

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be

TRANSFORMED!

by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.”
(Romans 12:2 NIV)

**Answers to Basic Questions for a Successful
Christian Journey**

By Dale Weatherford

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This text is, I'm sure, impacted by many, many sermons and books and tapes that the Holy Spirit has used to grow me. So, thanks to my many pastors, teachers, and mentors through the years.

Introduction: What Is Salvation?

I'm assuming that you are reading this book because you have just accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior and have a lot of unanswered questions! Or maybe you accepted Jesus into your heart as a child, but now that you are an adult, you've found that you have questions about what actually happened. Or maybe you are an established Christian just needing a good review of the basics. If you fall into any of these categories, I pray that this book will be helpful to you!

So, let's get started with a really basic question: **What is salvation?** Many people think of salvation simply as the beginning step: getting saved, having your sins forgiven, and Jesus coming into your heart. But in fact, salvation is something that begins with that initial step of inviting Jesus to be your Savior, and then continues for all eternity. There are three distinct stages of salvation and we'll discuss each of those stages in the beginning chapters.

Chapter 1 deals with this first stage of salvation, called justification. Justification is the theological term for having your sins forgiven and establishing a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Chapters 2 and 3 deal with the second stage of salvation, called sanctification. Because that's the stage that encompasses everything from the beginning step to the time when you enter Heaven, it will take two chapters to cover! The major purpose of sanctification is to become more like Jesus. So, in actuality, Chapters 5-12 are also about sanctification because they cover various topics that will aid you in becoming more Christ-like during your time here on Earth.

The third and final stage of salvation is called glorification. That's the time period that begins when we enter Heaven and lasts for all eternity. In Chapter 4 we'll look at what Scripture tells us about Heaven and our eternal life.

Scripture tells us that God has made good plans for us once we make our decision to accept Him.

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)

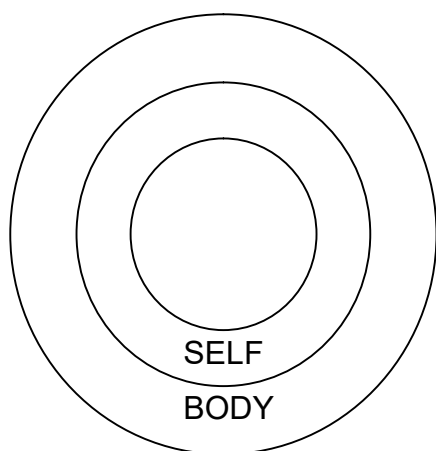
He knew before you were born that you would make this decision – He didn't make it for you, but He knew that this day would be the start of a very exciting journey.

What Just Happened to Me?

I want to take this first chapter to give you a basic understanding of justification, the first stage of salvation. In the Introduction, we talked about salvation having three stages: justification, sanctification, and glorification. In this chapter, we'll be looking at justification.

What is justification?

Let's start with a model that I call "Circles" that will hopefully make it easier to explain.

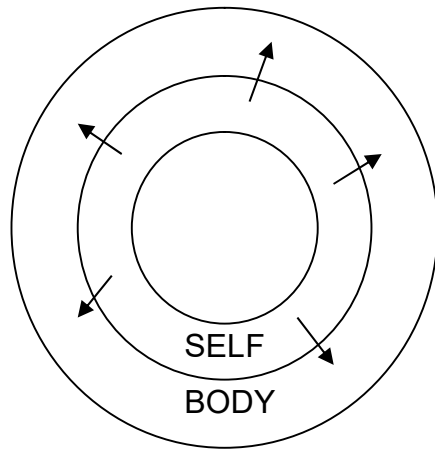


Note that the outside circle is labeled "BODY". This represents your physical body: your arms and legs and skin and muscles and organs and blood and all the nerves and hormones, and everything else that makes up your physical body.

The second layer is labeled "SELF". Psychologists tell us that by the age of 3, you are able to distinguish between the physical body and the "real you". You know that if you were to have a face transplant or remove any body part you would still be "you". What all makes up your SELF? Your emotions and thoughts, your goals and ambition (or lack thereof), your intellect, your identity, your learning or education, your preferences, your style, your heritage or upbringing, your personality, your impressions, your logic, and even your religion or preference for worship style -- and many, many other things -- make up SELF.

