder. He suffered the death of his own children as a consequence. His family dealt with rape, betrayal, murder and treachery.

Don't forget that during all of this, David still had an entire nation on his shoulders. He wasn't just isolated with his own problems. He had the weight of an entire nation, God's nation, that he was responsible for leading. He set the spiritual tone for an entire people.

The weight of his sin and responsibility took him to depths that most of us could hardly imagine:

- Psalm 3:1 Lord, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me.
- Psalm 6:2 Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled.
- Psalm 6:6-7 I am weary with my groaning; All night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears. My eye wastes away because of grief; It grows old because of all my enemies.
- Psalm 13:1 How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?

Can you imagine your life getting much more desperate than this:

Psalm 31:9-13 Have mercy on me, O Lord, **for I am in trouble; My eye wastes away with grief**, Yes, my soul and my body! **For my life is spent with grief**, And my years with sighing; My strength fails because of my iniquity, And my bones waste away. I am a reproach among all my enemies, But especially among my neighbors, And am repulsive to my acquaintances; Those who see me outside flee from me. **I am forgotten like a dead man**, out of mind; **I am like a broken vessel**. For I hear the slander of many; **Fear is on every side**; While they take counsel together against me, **They scheme to take away my life**.

And yet, notice David's immediate answer to this crushing depression:

Psalm 31:14-15a But as for me, **I trust in You, O Lord**; I say, "You are my God." **My times are in Your hand**;

It's unfortunate that simple faith and trust in God is considered insufficient today as the solution to life's hardships. In simple and efficient words, David sums up our sufficiency in God - Psalm 19:7-14 (NKJV, emphasis mine):

- The law of the Lord is perfect, **converting the soul**;
- The testimony of the Lord is sure, **making wise the simple**;
- The statutes of the Lord are right, **rejoicing the heart**;
- The commandment of the Lord is pure, **enlightening the eyes**;
- The fear of the Lord is clean, **enduring forever**;
- The judgments of the Lord are **true and righteous altogether**. More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, **And in keeping them there is great reward**.
- Who can understand his errors? **Cleanse me from secret faults**. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be innocent of great transgression.
- Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart **Be acceptable in Your sight**, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.

David's words are either true, or not. His observations about the sufficiency of turning to God are all encompassing and need no help from us. If you're soul is converted; if you are made wise and rejoicing; if your eyes are enlightened; if you fear God, keep His commandments and have great reward; if you are cleansed from secret faults and are acceptable in the sight of God... what part of dealing with life does that leave out?

### **Is God sufficient, or not? He claims that He is.**

The question stands for each of us to answer individually: Is the Creator of the Universe capable, willing and faithful to sustain us, heal us, and give us victory through the darkest of the blackest of the deepest of human suffering, discouragement and trials?

It is a question of where our hope and trust is placed. It is a question of God's sufficiency. It is a question of taking God at His word. He who has ears, let him hear.

*Creator God, who could know our pain and needs more than You? Who or what is worthy of our trust more than You? If the Creator is not sufficient to sustain us, then how could any created thing be? Teach us to cry out to You Lord. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Where do you instinctively and naturally turn when life gets tough? If it is anything but God, what does that say about your trust and understanding of God? Is there ANY problem, situation or disappointment that is more than God is capable of dealing with?

**Application:** God most certainly does use people, doctors and medication to help those who are hurting. This is not an issue of discarding all counseling or medical help. It is a question of where we place our trust. It is a question of what you see as the primary source of your hope. It is a question of what you truly trust in when life gets tough. God may lead us to get "help". The question is whether we trust God first, and fully..

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change will you make in light of this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Handling Life - Annie's Story

### Part: 5

2 Peter 1:3 ...as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue... (NKJV all verses following, emphasis mine)

This week we have looked at Scripture and Bible characters who have demonstrated their faith in God during the most extreme of hardships. Through their stories we have seen that God's Word is indeed true declaring that He is sufficient to sustain us through anything life throws at us.

It's natural to see people in the Bible almost as "super Godly". After all, that's why they are in the Bible, right? Well, no, not necessarily. But it's understandable why we would struggle with relating to characters in Scripture. It's natural to see them as extraordinary by default.

So I would like to finish up this weeklong series about God's sufficiency by sharing a story with you. Last year, Annie went through a war with cancer, the kind that especially terrifies a woman. Annie was so faithful and trusting in God, that it was difficult to even be aware of the severity of her trials. I personally never saw her down, nor ever heard her complain. I never heard her question God, ask why or pity herself. For those that know Annie, they will tell you how happy, vibrant and full of encouragement she always is. She has an infectious enthusiasm for God and proclaims His goodness openly.

God is sufficient in our darkest hour. Not just for Bible characters or super-Christians. For you and for me... for average, everyday people. Annie is one of us. Here is her story told in her own words:

"Ann, you have cancer." With those words, our journey began. I sang "When I Am Afraid" through my tears over the phone to my sweetheart husband the day I was told I had breast cancer.

Right after I got home from the doctor, my husband and I admitted to each other that we were scared and worried. We knew we had to turn to the Lord in prayer and depend on His Word for comfort. We found a promise from our Good Shepherd in Isa 41:10. "So do not be afraid, 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." Our fear melted into peace, the peace only God can give.

A couple of weeks later, God would give my husband Duke an opportunity to experience complete faith in Him. Duke wrote in an email:

"Last night at 10:15, Ann became lethargic and would not respond. I immediately went to the front desk, which God had placed right outside our door. I stood in the room and watched the nurses slap Ann's face and yell at her trying to wake her. I was soon ushered out of the room as I heard them say she is not breathing. I was taken to the end of the hall in shock to sit and wait. Within minutes a 'code blue' was announced hospital wide and I watched 15 people rush in to Ann's room. For the next few minutes I tried to call people who I could lean on and got busy signals and answering machines. The nurse asked if there was anyone they could call for me and I told her I had tried and the only one left to call was the Lord.

It is now obvious that the Lord had wanted me to call on Him first. As I prayed, a sweet nurse named Shirley came out of Ann's room and slowly walked toward me. From the look on her face I just knew Ann had gone to be with the Lord. Thankfully, she had come to give me the grim update. Ann was not breathing on her own and they were going to put a breathing tube in. She had a pulse but we just had to wait. She apparently had a bad reaction to morphine and they were giving her drugs to combat that. Hopefully they could get her on a respirator and moved to intensive care



where she could be stabilized. As I continued to pray and give Ann to the Lord, a second nurse came out and related that Ann was now breathing, on her own, and was asking if her husband was OK.

It is now 3:00am and for the last few hours we have been listening to hymns and choruses and are finding that worshipping the Savior will never be the same."

Our natural reaction is to pray, "Lord, remove this hardship, ease the pain, take it away." But often God gives "No" as an answer. God will deliver those whose hearts are set on Him, but it is deliverance His way and for His purposes. Instant rescue is rarely the Lord's way. He may not answer on the day that we cry out to Him. But He will always answer.

Ps. 27:4-5 says "One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, And to meditate in His temple. For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle; in the secret place of His tent He will hide me; He will lift me up on a rock."

The outcome of such intimacy and time with the Lord is a very real sense of security. We grow confident in God's protection and strength during times of trouble. Duke and I found this to be true when we were faced on another occasion with the possibility of ovarian cancer. An elevated count on a test indicated that I could be facing yet another dilemma. Again, Duke and I turned to our heavenly Father and depended on Him to calm our hearts and replace our anxiety with trust and peace.

Duke and I prayed for the Lord to use this illness to draw our neighbors closer to Himself. At the same time we were praying, there was a couple in Arizona praying for their daughter and son-in-law who had recently moved next door to us. They were specifically praying that neighbors would show them the love of Jesus. One day, my neighbor came over to tell me through tears that she had come back to the Lord after having strayed away for many years. She told me that God had used my response to breast cancer to get her attention.

The Lord showed Himself one day to my sister Sue and me. Sue was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis 5 months before my diagnosis of cancer. Try and picture this: the MS patient with her cane and hand-controlled car picking up the breast cancer patient who can't drive, humped over with her right arm by her side going to the hair dresser because neither can wash their own hair. It was quite comical.

As we were on our way, Sue got a cell phone call. She immediately pulled over to stop because she can't drive and talk at the same time. While we were stopped, I looked out the car window and noticed a bird hopping in the yard. Upon closer observation, the bird had only one leg. I thought to myself, "That little guy hasn't let his one-leggedness slow him down one bit. And the Lord of Creation sees him." When Sue finished her conversation, I said, "Sue, look at that bird. What do you notice about him?" She said, "That's the same one-legged bird that I saw last week here. Can you believe that God let us both see him together?" We both laughed and cried and thought of Matt. 10:29-31 "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." What a GREAT BIG GOD WE SERVE!!!!

The ultimate answer to our prayers was for someone to come to know the Lord through our suffering. This was answered as a result of the CODE BLUE during the hospital stay. The nurses and doctors told us that a code blue was rare on the 10th floor. I was the 1st "young" person to code in several years. All of the nurses and doctors were visibly shaken and surprised by this. Duke and I believe that the Lord used our reaction to this to draw my nurse to Himself. She wanted to know why we were different and why all the people who visited us were different. Before I checked out of the hospital, she had surrendered her life to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

When we find ourselves most helpless, the road most taxing, we find it is then that the Risen Christ comes and makes Himself known to us. This is the one pure joy for those who sorrow.

A few days after our visit with the oncologist I felt the sin of worry creeping in and robbing me of my peace and joy. I was anxious about the unknown world of chemotherapy treatments. I was about to call Duke in to pray with me when I decided to read through the sweet cards that had come in the mail that day. I opened a card with a letter attached. It was from a dear sister in the Lord who had gone through this several years ago. She shared her heart after struggling with just the right words for many days. She addressed each concern that I had. I simply wept through the whole thing, knowing that this was a direct answer from my Heavenly Father who knew about each one of my anxieties. Her words of encouragement came at the very hour my worry was at its peak. Jesus Christ Himself satisfied my need to be free from anxiety, worrying about the unknowns. He refreshed me and I entered chemo with joy in my heart.