Now, tell me, does SELF control the BODY or does BODY control the SELF? If you see a friend, you smile because your thoughts are friendly toward that person. It's

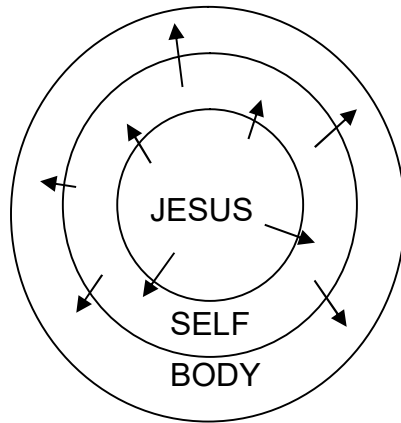
not the facial muscles that do the deciding, it's the SELF. So, SELF controls the BODY and we indicate that with outward arrows from the SELF to the BODY.



So, we are walking around with SELF in charge of the BODY and the BODY nicely obeying. And for many people, that's all there is – because this center hole is empty. Pascal, the great mathematician, first called this hole the God-shaped vacuum. He called it a vacuum because by definition a vacuum is empty and wants badly to be filled. He called it a God-shaped vacuum because the only thing that completely fills it is God. People will put all kinds of things into their core to try to ease the emptiness. Some people use alcohol or drugs, or busyness. Others shove their careers or success or money into that spot. King Solomon tried wine, women, and entertainment, but found that none of those would fill the vacuum. Only God brings the satisfaction and peace that we are searching for, because it's a space designed by Him and for Him alone.

So, there are only two types of people walking around on the face of this planet, those with Jesus in the center and those who are empty at the core of their being.

Now by way of explanation, we could write God in the center of our diagram, or we could write Jesus, or we could write Holy Spirit, because they are all three aspects of God called the Trinity. I write Jesus because He's the One Who died for me and it is His Holy Spirit Who guides me day by day. Note also the various names used for Jesus. He is often called the Christ, (which means the Messiah, or "Anointed One"), Lord (which means Master), or Savior (which means our Redeemer). All of these refer to Jesus.



When you asked Jesus into your heart, you invited God, Jesus, and more specifically, the Holy Spirit into the core of your being so that you are now “filled” instead of “empty”. For some people that is an immediate and quite satisfying feeling. For others it is a gradual but growing realization that Jesus is indeed dwelling within them. Some people call this the salvation experience, getting saved, accepting Jesus, or being born again. All of those are good descriptions, but the theological term is justification. Let’s look to see how it is described in Scripture.

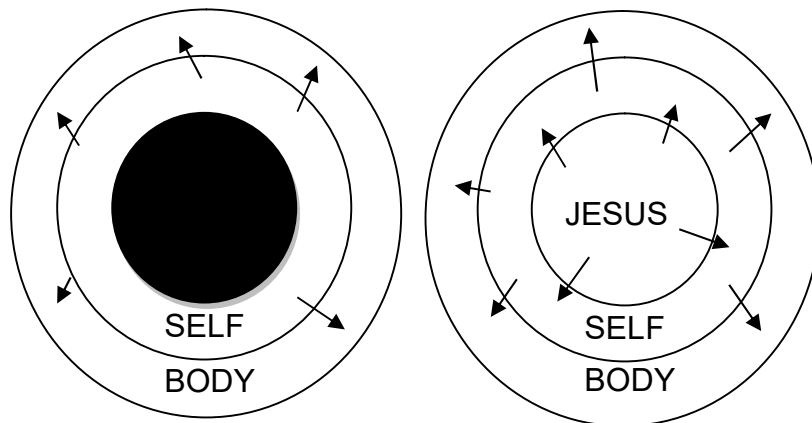
What does Scripture say about justification?