Duke and I experienced confident trust in God and expectation of the Lord's leading in our life again when we were faced with ovarian abnormalities. During this time, for the 1st time, we were at a loss for the direction the Lord wanted us to take. We had many questions regarding more possible surgery, long term effects and more drugs based on my kind of cancer, etc. We felt impressed to have a consultation with our oncologist. Mine was out of town, but were told Dr. Keller could see us. God used this doctor to make His will perfectly known to us. He answered our questions before we even asked them. We were instructed to have a full hysterectomy whether or not ovarian cancer was found.

Once again we entered surgery full of peace and joy knowing our lives were in the best hands possible—the nail scarred ones. Duke titled the email following that surgery: "No cancer, No pain, No morphine, No problem for our God!" Just last week at our oncologist appointment, Dr. Panicker shared that in December, a study revealed that women with breast cancer who have their ovaries removed are just as cancer free as those who have chemo. And here I've had both defenses! How good of God to confirm that we had been in His will all along. When I shared the good news with the kids, our son said, "Wow, that was God!"

The hardest time for me to "count it all joy" and trust the Lord came a few nights before surgery when I could not sleep because the Lord wanted my attention. I was restless from 10 p.m.-12 midnight. Finally, I decided to get up and meet with the Lord. This next part is hard for me to explain, but my mind became convinced that I would not survive. Not that the cancer would kill me, but I was sure something unexpected would take my life. This thought was so real that I had to address it. During the next 4 hours, I sobbed and mourned the idea of separation from Duke and the children.

I struggled with how they would get along without me. Who would tenderly raise the girls as they became women; show our son the type of godly young woman to marry; and meet all of Duke's needs? And then as loudly as I had cried out to God, His answer came to me. "Ann, I love them each even more than you do. I purchased them with a high price. I am capable of meeting their every need. You have given me your cancer, now will you give me your dearest treasures?" So, I surrendered my family and their future to the Lord that night with open hands.

After struggling with the Lord and finally accepting this outcome, I took the time to write "good bye" letters to each of the children telling them how much I had loved them and encouraging them specifically in their walks with the Lord. Then it was time to put into words my feelings for Duke... the lover of my life. Oh, how I wept!! I cried so loudly, I knew I would wake the whole house. Those letters have never had to be read.

Then came the next hardest thing—telling Duke that I truly believed I was going to die. You see, we had promised to each other that we would share each sorrow, concern, struggle, and praise, keeping nothing back. We would go thru this together as one. When I came back to bed early that morning and told him, we cried together as we once again went to the Throne of God to find grace in our hour of need.

When God wanted me to surrender my family, I didn't know until later, that He had just wanted my heart. Once surrendered, all was well as long as I did not grab them back, as though they would be safer in my hands! Boy, did I grow through that experience.

Through this journey, our family has learned to depend on Him first. God gave us rest from anxiety and worry, and revealed Himself to us in every part of our lives. Learning to wait on the Lord, we grew closer to the Lord while walking through the valley of the shadow than at any other time in our lives.

And that is Annie's story. So far.

Just this week she battled another potential scare with cancer. Initially, Ann experienced her worse anxiety ever but the Lord again accepted that burden from her and gave her overwhelming peace. Praise God it was negative and she is currently cancer-free. With each trial, God is poised to prove Himself ever faithful and truer still. **(If you would like to send an email to Annie,** send it to me and I will make sure she gets it - [devotional@seriousfaith.com](mailto:devotional@seriousfaith.com) If you have an inspirational story of God's faithfulness to share with our readers, email to me at [devotional@seriousfaith.com](mailto:devotional@seriousfaith.com) )

Is God trustworthy and sovereign? Is He loving and good, faithful to His promises? **You will find the answer to those questions most vividly during the darkest hours of your life.** But not if you aren't looking in the right place.

*Gracious God, thank You for having the answer for anything life can throw at us. Thank you for dear faithful saints like Annie who demonstrate that You are Faithful and True. In Jesus name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** When tragedy strikes, do you turn to God? When discouragement calls, do you turn to God? When things just simply don't go your way, do you turn to God? Do you ever turn to God?

**Application:** Our God has plainly declared that He is sufficient for every trouble life may bring. It is our choice to take Him up on it.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change will you make in light of this truth?

3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# Lessons On Life - Facing The Truth

## Part: 1

Ecclesiastes 1:2 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." (NKJV)

Put in modern English, "Life is futile. Everything is a waste of time. What's the use". Truth be known, probably every person that has ever lived life for very long has struggled with that thought.

**Let me begin with a caution.** This lesson begins a series that takes a brutally real look at the futility of life. There is no sugar-coating. This will be raw reality devoid of today's pop psychology. However, I will strive to leave you each day with hope and encouragement.

We live in a sin-corrupted world that is growing more evil by the moment. There is NOTHING in this physical life that can bring more than just a few moments of fleeting happiness. Nothing. Life on the horizontal plane of existence is doomed to disappointment.

**Then why bother at all?** Because there IS an answer... but it's not the one most people want to hear.

Our world would rather pump up on rah-rah seminars about "living life your way". or try out the latest multi-level-marketing, get-rich-quick, sure thing. For a "lucky" few who can afford it, the diversions that money can buy provide temporary escape.

In the end, it all leads to the same conclusion:  
something is still missing.

What is the answer to the futility of life? Well the simple answer is: **live life God's way**. Sorry about that. I know it would be more glamorous if I had the "10 secrets to success in life" or the "7 steps for power and prosperity". Those would definitely interest more readers, but the world is full of that kind of material already.

**Here is the raw truth:  
Life stinks unless you turn to God.**

That's it, period. You can be rich, famous, or drop-dead beautiful...but life is still empty and useless without God. You can drop out, tune out or quit caring... and life will still torture you. You can be whatever... it makes no difference. Life is dreary and useless without God.

You can even be "good". It still doesn't matter. You may be the "good woman" who sacrifices her life for her kids and husband. Everyday you endure the secret torment of wondering if this is all there is to life. Will you ever get to be "happy"? Is this it? Is this all there is? You wish you would have known what you know now BEFORE you got married. So you trudge through the day resigning yourself to the fate of being a good, but unhappy woman. Noble, but whoopee... who wants to live like that?

The "good man" works his tail off to provide for his family, works hard for his boss and volunteers his time at church. Every day he feels the demands from everyone around him to be a good employee, a good husband, a good father, a good leader...

followed by the frustration of no one ever being quite happy with his efforts. It's never quite good enough. He typically falls short of perfection, so no one is ever fully content with his effort. Nothing he does is quite good enough. So for all the effort, no one around him is satisfied, only wanting more. But he grinds on day after day resigning himself to his fate: a good man, but a discouraged and unhappy man. Noble, but eventually it will kill his desire to try anymore.

That is the ugly truth that everyone knows deep down but doesn't want to admit because it sounds SO depressing. Plus, it flies in the face of our entire "positive thinking" mentality.

**Positive thinking is man's attempt to deny reality and change it with his own effort.**

Note: **this is not to say** that we are to be sad, critical downcast people. We should be positive. We should be optimistic. We should live in victorious joy. We should have a general demeanor of contentment and happiness. **But it has to be grounded in the Truth of God**, not in our personal attempt to manipulate reality using the metaphysical technique of "positive thinking". Our positive outlook on life and demeanor **is derived from intimacy with God**, the power of man's mind.

Another reason the reality of life's futility is ignored, is because we are left with only one alternative, an alternative that many don't want to have to actively consider. It is more comfortable to passively ignore God and placate our conscience pursuing other solutions. The **only** alternative to life's futility is turning to God. But turning to God means obeying Him, submitting to Him and admitting He is right. And that is the part we want to ignore.

Human pride keeps us in denial of life's futility because the only answer is to admit God is right and we are wrong.

Throughout history, man himself has proven by his own experience that life has no meaning or hope. We have found thousands of ways to gain a few moments of pleasure or escape. But nothing lasts.

Humans have tried EVERYTHING imaginable to achieve lasting hope and secure long term happiness to no avail. So here we are after thousands of years of searching and groping after some answer. We come full circle back to the ugly truth: "what's the use? Life stinks".

**What is the purpose of bothering with such a painful look at life?** A primary reason is that this gets down to where we live and breath on a daily basis. This is the real deal, what life is all about. It's what we experience every single day we choose to get out of bed. It's the down and dirty truth about life. It's the kind of common sense look at the issues that is missing in our market-driven world.

It is my hope that through this study, there will be those who will not waste any more time chasing after the fleeting promises of this world. I hope there will be some who will choose to avoid ten, twenty or even fifty years of regret wasting their life in worthless and vain pursuits. I hope that those who may be on the verge of giving up, or leaving their spouse, or ruining their family because they aren't "happy", will put off that decision for now. I hope they can come to realize they will only end up back

at the very same point of decision they face today. What decision is that? **Will you pursue life on your terms, or God's terms?**

Understanding the futility of life apart from God gives us the opportunity to avoid wasting time chasing the wrong answers.

If you are struggling with hopelessness, take heart, your interest in God is leading you towards the right answer. If you already know God, but still feel the futility of life, take heart, you have the Answer, you just haven't fully applied it yet.

**God is the answer... the ONLY answer  
to the futility of life.**

God is the source of happiness and purpose. The next lesson in this series will begin our journey towards the Answer.

*God, You are the Answer to the dreary futility of this earthly existence. Help us understand that living can be joyful and fulfilling, but only in You. Give us the courage to admit, and the wisdom to know that life is truly futile and heartbreaking unless lived for You. That's just reality. Help us to see it. In Hope's Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you struggle with discouragement? Do you sometimes just wish God would give you a break and that life could be "fun" once in a while? How much of your happiness is dependent on your circumstances?

**Application:** Life without God is futile and dreary. Modern psychology and positive thinking doesn't change that. The sooner we accept that this is the fact of our sin-filled world, the sooner we will turn whole-heartedly to the only Answer to this dilemma.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change will you make in light of this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Lessons On Life - Monotony

### Part: 2

Ecclesiastes 1:4 One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But the earth abides forever. (NKJV)

Ecclesiastes is frequently labeled as pessimistic and depressing. Far from it, Solomon, the writer, was simply being brutally honest.

After attempting to find happiness using virtually unlimited resources, he found that life "under the sun" was a waste of time. The phrase "under the sun" is key to understanding the entire book. Solomon was attempting to find meaning in life on a horizontal plane of existence. With his unmatched wisdom, wealth and power, Solomon was uniquely prepared by God to be denied NOTHING in his pursuit of fulfillment.

**Solomon was singularly qualified to declare that life is meaningless "under the sun".**

He observed the stifling monotony of daily life. We live, we die. Another generation lives and dies. All pass away and are quickly forgotten. How many of us can remember the names of our great grandparents, much less the generations before that. If your own great-great grandkids won't even be aware you ever lived, who else do you think will?

Ecclesiastes 1:3-7 What profit has a man from all his labor In which he toils under the sun?

In other words, things never change. You wake up, you work, you go home. You get a job, then you lose a job. You save up money for the day it's taken away. You work hard to get ahead only to have it ruined, robbed or devalued in a moments time. It's the daily monotonous routine that seems to have no end or reward.

Ecclesiastes 1:9 That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun. (NKJV)

**Individuals tend to think their discouragement is unique.** They feel like the only person who have ever been so tired of life. They wonder if this is all there is. The reality is that this hopelessness has plagued man from the time sin made it's entrance and corrupted God's perfect creation.

**Wow, this is really depressing, right? No!**

This is just honest. There is nothing to be gained by ignoring it. Merely covering it up with human effort to find happiness, or manufacture "positive" attitudes doesn't change anything. It just keeps us from having to face the inevitable.

No, far from being depressing, it leads us to God. It leads us joyfully to God thankful that life has nothing to offer us that can take His place. God mercifully and miraculously takes our sin-cursed futile existence and supernaturally transforms it into a life of joy, peace and purpose!

The purpose of Ecclesiastes is **not** to discourage, but to leave us face to face with the only solution to life's monotonous futility.

As Christians, Ecclesiastes is an incredibly POSITIVE book that confirms our hope in God. Ecclesiastes gives us the reasons why our horizontal intuition is correct... life IS frustrating, monotonous and hopeless. That is, **until God comes to rescue us** and miraculously transform futility into **hope beyond measure**.

Life without God is futile. There's no way around it. Monotony can be horribly discouraging. Life WITH God dispels the monotony and brings a daily adventure overflowing with a wealth of opportunity to receive God's blessings! God brings the morning full of anticipation of what the Wondrous Creator has planned for every glorious day! **There's no futility or monotony in the arms of our loving Heavenly Father!**

*Lord God, thank you for transforming our life into joyful anticipation, filled with the endless variety of Your blessing. Help us to be grateful that You bring hope and meaning to what could have been a futile existence, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Do you feel your life is boring and monotonous? Is happiness always one dollar, one achievement, one girlfriend... one something from being obtained? Are you fatigued with the endless cycle of daily life?

**Application:** Monotony is repetition and routine without hope or reason. That same routine can be a source of security and comfort if God is present. The Lord takes monotony and turns it into security and opportunity.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change will you make in light of this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Lessons On Life - Wisdom and Grief

### Part: 3

Ecclesiastes 1:17 And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind. (NKJV)

Apart from God, the pursuit of wisdom and understanding about how life works only brings frustration and disappointment. However, when a Godly perspective is brought to bear, this very same understanding becomes priceless.

Keep in mind that the writer, King Solomon, was stating his conclusions from purely horizontal observation. He was not injecting any eternal or spiritual meaning into his insights. His conclusions were brutally honest, not fatalistic. Life without God is hopeless.

**It is a waste of time to become wise,  
and understand WHY things are "the way they are"... Apart from God, it  
only results in despair.**

To understand life is a burdensome task that brings us to the brink of hopelessness (remember, "without God" is the point) . Why? Because the more you learn about it, the more you realize you don't understand it and it doesn't make sense. The more you learn about life in this sin-corrupted world, the more it will overwhelm you. The more you understand the nature of man, the more it will discourage you.

Ecclesiastes 1:13 And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. (NKJV)

Man left to himself is recipe for disaster. Early in man's history, he was left alone without laws or Godly restraint. The result was very quickly an entire creation whose "every thought was continually evil" (Gen 6.5). Out of the likely billions of people that existed only one man and his family were found by God to be righteous. God Himself was so bereaved that He was sorry He ever created man (Gen 6.6).

**Apart from God, it is regrettable that  
man even exists.**

Another reason Solomon says that wisdom is futile is because even if you do understand things, you can't change them.

Ecclesiastes 1:15 What is crooked cannot be made straight, And what is lacking cannot be numbered. (NKJV)

No matter how well you understand the human problem, or how completely valid your solutions may be (apart from God), you cannot change how people are. What is crooked will go back to being crooked, even if you straighten it temporarily. There are so many things that need to be done to "fix" mankind, that they cannot even be numbered. The more you realize this, the more futile life becomes because you are faced with the harsh reality that you are powerless to change anything.

**That is the view from "under the sun", or in other words, from man's  
perspective. What does God say about it?**

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (NKJV)

Why would God tell us to ask for wisdom if it is futile? Because the wisdom God gives is an entirely different type of wisdom. It is understanding from an eternal

perspective, from a Godly viewpoint... it is VERTICLE wisdom (Godly), not horizontal wisdom (under the sun). When our goal is to apply **God's wisdom** to the human dilemma, understanding it becomes imperative.

**God's wisdom allows us to correctly diagnosis  
the sinfulness that is behind the behavior,  
and apply the correct Eternal remedy.**

Now, understanding "life" does not bring hopelessness, but hope, because we have a real answer. With God's perspective now in play, **we have reversed** both of Solomon's conclusions: it is not burdensome to understand the "ways of man" but helpful; nor is this understanding futile because in God's power, we CAN facilitate real change.

With a "vertical perspective", the crooked CAN be made straight, and what is lacking CAN be numbered.

In other words, it is no longer futile to be wise about life because it allows us to correctly apply God's solution to any human problem. It is no longer futile to understand why things "are the way they are", because God is capable of effectively changing the problem at the source.

If the sinful, dangerous, uncertain condition of today's world is causing you to feel hopeless, **perhaps you are still viewing things from "under the sun"**. Learn to look up to God (vertical thinking) and see life from His perspective. Having a vertical perspective allows you to live above the futility that life brings when lived apart from God. A vertical perspective is only achieved by vertical time with God (prayer and Bible study).

*Heavenly Father, we pray for eternal perspective today. We ask you to give us hope in a life that would be hopeless without You. Help us to understand the difference between horizontal and vertical wisdom. We pray for discernment and insight into human behavior, and the wisdom to know the Godly solution that can bring real change and hope. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** What is your general disposition concerning life, hope or hopeless? Are you discouraged and worried about life? About the future? Does learning the truth about sin and human nature cause you to feel futility or opportunity?

**Application:** Ask God to help you understand life from a "vertical" perspective. Learn the difference between human wisdom, and Godly wisdom. Don't kid yourself: a vertical perspective is only gained by vertical discipline... prayer and Bible study.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change will you make in light of this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Lessons On Life - Gift of Work

### Part: 4

Ecclesiastes 3:13 and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God. (NKJV)

Without God, work is a necessary hardship and frustration to be endured... an utter futility that always leaves us wanting more. When viewed with a vertical (eternal, Godly) perspective, work becomes a gift from the Lord for our enjoyment.

For most of us, work will consume more than any other waking activity. Work is a source of fulfillment, accomplishment and purpose when it is undertaken as a gift from God. Without God, it is loathsome or it becomes our idol. Either way, without God it is a never ending cycle of disappointment and discontent.

What is your general disposition when you think about work? Our typical attitude is proof of our true perspective. Do you despise going to work? Are you constantly discontent always looking for the next job? Do you see work as something to be endured? Does minute after minute drone by leaving you with the excruciating task of trying to get through another day doing as little as possible? Is work merely the time of the day that you spend wishing you were doing something "fun"?

On the other end of the spectrum, has work become your god? How can you determine that? Has work replaced your time with the Living God? Does your primary sense of worth and purpose come from your work?

### **Work is a gift from God to be enjoyed!**

It is neither to be loathed, nor worshipped. Through work God allows us to satisfy our God-given appetite for food, drink and pleasure. Within God's framework, these appetites are a blessing to be enjoyed.

1 Thessalonians 4:11 that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, (NKJV)

Hard work promotes discipline and a "mind your own business" mentality. Hard work rarely leaves us enough time to meddle or gossip. There is comfort and contentment in a life of hard work, consecrated to God in quiet peace and security.

Proverbs 10:16 The labor of the righteous leads to life, The wages of the wicked to sin. (NKJV)

When it comes to work, we have only two choices: consecrate our work to the Lord and enjoy all the many blessings of it; or work for ourselves and ultimately discover the futility of it.

Hard work apart from God is meaningless and one way or another, will disappoint you eventually. The hard work of the righteous leads to many Godly benefits of joy, security, fulfillment and satisfaction.

*Heavenly Father, we thank You for the gift of work. We thank You for the blessings we enjoy because of Your gift. Help us to consecrate our work today to You and honor You in our labor. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Is work a joy or grief for you? Do you see it as a gift from God? Do you dedicate your work to the Lord or is work "separate" in your mind from spiritual matters?

**Application:** Typically, you will spend more of your waking hours working than

anything else. Learn to see work from God’s perspective, and it will become a source of enjoyment and fulfillment.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change will you make in light of this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Lessons On Life - Vertical Benefits

### Part: 5

Ecclesiastes 5:12 The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, Whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep. (NKJV)

Ecclesiastes has a running theme about the futility of life “under the sun”. This phrase refers to a horizontal point of view, a man-alone perspective.

The “vertical” perspective brings God and eternity into the equation and looks beyond man’s plane of existence. Our hard work and daily toil takes on a whole new meaning when a vertical purpose is applied. There are wonderful benefits to be enjoyed when you dedicate your labor to the Lord.

Let’s look at the flip side of that coin first. There is **no amount** of money, success, notoriety or popularity achieved through work or business that will bring anything greater than a fickle, frustrating, temporary satisfaction.