Our salvation is based on the fact that God says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (*Romans 6:23*) Your sins were forgiven by the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. He died that your sins might be paid for in full. Romans 3:23-24 says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” None of us can measure up to God’s requirement of holiness, so He sent Jesus to die for us – to pay for our sins. Romans 3:24 says that our account is justified. Justified means “equaled out” or “zeroed out” in bookkeeping terms. It means that we have a long list of sins that need to be dealt with and God took care of them by Jesus’ death on the cross, so that now we owe nothing – zilch, nada, zero. So, when you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you are allowing God to credit your account with Jesus’ blood.

Romans 6:23 says that it is a free gift from God. Like all other gifts, you must receive and open it for it to be of any worth. God has given you a gift (salvation), but until you receive it, it is of no value. Your decision to follow Jesus means that you have indicated to God that you want Jesus to pay for your sins so that you can be in a right relationship with God, Who is holy and just and perfect in every way.

And the final word used in Romans 3:24 to describe salvation is the word “redemption”. This is a term that was very familiar to the population that Paul was addressing. In the slave markets, when a person redeemed a slave, it simply meant that he paid the price and purchased them. The new owner then had full rights to do as he pleased; he owned them completely and could use them, abuse them, or set them free. Essentially, Satan holds you in slavery to sin and God has paid the purchase price (Jesus’ blood) in order to set you free to serve Him for the rest of your days. But, rest assured, He is a wonderful Master. Jesus says, “...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (*John 10:10b*)

Let’s look at another description of salvation found in Scripture. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (*2 Corinthians 5:17*) Remember the arrows indicating that the SELF is always controlling and signaling the BODY and the BODY simply obeys the SELF? Here we see a model of both the unbeliever (empty) and the believer (filled). Note that the arrows on the believer’s model are in their proper place – pointing from JESUS out to the SELF and from SELF to the BODY. Now, what’s the difference between these two individuals?



The person represented by the circle on the left makes all of his decisions based on what? SELF – that’s right – the intellect, the logic, the emotions, the vision, the goals that he has for himself. How does the person on the right make his decisions? He makes them by supernatural divine guidance. Wow!

You can read more about having the mind of Christ in 1 Corinthians 2:10-16. Now that’s a new creation! Christians operate by receiving input directly from God or JESUS through His Holy Spirit, through the SELF and to the BODY.

And it might look like this: Joe walks into the room and your SELF says, “I don’t like him!” and the BODY responds by frowning. But then you hear JESUS

reminding you that the Scriptures say that we should love everybody. Then SELF has got to give a new order, “No, no! Don’t frown, smile instead and go say ‘hello!’” This process of learning to listen to the instructions that JESUS is giving within us is the subject of our next chapter.

Once I become saved, can I ever become unsaved?

No. The security of the believer is a concept reinforced by Jesus’ statement in John 10:27-29. And Paul emphasizes in Romans 8:35 that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. In the next chapter, we’ll talk about what happens when we disobey orders given by God. Some religions teach that we lose our salvation if we ever willfully disobey, but Scripture does not support that. We *do* need to take seriously His commands and follow them out of our love and devotion to Him, not because we might lose our salvation.

What about people who say they are Christians but don’t act like it?

Jesus says, “Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.’” (*Matthew 7:21*) How can that be? Remember that I mentioned earlier that “religion” is found in the SELF. Some people *behave* or *act* like believers without ever inviting Jesus into their lives to be their new control center. Therefore, even though they may look like Christians from all outward appearances, they are empty on the inside. They are controlled entirely by SELF and there is no supernatural presence or power in their lives.

What have you learned about justification?

Justification and redemption are words that indicate that you have accepted Jesus Christ’s payment for your sins and now you have a new control center in your life. You are no longer controlled by SELF alone, but have JESUS and the Holy Spirit of God living inside of you and directing your life. That makes you a new creation! And like a new-born, you’ll need to grow and learn and become all that God has planned for you. It’s going to be an exciting journey!

2

What Is Happening to Me Now?