We have no excuse for an incorrect perspective on this when has God provided us the perfect test case to prove the futility of labor “under the sun”. King Solomon had virtually unlimited wealth and resources. God put little constraint on his pursuit of fleshly satisfaction. Solomon’s money, businesses, enterprises and work achievements make Donald Trump and Bill Gates look like paupers.

And yet, in the end Solomon declared unequivocally that looking for meaning in life through labor was like “chasing after the wind.” In other words, it is a **waste of time** (without God).

**How many times have you thought  
that having more money would be the  
answer to your problems?**

Solomon declares the “abundance of the rich” keeps the rich from sleeping well at night. Money brings worry, anxiety and fear of loss. Money brings bondage and discontentment. Again, this is all true assuming a horizontal approach.

On the other hand, the righteous are blessed with the capacity to enjoy labor. This blessing includes meaning, satisfaction and a clear conscience that allows a good night’s sleep... regardless of what you have in your bank account. The Lord has provided everything for us, and it all belongs to Him. The righteous person knows that God provides perfectly and is satisfied with that.

1 Timothy 6:8-9. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. (KJV)

God owns and controls ALL wealth. He could drop a million bucks in your lap today if it served His purpose.

**The foundational principle of work  
is not to make more money or be successful.**

No, your primary focus concerning work should be to honor and obey God, and glorify Him through honesty, obedience, dependability and excellence in what you do. Like everything in life, work should be seen as a way to bring glory to God by our example to others. You work should be just another part of your day when you are communicating with God and obeying Him.

If your primary work focus is about success, the acquisition of wealth, or a search for satisfaction then you are “chasing after the wind”.

Become a vertical thinker. Consecrate your business or homemaking to God. Dedicate your work hours to His glory. **Only then will you find true contentment and purpose in your daily labors.**

*Our God, we ask for Your wisdom about this very important part of our life. Help us to have a vertical perspective about work so that we may glorify You through it. In Jesus Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Why do you work? Because you have to? More money, success or achievement? Why do you have the job you have or own the business you own? Is it for you or God?

**Application:** So many of us, men especially turn to work for satisfaction, meaning and fulfillment. You won't find it there. Examine your true motives about work and change them in light of a vertical perspective.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change will you make in light of this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## A Form of Godliness - Self Love

### Part: 1

Judging by this list, the perilous last days are indeed upon us. Is this verse not a vivid snapshot of the world today? These men are said to have "a form of godliness" but it is powerless. Paul says to **turn away** and have nothing to do with people who practice such things.

If a life characterized by this list is a powerless "form of godliness" then it is certainly to our benefit to understand what each of these are and how they are manifested in behavior. Over the next few days we will examine them.

### Lovers of themselves

The entire Christian existence is an exercise in denying yourself for the sake of God and others. It is the choice to love God and love others.

*Luke 9.23 Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, **let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.***

The world would have us to believe that you need to "love yourself", take care of yourself and be concerned about yourself first before you can be "healthy".

I recently watched an interview of a very famous entertainer who had in many ways made a mess of her life despite being world famous, super rich and idolized by millions. She proclaimed that she has finally gotten her life on track because she has "learned how to love herself" and put herself first. In the past she had always done what other people wanted and that has been the cause of her failed marriages, abusive relationships and personal character flaws. But now that she had learned to "love herself first" and "take care of her first", she proclaims herself as finally "healthy".

*Proverbs 14:12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.*

Even the Christian community has been duped into accepting the religion of "self love" and "self esteem". We have turned inward to live a life focused on our needs, our past, our hurts and healing ourselves emotionally. Even our Christianity has been used as an excuse to turn inward. I recently spoke with a dear brother whose wife can't be concerned with her marriage or family until she "gets herself" together first. After all, how can a person be expected to meet the needs of others when they haven't even met their own needs. Ah, the foolish of human wisdom.

This is in stark opposition to clear teaching in the Bible that the Christian life is about denying ourselves, sacrificing for others, putting others before us and giving up our desires in love for those we serve.

- We are not to "learn to love ourselves". (Luke 9.23)
- We are not to dwell on our past to get "healed". (Phil 3.13-14)
- We are not to esteem ourselves. (1 Peter 5.5-6)
- We are not to consider our needs first. (Phil 2.3-4)

### **The way to take truly care of yourself, is to focus on God and others.**

Get your mind off your "needs", your "hurts", your happiness, your feelings and your past. We are not to live our lives focused on "self". The world preaches:

- You can't take care of others until you take care of yourself
- You can't learn to love others until you learn to love yourself
- You have to put yourself first because no one else will
- You have heal your past before you can have a healthy future
- You have to have a high self esteem and self worth.

**This is the summary of the *religion of man*: "love yourself".**

It is exactly the opposite of the truly Godly life:

- Phil 2.2-4 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each **esteem others better than himself**. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.
- Rev 12.11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and **they did not love their lives** to the death.
- John 2.15 **Do not love the world or the things in the world**. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.
- Luke 9.23-24 Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, **let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me**. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but **whoever loses his life for My sake will save it**.
- Psalms 149.4 For the LORD takes pleasure in His people; **He will beautify the humble with salvation**.
- Acts 20.35 And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, '**It is more blessed to give than to receive**.'"
- 1 Cor. 10.24 **Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being**.

*Father in heaven, help us today to lay aside the burden of worrying and focusing on ourselves. Help us loose the chains of self love and always being so acutely aware of our every need, every offense, every hurt and every want. Give us opportunity today to forget ourselves and focus on You, and on those around us. Help us to understand that the only true way to fulfill our "self needs", is to serve the needs of others. Amen.*

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## A Form of Godliness - I Just Love My Money

### Part: 2

We continue our study today learning to recognize this list of behaviors that characterizes those with a “form of godliness” but lacking power. Do you find your Christian walk to be feeble and frail? Perhaps one of these attributes has crept into your life.

Today, let’s look at “lovers of money”, certainly an undeniable concern in our age of prosperity and affluence. It has been said that for every hundred persons that can endure poverty in a Godly manner, maybe one person can become prosperous and remain faithful to Him. It does not help matters when an entire Christian movement today measures faith and godliness by prosperity and wealth.

*Luke 18.24 And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."*

*Luke 8.14 Now the ones [the Gospel] that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.*

Money is one of the most taught subjects in the Bible; its attainment, its purpose, its use, its dangers and its power over us. A library of books could hardly exhaust the subject and many great teachers whose books I’m hardly worthy to dust off have written much concerning the Godly use of money and the ill effects of materialism. The Biblical conclusion is that money itself is not evil; but our attitude towards it and use of it very easily can be.

Let me turn your focus this morning to God’s Word and bring your attention to **Psalms 49**. Let’s refresh our minds about God’s perspective on money.

- *v. 2 Both low and high, **Rich and poor** together.*
  - The first point we notice is that life makes no separation of the rich and poor. Death, ill fortune, chance... they occur for all men alike regardless of status. If you think your bank account or success means that you will escape the common destiny of man you are mistaken.
- *v. 6-9 Those **who trust in their wealth**, And boast in the multitude of their riches, None of them **can by any means redeem his brother, Nor give to God a ransom for him— For the redemption of their souls is costly**, And it shall cease forever— That he should continue to live eternally, And not see the Pit.*
  - No amount of money can buy your way out of the common fate of death and judgment. Nor can money purchase redemption for your family, friends or loved ones. We are all facing the inevitable Day when we will give an account for our lives and no amount of money can purchase God’s mercy.
- *v. 10-12 For he sees wise men die; Likewise the fool and the senseless person perish, **And leave their wealth to others**. Their inner thought is that their **houses will last forever**, Their dwelling places to all generations; They call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless **man**, though in honor, **does not remain; He is like the beasts that perish**.*

- All men die and take absolutely nothing with them. The rich and poor, the wise and foolish alike leave everything they have behind. But God has given His children an opportunity to send it ahead to heaven in the form of eternal treasure (Luke 16.1-13).
- There is a reason you never see U-Haul trailers being pulled behind hearses.
- We live in a false security that our current prosperity will never end, that we will always have what we have now. In reality, it will all perish, whether through economic disaster, poor decisions, thieves, moths & rust or death... the result is always the same.
- *v. 16-20 Do not be afraid when one becomes rich, When the glory of his house is increased; **For when he dies he shall carry nothing away; His glory shall not descend after him. Though while he lives he blesses himself (For men will praise you when you do well for yourself),** He shall go to the generation of his fathers; They shall never see light. A man who is in honor, yet does not understand, Is like the beasts that perish.*
  - We are not to covet or be in awe of one who becomes rich and it seems that everything in life is going their way. All wealth is doomed to the same end. Its not how much money we have or don't have, its how we use it.

It's not how much prosperity we have that is an indicator of faith, it's how loosely we hold on to it and use it for God that indicates our faithfulness. One dollar, or a million dollars, spent with the sole thought of personal pleasure is symptomatic of a person who is a "lover of money". One dollar or a million, given in sacrifice and obedience to God's conviction is a heavenly treasure far exceeding its monetary value. (the key phrase being "sole thought")

### **Let me close with some principles about money for you to consider:**

- It's not how much you have or don't have, its whether you truly believe it ALL (not 10%) belongs to God. (James 1.17)
- You can spend it now on temporary short term reward (pleasure or comfort)... or you can send it ahead to heaven as an eternal investment by using it sacrificially for God's purposes. (Luke 12.32-34; Luke 16.1-13)
- No matter what your bank account balance is, if you are not content right now, with exactly what you have, you will never be content. (1 Tim 6.6-10)
- The poorest man on earth is unimaginably rich if he has Christ; the richest man on the planet is to be pitied above all men if he is not a follower of Jesus Christ. (Eph 3.8)

Consider making this your prayer concerning material blessing and income:

*Proverbs 30.8-9 Remove falsehood and lies far from me; **Give me neither poverty nor riches**— Feed me with the food allotted to me; Lest I be full and deny You, And say, "Who is the LORD?" Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God.*

*Lord, grant us integrity and honesty in all things financial. Give us this day neither poverty, that I might be tempted to steal and shame Your name; nor so much prosperity that my trust in You is diminished because I have no need to depend on You for anything. Teach me contentment today with exactly what I have, wanting no more and more than willing to give up what I do have. Amen.*

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## **A Form of Godliness Boastful, Proud, Blaspheing**

### **Part: 3**

Do you find your Christian walk to be feeble and frail? Perhaps true Godliness has been robbed from you through one of these behaviors. Today, we will look at the next three: boasters, proud and blasphemers. All three in essence say:

### **Look at me! Look what I did. I don't need God.**

They are a wickedly complimentary of each other. Blasphemers attribute to men what only God can do; or, attribute to God what only men can do. Pride dethrones God and takes credit for what God has done. Boasting is putting that pride to words. Let's take a look at what Scripture has to say about these three.

### **Boastful**

- **Psa 5.5** The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate all workers of iniquity.
  - It is a very fearful thing to consider God's hate. Boasters proclaim their own glory instead of God's.
- **Psa 94.4** They utter speech, and speak insolent things; All the workers of iniquity boast in themselves.
  - It is a defining characteristic of evil people that their speech is disrespectful and boastful. ALL evil people boast about themselves.
- **1 Cor 4.7** For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?
  - Boasting is in effect denying or ignoring that you have NOTHING you didn't receive from God. From the moment of conception, your first breath, everything you received as a child, and now what you have as an adult.... Every single thing was given to you. In the same way your parents gave you EVERYTHING when you were young, God gives you everything now.
  - Did you create anything? Do you instill in yourself the talents you have? Did you give yourself life?
  - Think. Name one single thing that you can take credit for being the original source of? What you have, what you have done, what you are or the very fact you are alive.. which part of it was not given to you? What reason then do we have to boast about anything of ourselves?
- **James 4.14-16** ...whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.
  - Boasting is great foolishness. We don't know if we will be alive one minute from now. We could drop stone dead of a heart attack.
  - Boasting is pure arrogance and evil in the Lord's eyes. It is saying "thank you ME" instead of "thank you God".

## **Proud**

A couple of paragraphs can't do justice to this subject, as it is the very essence of sin. Pride in its most basic form is replacing "God" with "me"; putting "me" where only God should be.

**Life + ME – God = pride**  
**Life + GOD – me = holiness**

I didn't do so well at "gozintuhs" in math, but I understand simple adding and subtracting. Sanctification in simplicity is ADDING God and SUBTRACTING myself in my everyday life. The scriptures are so brutally plain and convicting that they need no commentary from me:

- Ps. 10.4 The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts.
- Prov 6.16-17 These six things the Lord hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look...
- Prov 16. 5 Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord; Though they join forces, none will go unpunished.
- 1 Pet 5.5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."
- Isa 13.11 "I will punish the world for its evil, And the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, And will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.

## **Blasphemers**

The proud boast, "I did it". Blasphemers go one step further and actually speak or think evil against God. They remove from the Lord His rightful attributes, power and sovereignty. Or worse, they openly and arrogantly attribute wickedness to God, proclaiming His inability, flaws or non-existence. Some common examples we hear often today:

- Well if God really cared He wouldn't...
- If God is really a God of love how can He...
- I don't need God. He never did anything for me.
- God is for the weak-minded who need a crutch.
- Some God... He can't even stop suffering and hunger.
- God himself couldn't...

Then there are less obvious examples of blasphemy:

- God "told me"... followed by yet another unscriptural "revelation" which is so common in Christianity today.
- The name of God is invoked as support for white supremacy, violent religions, ungodly tolerance, the eradication of moral judgment and the pursuit of any religion as a means of earning salvation.
- God is characterized as an all-loving, all-accepting, kindly old man with a smile who eventually will accept anyone who is faithful to some religion or is basically a "good" person.

Blasphemy is crediting God with anything sinful, or speaking directly against what is true about God. It is the natural progression to boast because of pride originated in a blasphemous idea of God.

**Blasphemous ideas cultivate pride delivered via boasting.**

All three of these sins are contributable to removing God from His rightful authority and position and putting ourselves there. Whether or not we can articulate it, pride and boasting come from conscience or subconscious blasphemous conclusions:

- God can't or won't do what He says
- God isn't, or is less than, what He proclaims
- God is either unwilling or unable to keep His own word
- God is exaggerating, lying or deceived

Therefore I will be the king of my existence. I will bring attention to "me" and exalt myself because deep down I have blasphemed God, daring Him to challenge my ascension to the throne of life.

"Gather around people and listen to me declare how good I am: I have done it, I have achieved it, I have built it, I have earned it. I am a good person and have accomplished many things. And surely God will see that my goodness and greatness have earned me salvation."

**You would never say that!** Right? You may never be bold enough to utter the words, but does your behavior shout it for all to hear?

*Lord, we ask you today to remove boasting, pride and blasphemy from our hearts. Create in us clean hearts that have a pure understanding of our complete dependence on you. Help us to truly understand we have received all things from You and have nothing to boast about of ourselves. May it cause us to be the opposite of boastful, proud blasphemers... humble, thankful and worshipful. May we boldly speak of our dependence on You, of Your goodness and righteousness; and may we boast only in the death of our dear Savior. Amen.*

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## A Form of Godliness - Our Behavior

### Part: 4

As we continue today studying the behavior that robs us of true Godliness, notice the progression: it starts with replacing God (lovers of...); then proclaiming it (boaster, proud, blasphemer); now it is manifested in behavior: disobedience, ingratitude, unholy, unloving and unforgiving. These are natural consequences that occur simply by enthroning ourselves as Master of our existence.

Luke 6.45 A good man **out of the good treasure of his heart** brings forth good; and an evil man **out of the evil treasure of his heart** brings forth evil. **For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.**

Whatever is in your heart comes out of your mouth and is demonstrated in your behavior. The person who has replaced God with love of self, will boast how he controls his own life and then will begin to manifest it in attitudes and decisions.

### Disobedient

Being disobedient to those in authority over you of course is very understandable for a person who has made themselves king of their life. If obedience to God has been tossed out, what mere mortal could command our obedience? We will do our own thing. Who are you to tell me what to do? Don't push your morality off on me. "The Bible says don't judge", how many times have you heard that? How many times have you said it?

Titus 1.16 They profess to know God, **but in works they deny Him**, being abominable, **disobedient**, and **disqualified** for every good work.

### Unthankful

Anyone who has ever been a parent knows how it feels to be the recipient of ingratitude. How many times out of our love have we sacrificed our own desires to fulfill those of our children, only to be rewarded with a cavalier, "I deserve it" attitude and a feeble "thanks" only after you remind them of it? Doesn't exactly motivate you to want to do more does it? What makes us think God feels any differently when we do the same thing to Him? I'm sure everyone reading this has been taken for granted many times.

**Ingratitude is a by-product of our prosperity.  
We come to expect, instead of appreciate.**

Being a thankful, appreciative person is a characteristic that has to be cultivated and practiced. It does not come naturally. It begins with the correct understanding that everything we have came from God's hand. We can take credit for nothing. The appropriate response is thanksgiving and appreciation.

Rom 1.18-21 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, **so that they are without excuse**, because, **although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful**, but became futile in their thoughts, **and their foolish hearts were darkened.**

## Unholy

Becoming our own master will of course produce behavior exactly opposite of Godliness. The very definition of unholy is doing things our way instead of God's. We tend to over-complicate things. Using our simple math lesson from yesterday (I bet some of you still haven't figured out what "gozintuhs" are):

**My way = unholy  
God's way = holy**

This is not just limited to certain acts. You can't divide your life into neat compartments. If you're a thief on Friday, you're a thief, period. Our holiness is part of us all the time, 24/7; not just at church, or when reading the Bible or witnessing. For the Godly person, every act is holy. Going to work, tying your shoes or worshipping in church is all dedicated to obedience to God.

We must fight the tendency to divide our lives into "godly" versus "all that other stuff we have to do everyday". We think that getting up in the morning, eating, working, driving the kids, mowing the grass and every other task or responsibility is just part of "daily life"... somehow being wasted time that robs us of time to serve God.

**No! Every act of the Christians life, whether overtly "spiritual" or not, is to be a consecrated, holy, dedicated sacrifice to God.** As we mature spiritually, we should begin to realize that there is no separation of the "sacred" and the "secular".

Col 3.17 And **whatever** you do in word or deed, do **all** in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

For the "unholy" just the opposite is true. All acts become unholy, even those meant to attempting to appease God or appear "good". Once man has dethroned God, and made himself king, every act, every thought and every breath becomes unholy.

## Unloving

God is the source of all true love. His love is based on truth, selflessness and humility. A self-loving, proud person will naturally become unloving which is simply a mindset that is consumed with self interest.

As the offenses to his pride and self-rule mount quickly, this person becomes more and more bitter about life and towards other. People fail them which of course they will be acutely attuned to and remember with impressive accuracy. So they become more and more callous to anyone or anything but themselves.

Phil 2.3-4 Let **nothing** be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, **but also for the interests of others.**

## Unforgiving

The natural progression continues. The proud, self-loving person will of course not be a forgiving person when they obviously have not come to understand their own need for it. This person is characterized by phrases such as "I call a spade a spade"; "you made your bed now lie in it"; "God helps those who help themselves" and other such expressions that betray a persons true feeling that they have what they have because THEY have earned it. So there is no compassion, mercy or forgiveness to bestow on others.

**I had to get my own... and you have to get yours.**

This unforgiveness will transform itself into bitterness and a finely honed skill of holding grudges. The dual effect is that no forgiveness has been received, none will be given.



Mark 11.26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

Starting with the decision to replace a love for God (and thus obeying Him – 1 John) we see a rapidly descending spiral of consequences. Our heart is corrupted, then our mind, then our words and now our behavior. It becomes self explanatory why a person whose life is marked with any of these characteristics only has a “form of godliness” which will lack any true power.

**Power for what?** Power to change. Power to resist sin. Power to be disciplined. Power to please God. We may go through the motions (a “form” of godliness) of Christianity, but it will be no more fruitful than if we just turned from it completely.

Tomorrow we will see how this ultimately leads to an aggressive, defiant, “in your face”, ungodly lifestyle if left unchecked.