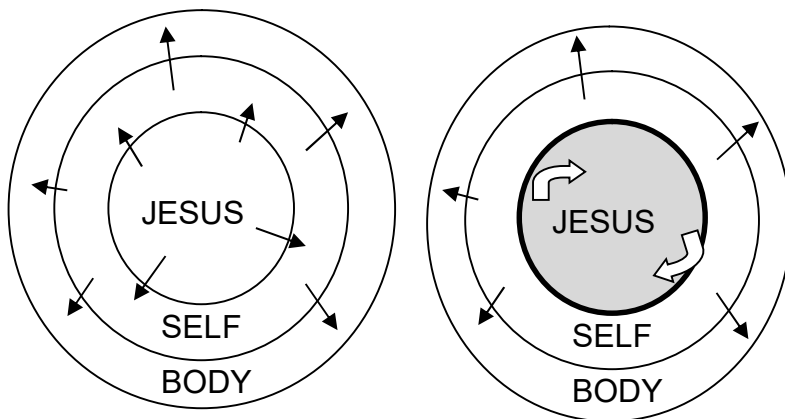
In the first chapter, I stated that there were only two kinds of people in the world, empty or filled, Christians or non-Christians. Now, I want to show you that there are only two kinds of Christians, the obedient and the disobedient. We'll spend Chapter 2 looking at the obedient Christian and Chapter 3 looking at the disobedient or fleshly Christian.

What is sanctification?

The second stage of salvation is called sanctification. It literally means “setting apart for God’s use” and as we learn about it, I think you’ll see why that’s a good word to describe this stage of our Christian life. Sanctification is simply learning to be obedient to JESUS’ instructions in order to give Him full control of our lives. This stage of salvation will last until the day we step into Heaven. The Holy Spirit will continue to mold and shape our lives and impact more and more areas of the SELF.

My goal for you and me is to see our lives becoming more Christ-like each day, one step at a time, for the rest of our lives.

If there are only two types of Christians, what do they look like?



In the diagram on the left, we see JESUS giving orders, the SELF taking those orders and relaying them to the BODY, and, as a result, we see a Christian who is obedient. In the model on the right, we see JESUS giving orders, but SELF is saying “no” to JESUS and is giving the BODY its own orders. The result is a disobedient Christian.

What does Scripture say about sanctification?

The Scriptures tell us that there is a constant war going on to determine who will give the orders, JESUS or SELF. Because the SELF has always given the orders – up until the time that we accept Christ – sanctification is a process of learning to surrender that control to JESUS.

Let's look at the way the Scripture describes this struggle between our SELF and JESUS for control. In these verses, the "Spirit" refers to JESUS and the "sinful nature" refers to the SELF.

The Apostle Paul writes,

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. (Galatians 5:16-17)

Here he very clearly describes the struggle of the SELF to try to obey JESUS:

For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin. (Romans 7:22-25)

He goes on to state,

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. (Romans 8:5-8)

Let's hear how Jesus described this relationship. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me, and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

Once you have accepted Jesus Christ into your life, the next step is learning to recognize His voice and obeying the commands coming from your new inner core. Jesus tells us, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”
(John 10:27 NAS)

What does God sound like?

Each Christian has to discover His voice, but once you do, you’ll recognize it readily. He speaks to the SELF in the same way that the SELF speaks to the BODY. It is a very quiet and gentle and natural sensation. What kind of things does He say? Usually they are in the form of a command, but sometimes they are just instructions from God’s Word, or reassurances or comfort. He often reminds us of a Scripture verse or a song that helps us worship or obey Him. Often the first thing He says after you accept Jesus is to tell a friend about your salvation. A friend of mine said that the first thing she heard was, “Put on your seat belt.” Even though it was a law in her state, she had never done it. But after accepting Jesus as her Savior, she noticed that every time she got in the car, she heard that same command. When she decided to obey it, she began to recognize “that voice” in other areas of her life. When I recently asked a new believer if he had learned to recognize God’s voice, he said that he called it “The Flicker”. He didn’t know that it was God; he just knew that ever since he had accepted Jesus into his heart, he was hearing a voice speaking in his head and it seemed to flicker like light in his mind. Others describe it as just a still small voice speaking gently to remind us of what we should do or be or become. Jesus says, “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” *(John 14:26)*

What things will He teach us?