*Father, help us recognize any hint of these behaviors in our life. Give us wisdom to understand that it all begins with who is ruling our life. May we completely surrender every moment of our day today in humble submission to You as Master and King. Let our every step, every task, and every moment be consecrated to You as a holy act of obedience. Amen.*

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## **A Form of Godliness - The End Result**

### **Part: 5**

Today we will finish our series on this verse. Notice the progression and effect of replacing a love for God with a love for self. The characteristics start as inward changes of attitudes and motives and manifest themselves outwardly in increasing intensity.

First your attitude and language changes (proud and boastful). Then you begin to respond unrighteously to those whom you come in contact with (disobedient to parents, unthankful, unforgiving, etc). Then as pride runs its natural course, the "lovers of themselves" will begin to be purposefully aggressive towards that which is good. At this point, even the "form of godliness" they have will be obviously self-serving and corrupt denying the power of God's Word to have any effect whatsoever.

### **Slanderers**

Slandering is the speaking of words to harm someone. They frequently are dressed up in "concerned" or "prayerful" language, but God knows the intent. There are the very obvious attempts to hurt someone, then there are the subtle methods such as "benevolent" gossiping that is slander in Christian clothing.

If your words diminish another for any reason, you should be careful that you are not guilty of slander. Your opinions, comments, observations and "constructive criticism" of others need to be very carefully weighed and your true motive examined before uttering them. Honesty will reveal that seemingly benign comments are often meant to elevate ourselves at the expense of others.

Eph 4.31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

### **Without Self Control**

Lack of self-control in its simplest definition can be summed up with the word "impulsive". It is following your current feeling or desire despite the consequences.

Self-control always measures the holiness and consequences; and then responds appropriately. Lack of self-control is frequent excuse for ungodliness; "I just couldn't control myself"; "If I think it, I say it"; "I felt like it".

**Lack of self-control says if I feel it, think it, or want it,  
I will immediately gratify it without regard to God or consequences.**

2 Pet 1.5-7 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

### **Brutal, Despiser of Good, Traitors, Headstrong & Haughty**

We now move to open aggressive antagonism against God. No longer is a passive disinterest satisfactory. Now we have to search and react to all things Godly in an offensive way. This life is characterized by lack of mercy, wicked indulgence, rampant self interest and defiant stubbornness. We laugh at righteousness declaring "Fools!" to anyone advocating it. In truth, they are demonstrating the truth of God's Word.

Proverbs 1.7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction.

The result of sin is a "form of godliness" that denies its power. Power to do what? To change our lives. To save us. Don't underestimate the end results of allowing any of these characteristics to go unchecked in your life. Like an avalanche, it will only gain momentum, force and size resulting in loss and heartache.

*Lord, if there is any sign of these sins in our lives, reveal it clearly to us today. Help us to understand that BIG sin, starts with little sin undealt with. Instill in us true Godliness today demonstrating its power through our changed lives. Amen.*

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Ladies, Meet Your New Best Friend

### Part: 3

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (NKJV)

"Ladies, meet your new best friend"; and with that, the new Army recruits would be introduced to one of the most important elements of soldiering. Their new "best friend" was an M-16 rifle. (I only trained male soldiers, and "ladies" of course, was a loving term straight from the heart of their new, sensitive, Drill Sergeant. BR)

As a Drill Sergeant in the Army we had to instill in the untrained soldier that his weapon was now the "best friend" he had on the battlefield. From the day he was issued the weapon, it could never leave his side or be neglected. The well-trained soldier knows every detail about his weapon: how it was made, how it works, how to care for it and how to use it. Indulge me for a moment and hear these words in your mind coming from the best Drill Sergeant voice you imagine – loud, strong, authoritative, demanding:

- "Christians! A - ten - shun! Let me introduce you, to your new "best friend": your Bible.
- You will learn it. You will love it. You will care for it. You will protect it (Psa 119.11), and it will protect you.
- You will read it, know it, meditate on it and tell others about it.
- You will wake up with it. You will go to sleep with it. It will never leave your presence. You will become it, it will become you.
- You WILL be an expert on the battlefield and you ARE guaranteed victory over the enemy. You WILL learn to be a killer of sin. You WILL be relentless in obeying it.
- The training will not be easy and it will end only when you die. You will not quit. You will not fail. You will sweat. You will bleed. You will suffer for it; and it will NEVER fail you.
- You will report each morning for intensive training. You will not be absent; you will not be excused. Any questions? I didn't think so. That is all. Dismissed!"

Wow, I almost went in and put on my old uniform (which of course is about 3 sizes too small now)! If only we could "order" someone to spend time with God and read the Bible. Seriously, the Bible is your weapon, your "Sword of the Spirit" (Eph 6.7). Let's start by learning ABOUT our weapon. You must KNOW a weapon before you can USE a weapon:

- The Bible is the supernaturally inspired written words of God (2Tim 3.16-17).
- The Bible contains **EVERYTHING** we need to know concerning how to live a pleasing life to God (2Pet 1.3).
- God wrote it using regular people just like you and me as He inspired them to pen the words He wanted us to read.
  - People from all walks of life: rich, poor, soldiers, professionals, writers, doctors, tax collectors, etc.

- People with all different educations, from the academic elite to the completely uneducated.
- People who spoke different dialects and wrote the Bible in 3 different languages.
- Normal people, whose sins and failures are not sugar coated or ignored.
- People who lived over great distances covering three continents.
- People in a variety of circumstances including war, peace, freedom, prison, bondage, slavery, poverty and wealth.
- People in a variety of moods: happy, sad, grief-stricken, depressed, apathetic, joyful, exuberant, etc.
- The Bible was written over a span of about 1500 years, by more than 40 authors.
- The Bible addresses many, very controversial issues which routinely cause argument and dispute; and all 40 authors agreed on everything controversial to us.
- The Bible contains 66 different books in various styles of writing: history, poetry, wisdom, instruction and revelation.
- The manuscript evidence supporting the accuracy of the Bible far surpasses ANY other known written work.
- **The Bible has endured thousands of years of intense scrutiny and persecution yet still remains the one Book that changes men's lives, and entire nations for the good.**
- The Bible is the runaway leader in number of copies printed, number of languages translated into, and extent of distribution.
- The Bible is the only book that contains hundreds of predictions of future events that have all come true down to the last letter. No other book claims more than a handful of predictions, and even those are generally vague.
- With the increase in scientific and archeological discovery, the Bible continues to be vindicated as **completely accurate** historically and technically
  - Researchers continue to discover people, cities, societies and events that only the Bible records. In the past, those very same historical facts recorded in Scripture were used to "prove" the Bible as being false.
  - The Bible records many scientific ideas that have not been discovered as true until recently: the earth is round, thermodynamics, dinosaurs, cosmology, wind patterns, the water cycles, atmospheric pressure, the earth "hangs" in space, rivers in the sea, the "balance" of life on earth, man's circulatory system, psychosomatic illness, conception, and many other facts about nature and biology.

Despite the time span, distance, languages, circumstances, diversity, and sinfulness of the authors... the Bible miraculously contains a consistent, harmonious, error free message from cover to cover.

**The Bible is God's plan for the salvation  
of mankind and the glorifying of His Son,  
Jesus Christ.**

The subject of Biblical authenticity, accuracy and proof is one far too extensive to cover in a Devotional format. I present these facts to you as an introduction to your

“new best friend”. The more you know ABOUT your Bible (origin, evidence, proofs, structure, etc.) the more you can trust and defend what the Bible “says”. Tomorrow we will continue our training by learning what the Bible says about itself.

*O God, Open our eyes to the importance of being trained with Your Written Word. Instill in us the desire to know it, prove it, test it, examine it and apply it. Give us ears to hear, and eyes to see the Truth You have set before us. In the Name of the Ultimate Best Friend, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** How much do you know about where the Bible came from, how it is structured, what evidence supports its authenticity, and why it can be trusted as inspired from God? If you had the same level of knowledge about a rifle, would you march into war confidently?

**Application:** It is important to know ABOUT your Bible, as well as knowing what it says and applying it. Be ready to give an adequate answer when someone asks you “can I trust the Bible?”

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## Practical Purity - Do You Live Like Your Saved?

### Part: 4

Psalms 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. (NKJV)

**Fundamental purity** is in essence, God. God is the definition of purity. God is what all things are compared to in order to measure purity.

**Applied purity** occurs the moment we are saved. God imputes (adds; places; applies) the righteousness (purity) of Christ to us supernaturally. From that point on, He quite literally sees us a pure, worthy of salvation, worthy of coming into His presence.

**Practical purity** is the process of what the Bible calls "sanctification". It is the daily process of the Christian becoming more and more like Christ, who of course is Purity (God). It is the daily increase in our life of righteousness, Godliness and holiness... becoming more pure.

If we are truly saved, then increasing purity (righteousness) will be evident in our lives. Living pure lives is the purposeful effort to live in obedience to God; conviction and repentance as we fall short of purity; and trust in God to empower us to live righteously.

It is not within the scope of one devotional to discuss all the WAYS to become more pure in our daily life; that is a series of lessons in and of itself. It is the intent of this little mini-series on "purity" to help the reader understand what purity is in its various forms.

So I will leave you with some Scripture to meditate on about purity. Tomorrow we will finish up with a quick look at three other forms of purity.

- Proverbs 22:11 He who loves purity of heart And has grace on his lips, The king will be his friend. (NKJV)
- 1 Timothy 4:12 Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. (NKJV)
- 1 John 3:1-3 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (NKJV)

Man started out pure when God created us. We ruined it with willful sin. The whole of Scripture is God's plan to return us to that state of purity and to bring glory to Him through it.

*Our God, May we strive each day to become more pure like Your Son; and have a hunger to learn what makes us pure as found in Your Word. In Jesus Pure Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** Is your life marked with an obvious increase in righteous and holy purity?

**Application:** God is the source and power to become pure. Pray and ask God for His wisdom and strength.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# Time For Training

## Part: 2

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (NKJV)

The Bible is our "spiritual sword" (Eph 6.17), our weapon for spiritual battle. As a Drill Sergeant in the Army, I knew very well that the **primary foundation** to becoming a skilled soldier was **training, and lots of it**.

There was no substitute for it. **Quality** of training, while very important, **was not sufficient** to compensate for the **sheer quantity** of time needed. We have a popular phrase today that in reality has become an excuse for wrong priorities: "It's not the QUANTITY that matters, it's the QUALITY that counts".

To quote Grandpa's all across this great nation: "that's horse pucky".

It is certainly true that a large amount of "poor quality" anything is probably useless. Most things in life that are valuable require a commitment of extensive time AND high quality. I hear this "quality not quantity" business most often when it comes to family and God. Even the unbeliever knows better. You won't hear an athlete, entertainer, soldier, doctor, lawyer or any other serious professional tell you that the amount of time spent on training doesn't really matter as long as its "quality time". And yet, we apply that silliness to things about our life that eternally more important.

Psalms 119:2 Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, Who seek Him with the whole heart! (NKJV)

Fellow Christians, let's talk plainly. There is no substitute for large quantities of time spent in God's presence through prayer, reading His Word, meditation, worship and service (Josh 1.8; Ps 1.2; 44.8; 86.3; 119:97; Phil 4.8; 1Tim 4.15). Yes, quality counts. Everything we do should be with our whole heart "as if unto the Lord" (Col 3.17).

This is not legalistic. Of course, sheer amounts of time reading the Bible or praying won't save you; it doesn't merit God's favor with regards to salvation. No amount of time is profitable, **if your heart and motives aren't pure** (Ps 24.3-4) and your spirit isn't first renewed by God (Titus 3.5). Assuming your salvation is genuine, the point is clear:

### **There is no substitution for spending substantial, routine amounts of quality, private time with God.**

This private time is the Christian training ground (Lam 3.22-28) where we prepare for warfare and the equation is indisputable: **your effectiveness** in overcoming sin and serving God, **is directly proportionate to** the amount of **time you spend** training for spiritual battle through Bible reading, study, worship and prayer (Eph 6.13).

Psalms 119:10 With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You. (NKJV)

### **If a Christian can't find at least an hour or so a day to read the Word, study, worship and pray; their priorities are out of Godly balance.**

Let's examine this honestly and frankly. Except for extreme circumstances, if you're schedule does not allow for at least an hour with God every day, then something in

your schedule has most likely become idolatrous (an idol being anything that has replaced God in your life).

- If you have an hour a day to watch TV (to “wind down”), but can’t make an hour for God, TV is your idol.
- If you have an hour a day to read magazines, newspapers, the Internet or books (even Christian books, even this Devotional) but can’t find an hour a day with God, reading has become your idol.
- If you have several hours once a week to play sports, but can’t make an hour a day for God, sports is your idol.
- If you work long hours every day, but can’t spend an hour with God, work is your idol.
- If you can make time for your love interest, family or friends but not for God, your relationships have become your idol.
- If you can find several hours a week to talk on the phone or chat online but are just “too busy” to spend a “whole hour” with God every day, then chit-chatting has become your idol.
- If you can serve the Church for many hours every week but have insufficient private time with God, then church work has become your idol.

**That’s legalistic and judgmental!** No, my brethren, that’s **REALISTIC and FUNDAMENTAL**. We’re not talking about what SAVES you; we’re talking about what sanctifies, purifies and matures you **as a result** of your salvation. What other profession or life-pursuit can you think of, that would prosper on a quick 15 minute “devotion” somewhere between your shower and breakfast, or during the drive in to work? Or in the foggy moments just before falling asleep at night?

Lest I be misunderstood, if you are giving your whole heart to God 15 minutes day... good for you! **The Lord will bless your sincere commitment.** If 15 minutes is an obvious blessing, consider how much blessing an hour or more would be. **"One hour" is not a magic number**, just a good starting point. A characteristic of our Christian life should be an INCREASING commitment and devotion.

Psalms 119:34,38,72 Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; Indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Establish Your word to Your servant, Who is devoted to fearing You. The law of Your mouth is better to me Than thousands of coins of gold and silver. (NKJV)

**Make time for training every day and let NOTHING keep you from it; not sleep, not family, not work, not recreation or life’s interruptions.**

A Christian Soldier is the only “profession” in the world that routinely ignores mediocrity and rationalizes minimal training time. If the unsaved occupations of mankind recognize the folly in neglecting to train extensively, how much more should the Army of God? Why don’t you start today by setting aside an hour for training with God? There is tremendous blessing waiting to be experienced, but you will never know until try.

*Heavenly Father, we confess our excuse making and procrastination. For far too long, we have cultivated every creative reason imaginable to soothe our conscience concerning our lack of commitment and dedication. Foolish Christians, may we grow*

*up and quit toying with God's Word! O God, rain down on us conviction and wisdom as we ponder the state of our devotion. In His Name, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** How much committed, routine private time do you spend with your Savior and God every day? Is it an embarrassing amount? Do you allow yourself to make excuses about it? Has it ever dawned on you that this could be the reason for a lack of consistency and spiritual power?

**Application:** There is no substitution for extended time with God, each and every day. Don't pretend there is. Make the necessary changes and commitments. Read Psalms 119. Identify another Christian that you know is dedicated to longer periods of time with God and ask them to share the blessings they receive because of their commitment.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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# Weapons Training

## Part: 1

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (NKJV)

**If you are a defeated or inconsistent Christian, it's because you've neglected your weapon, and your training.**

When I was a Drill Sergeant in the Army, one of the most important things we taught new soldiers was how to use their weapons whether it was their rifle, hand grenades, machine guns, mines, tanks or even the weapon of last resort, a bayonet. Regardless of the weapon, the lesson was always the same:

- have your weapon ready and available at all times
- know everything that can be known about it
- keep it clean and well maintained
- be an expert in its use through relentless, intensive, daily training

Before the advent of modern weaponry, the sword was the weapon of choice for thousands of years. It came in many forms but all had the same purpose: to cut, to kill, to intimidate and to serve as protection.

It has always amazed me that the Scripture refers to the Bible as the "Sword of the Spirit" (Eph 6.17), serving as our weapon in the battle against temptation and sin. Stronger than titanium and sharper than a surgeon's scalpel, we use it to cut away, hack up, fend off and destroy sin (Heb 4.12; 1Sam 15.33). We wield it in both offensive and defensive techniques against attacks of evil (Eph 6.12; 6.17; Matt 4.4).

Ephesians 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the **sword** of the Spirit, which is the word of God; (NKJV)

Writing about spiritual warfare, the Apostle Paul uses the greek term "machaira". This was a short type of sword or dagger used for precision thrusts of attack and defensive movements by Roman soldiers of that time. It wasn't the long, broad, heavy "Braveheart" type of sword that required huge sweeping motions with both hands, flailing away with intense abandon hoping to strike the enemy with one decisive blow.

God has not left his soldiers defenseless and unarmed. We have a weapon at our disposal that when properly used, cannot be defeated by any attack the Enemy can produce. But a weapon that is not used, used improperly, or that you don't know how to use, **is truly ineffective and powerless**. Sin and Satan are the enemy. The Sword of the Spirit (the Bible) is our weapon. If you are being defeated by sin, you need a sword, and sword training. We would think someone foolish who would fight a battle without a weapon, and yet sadly, this is the reality of most Christian soldiers who war against Satan with weak or non-existent weaponry.

**Be assured that our Enemy never casually enters into battle unarmed or untrained.**

Our Enemy is well armed, well trained and fights relentlessly. Do you wonder why you are defeated so easily? It is utterly futile for a soldier to go into battle:

- without a weapon
- with the wrong or inappropriate weapon

- with a broken weapon
- untrained in the use of the weapon

**Humiliating defeat will be the result** for the Christian who tries to fight a war against sin and Satan **knowing very little** or nothing about his weaponry; **sorely neglecting** weapons training; and worse, **not even taking** his weapons into battle with him. As Christians we must be expert, professional soldiers. We must well-trained in:

- The need for intensive daily training
- How our sword is made, and what it is made of
- Keeping it with us and ready at all times
- Care and maintenance of our weapon
- Offensive and defensive techniques
- Knowing our enemy
- Plans of attack and defense

My fellow Soldiers of the Cross, the war against sin and evil is serious business.

**What soldier would enter an ongoing,  
bloody battle with the same casual attitude and neglect  
displayed by the typical Christian soldier today?**

There is a very disturbing trend in our nation's military today. Many people join the military not to do battle, but to get some sort of personal benefit from it such as a paycheck or an education. Their primary goal is not to serve, fight and defend; but to be employed, provided for and educated.

When a war starts (and I have witnessed this first hand), those who have joined for personal gain and not to "fight", desperately search for any means possible to avoid the battlefield and attempt get out of the military by any means necessary. I lost track of the number of times I heard someone say "I didn't join the military to go to war". How absurd.

Sadly, this is the attitude of many Christians as well. Countless numbers join for the personal benefit they perceive: Jesus will fix all my problems; God will make me healthy and prosperous; my life will be happy and positive from now. "Why, **Christianity is a really good deal**. Okay, I'm in."

It never crosses their mind, and often they are not told, that serving Christ means going to war against wickedness and it will cost you your life (but gain you eternity in Heaven). Certainly there is great personal reward and benefit; but they are the **RESULT** of giving up your life for the cause. "Benefits" should not be the primary objective of your enlistment into God's army.

**The primary objective of enlisting is to join the Army that has  
already been declared victorious.**

Everyone will enlist, like it or not. Signing up on the **WINNING** side is the issue.

**Make no mistake my fellow soldiers, we are in a war.** This is not dramatic language for the purpose of entertaining reading. We must learn to use the weapons of our warfare (2Cor 10.4) and engage in relentless, undistracted training (2Tim 2.4). Your effectiveness as a warrior depends on your commitment to training, and choosing the right weapon.

Tomorrow we will begin our "bootcamp". Drill Sergeant Riggs will be your Instructor; Jesus Christ is the Commanding General; and God Almighty our Commander-in-Chief.

*Father, You have told us plainly we are in a war, but we have not taken You seriously. We have neglected our weaponry and joined Your Army only for the benefits, but not for the war. Instill in us the understanding of the spiritual battle and the discipline to be well trained. In the Name of the Master Swordsman, Amen.*

**Contemplation:** How's your sword? Are you a fearsome warrior, or a child with a toy? What in your life has become more important than your training as a Godly warrior?