He will teach us to become more like Jesus – day by day, hour by hour, step by step. When you accept JESUS into the control center of your life, you become a new creation – but that doesn’t mean that you change the SELF overnight. You have a new core – but then God begins to work to impact every aspect of SELF so that we become more like Him.

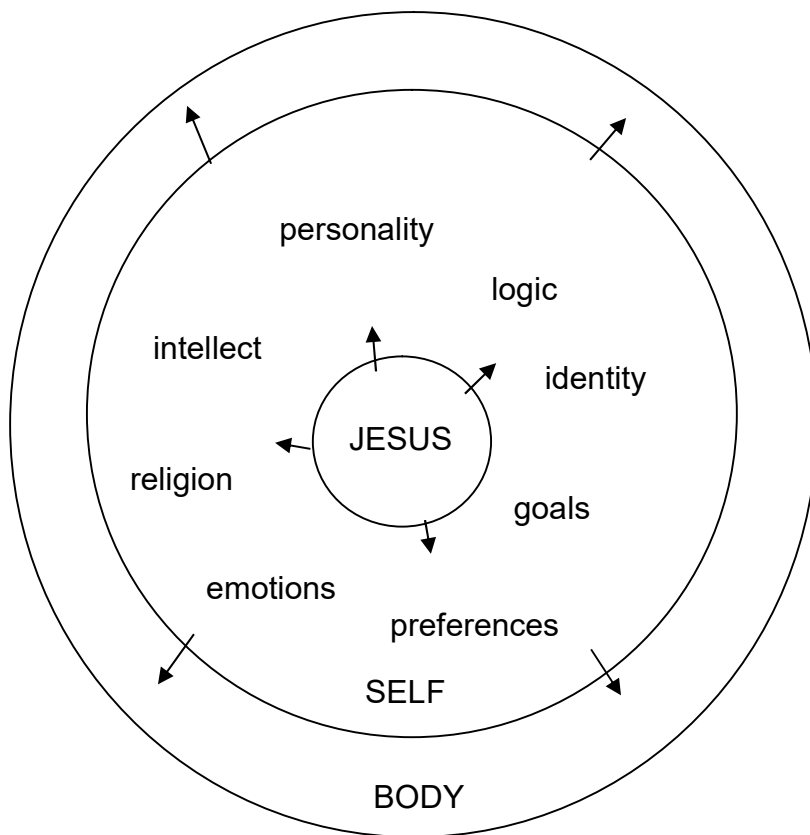
Let’s enlarge the circle so that we can see more clearly what is inside SELF. There are thousands of other things inside SELF, but we’re going to limit our discussion to just a few. (See model below).

Let’s take a pretty obvious one to start with. Does your intellect change as a result of accepting Christ? Probably not immediately! But when we allow JESUS into the control center, He will begin to impact our intellect and show us errors in our thinking and refine our thoughts so that they are in line with His. Our intelligence

becomes shaped and molded by the Master Creator. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge...” (*Proverbs 1:7a*) As we grow and learn more about God, our intellect will expand and become all that God intended and it will become more and more centered in Jesus Christ.

What about our goals? If we allow JESUS to begin transforming us into the person He designed us to be, then our goals will gradually change to become closer to the goals that He intended for us.

Does your personality change overnight? Of course it doesn't. But as God begins to work in your life and give you instructions, your friends will begin to notice a difference in you that is very, very good.



It might be nice to wake up and be a totally new person, but I believe that God's way is good as He transforms us gradually and gently. Remember that justification (that initial part of salvation) is immediate and we receive JESUS in His fullness at the very second that we believe. But sanctification, or the process of becoming Christ-like, is indeed a process! And it takes time and work!

*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.
(Romans 12:2)*

As we listen to JESUS directing us, our lives are transformed little by little, one step at a time.

What have you learned about sanctification up to this point?

As we obey JESUS, we change more and more into the person that He created us to be. We are transformed! This process is called sanctification, or setting apart the individual parts of our lives for God's use. In Chapter 9, we will discuss the specific rewards for this obedience called the Fruit of the Spirit. In the next chapter, we will discuss what happens when we disobey JESUS and instead chose to obey SELF.