**Application:** There is no magic pill or trick to effective training. It takes time, commitment and effort. Determine today that you will set aside "training time" every day and nothing will cause you to neglect it.

1. What is the most obvious Bible truth you have learned today?

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2. What change in your life needs to be made concerning this truth?

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3. What specific thing will you do today to begin that change?

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## It Matters What You Believe

### *How You Can Be Saved & Go to Heaven – The Gospel of Jesus Christ*

Every person needs to have a right relationship with the God who created us. (Do not believe the lie that you came from a monkey or goo. God made you, loves you, and is now trying to get your attention.)

Perhaps in your own heart you have tried to explain away spiritual things, convincing yourself it is all superstition or fairy tales, but the questions just will not go away. Do you know why they will not go away? Because God created in every person the need and desire to know the answers... this need is evidence that God exists, and is reaching out to you.

You need to be "saved." Perhaps you do not understand that religious phrase. Let's take a look. To be saved means to be rescued from some impending harm. You cannot really desire to be saved unless you are convinced there is something that you need to be saved from. What do we need to be saved from?

The nutshell is this: you are a sinner. The God who created you does not tolerate sin. Like a righteous human judge doing his duty, pronouncing punishment and penalty on wrongdoing, the Judge of the Universe – God – must pronounce eternal judgment on all those who have violated His perfect Law. That is the bad news. The good news is that God also has provided a way for us to be forgiven for those violations (sin).

But I'm a good person, you might say.

- Are you really? Is it fair to call you a "sinner"? Most people would answer: "no, I'm a good person." Hmmm... let's put that to the test.
- Have you ever lied? Ever, even once? How many lies does it take to be a liar? One. You are a liar. So am I.
- Have you ever stolen, cheated on your taxes, been lazy at work? You are a thief.

Ever lust? Ever take God's name in vain ("g\*d\*m\*\*t) or used His name casually ("oh my god")? Ever hated someone? Even once? That makes you an adulterer (Jesus said lust is equal to adultery in your heart), a blasphemer (using God's holy name without proper reverence), and murderer (Jesus said to hate your brother is the same as wanting to kill him).

See what I mean. You are not "good." You are a lying, stealing, blaspheming, murdering, adulterer (and that is just a start. We are not even halfway through the 10 Commandments). You are a sinner. I am a sinner. We ALL are sinners. We all have a very real need for forgiveness by God. That's what "being saved" means. We need to be saved from God's righteous pronouncement of "GUILTY!" and His just sentence of "DEATH" for our sin. Just like a good human judge will pronounce "guilty!" and a penalty on someone who has broken the law, God (The Perfect Judge) will do the same. Makes sense, right?

God mercifully provided a way for us to be saved. You cannot earn it, you cannot be good enough to merit it. You cannot demand it or obligate God to give it. It is a free gift manifested in God's love and sovereignty. Our salvation is unattainable except that God chose in eternity past to provide it.

Here are seven truths to help you find true Christian faith for yourself, based upon what God says in His Word – the Bible:

**God Loves You:** ...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).

**You Are in Trouble:** All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” — “You [God] are not a God who takes pleasure in evil; with You the wicked cannot dwell.

**Sin Brings Disaster:** The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**God Has Provided the Answer – a Savior:** God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

**Repent\* of Your Sin and Turn To the Savior, Jesus Christ:** Turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus — To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.

\*To repent means to “turn away from.” It means to be sorry for your sin and truly not want to do it anymore.

**Believing in Jesus and Receiving the Savior by Faith\*:** This is what the Bible says – God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son, Jesus. He who has the Son has eternal life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have eternal life — If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

### **Now Is the Time to Receive Him and Respond in Obedience:**

Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts. — Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Obedience is the evidence of true repentance, faith, and belief. We must respond to God’s gift of salvation ON HIS TERMS by obeying what He commands. Confess that you are a sinner publicly. Believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the ONLY way to salvation. Be baptized – which symbolizes your old life of sin and defiance being put to death in a grave of water, and a new Godly person being born to a new life of righteousness and good.

Find a group of Believers with whom you can serve, pray, and worship the God of the Universe. Read your Bible. Love others. Obey God. Obedience is the EVIDENCE of GENUINE salvation.

### **What is Faith?**

You hear the word “faith” a lot in Christian conversation. Often it is used to simply mean “trust”, such as “trust God” (ie. have faith that God will care for you). But what is “faith” when speaking of the clear truth in Scripture that “salvation is by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ”? Faith is transferring your TRUST in yourself to Jesus Christ concerning salvation.

Here’s a good analogy: you are 10,000 feet in the air about to jump from an airplane. You know it is certain death unless something/someone saves you from the fall. If you trust YOURSELF, you jump, flap your arms, and die. No amount how good you are or how hard you work at flapping your arms, you cannot save yourself.

Or, you see a parachute next to you, put it on, transfer your TRUST to the parachute to save you... you place your “faith” in the parachute.

When you die, you jump into eternity. There are only two destinations: Heaven or Hell. You can trust yourself (your own goodness or works) and you’ll die eternally in Hell. Or you can transfer your trust to Jesus (faith in Him) and He will save you from certain doom that awaits all humans, all of whom have sinned against God and are due the eternal death penalty (Romans 3:23; 6:23).



**Other considerations:**

Do you know what “praying” is? It just means to talk to God. If you have finally realized you are a sinner and need to be saved, talk to God and ask Him to forgive you. Tell Him you believe Jesus died to pay for your sins, and you want to stop sinning. Thank God for this.

Now go and find some other Christians who are serious about their faith in God and who believe the Bible. Ask them to show you what God would have you do next. The Bible says we authenticate our salvation by our obedience – doing what God says. Other mature Christians can show you what God would have you do now, such as being baptized and meeting with other Christians regularly.

Your decision of what relationship you want with God is the most important decision you will ever make in your life. If you have questions, or need help finding Christians in your area who can talk to you further, do not hesitate to email me: [brent@brentriggs.com](mailto:brent@brentriggs.com).

Look up these Bible verses where God says many of the things I’ve written above: John 3:16, Romans 3:23, Psalm 5:4, Romans 6:23, Romans 5:8, Acts 20:21, John 1:12, I John 5:11-12, Hebrews 3:7-8, Romans 10:9; Acts 2:38. I have adopted my salvation explanation from things I’ve read over time. Any similarity is not meant as plagiarism but rather just a choice to communicate this important truth in the best way possible. I have lost track of what part of this came from where, or what is my own.

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**Here is a Summary of What I Believe About God & Salvation**

- I believe the Bible to be the inspired, inerrant word of God and is the only infallible rule of faith and practice. (II Tim 3:16-17)
- I believe that there is one true God (Dt 6:4), eternally existing in three persons...The Father (Jn 4:24), Son (Jn 1:1,14), and Holy Spirit. (Acts 5:3,4)
- I believe that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin (Isa 7:14), that He is God incarnate, (Jn 1:1,14), and that He came to earth for the express purpose of paying the penalty for our sins (Jn 1:29), making for Himself His very own people. (Titus 2:14)
- I believe that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and raised from the grave (I Cor 15:3,4); was exalted to God’s right hand (Eph 1:20); and there is no other name under heaven by which man can be saved (Acts 4:12)
- I believe that all men without Christ are sinners, guilty before God, and are under His condemnation. (Rom 3:23; 6:23)
- \*I believe that all who repent and believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and who respond in genuine obedient faith, are supernaturally born again (John 3:3,7; 1 Pet. 1:3,23; Titus 3.5), sealed by God and given the Holy Spirit as a guarantee (2Cor 1:22), adopted as children of God (Jn 1:12), and eternally saved. (Jn 6:47)
- I believe that all who come to believe in Christ, being filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:47-48), are commanded to be baptized (Matt 28.19; Acts 2.38; Mark 16.16, Gal 3.27); to observe the Lord’s Supper until His return (Luke 22.19; 1 Corinthians 11:25-26); and are to be a part of a local assembly of Believers (ie, a home or community meeting on the Lord’s Day of fellow Christians for worship, service and fellowship). (Heb 10.25; The Book of Ephesians)

- I believe in the personal and imminent return of Jesus Christ for His church. (I Thes 4:16,17)
- I believe in the bodily resurrection of the just and unjust, the everlasting bliss of the saved in heaven, (Phil 3:20) and the everlasting punishment of the lost in hell. (Rev 20:15)
- I believe that the sick may request to be anointed with oil by the Elders of the Church as they pray the "prayer of faith" and the Lord can save the sick and raise them up from both physical and/or spiritual sickness as God chooses according to His will and pleasure which He may or may not reveal to us. (James 5.14-15)
- I believe that every believer is endowed with spiritual gifts for the building up of the body of Christ. (I Cor 12:4,11)
- I believe that all believers are called to live a life of holiness apart from all worldliness and sinful practice. (Rom 12:1,2)

\* I believe that salvation is God's merciful gift (we don't deserve it) and possible only by faith\*\* (belief + trust + response) in Jesus Christ alone (and no other) – Ephesians 4: 2-4, 8 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. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—

\*\* FAITH is a combination of belief + trust + response. Belief that Jesus is the Son of God, that was He born a real man, human in every way except the sinful nature; that He lived sin-free life (unlike us Romans 3:23), that He freely gave His life on the Cross and paid my penalty for my sin. It is the belief that Jesus died on the Cross but three days later rose from the dead defeating the power of death. It is belief that I am a sinner who is justly and eternally condemned for violating God's holy standards. Faith is trusting that Jesus Christ alone can atone (satisfy God's requirement for justice) for my sins (and is willing to) and save me from an eternity in Hell that I deserve... and faith is responding in humble obedience (God is right, I am wrong) by confessing my sins, repenting (turning away from sin), and "putting on" Jesus Christ (like a person would believe and trust and put on a parachute to save himself from burning airplane that was going down). I believe that an obedient response to God's gift of salvation and the resulting transformed life (from a lover of sin to a lover of righteousness and God) is the evidence and authentication of true salvation in a persons life.