3

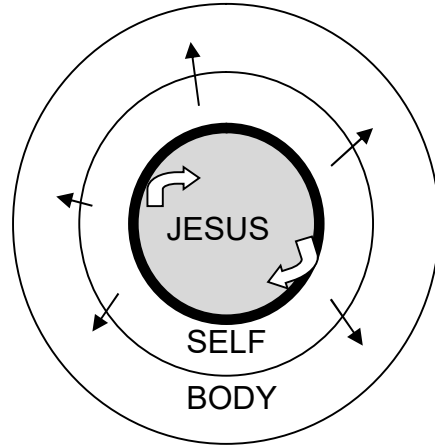
What Is Happening to Me Now? (continued)

What happens if I choose to disobey Jesus' instructions?

Remember that there is a constant war going on to determine who will give the orders in your life, SELF or JESUS. Because old habits are really hard to break, it takes time and work to break the habit of letting SELF be in control. So, what happens when JESUS speaks to us and we hear it clearly, but chose to disregard or disobey that instruction? For example, when Joe walks in the room and JESUS says, "I want you to learn to love everyone, so smile and be friendly with Joe," what happens if we say, "No, thank you very much! I don't like Joe, and I'm going to frown at him."

It's just a simple little decision – but it has far-reaching consequences. The second that you chose to disobey, I believe a teeny-tiny wall or barrier is inserted between JESUS and SELF. It's so tiny, but it's there. The next instruction from Jesus will be just a bit harder to hear. Unfortunately, there are Christians who have, over time, accumulated an awful lot of junk between JESUS and SELF. There's so much junk that they find it very, very hard to hear JESUS. He's still giving instruction and directing us, but it's a distant sound that is easily disregarded. In fact, some Christians get such a thick wall between SELF and JESUS that they forget that JESUS is giving orders!

What does Scripture call this junk between SELF and JESUS? Sin. An easy way to remember it is "s-I-n" – with a big I in the middle! You see, anytime "I" is in the control center of my life, I am sinning against God. God's plan for you is obedience. So anything that falls short of that is sin.



Above, we see a model of a Christian who has said “no” repeatedly so that there’s a barrier between JESUS and SELF. Now, how does this Christian operate? He has accepted Christ and has the promise that Jesus will never leave him – but all his decisions are based on SELF. Sadly, that’s exactly the way a non-Christian operates. And from all external appearances, the non-Christian and the SELF-led or “fleshly” Christian look the same. But I promise you, they do not feel the same. You see, JESUS has not only promised to give His Holy Spirit to instruct us, but also to convict us of sin. So, I believe that the most miserable people on Earth are those who are saying “no” to God and letting SELF have its own way. Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way which seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.” Following SELF will lead you into all kinds of messes. And there are serious and often painful consequences to sin in a Christian’s life.

What does the Scripture say about disobedience?

A list of what a Christian looks like who is being led by SELF instead of JESUS is given by the Apostle Paul:

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.... (Galatians 5:19-21a)

I assure you, when you see these things in a Christian, you are not seeing an obedient Christian, but a disobedient one!

Yet, sooner or later, we all say “no” to Him. If every time we say “no” to Him, it becomes easier and easier to say “no”, are we doomed to live our life gradually moving in a direction of deafness? Do we just live our lives growing farther and farther away from God? Praise God, No! Let’s look at what I consider to be one of the most important verses for you to memorize. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9) Wow! That’s our solution! Not only does God forgive us our sins, meaning that He applies Jesus’ blood to them so that they are paid for in full, but He also purifies or cleanses away that “junk” that has accumulated between JESUS and SELF so that we can hear Him as fresh and clear as a newborn believer!

So, what is confession?

Confession is simply agreeing with God that we have disobeyed in a particular area. A criminal can’t get away with just saying, “Forgive me, I’m confessing.” “To what?” we ask! In order to confess, a person needs to state his crime. It’s important as you begin your walk with God to get in the habit of stating your crime, i.e., agreeing with God that you have disobeyed in a very specific way. For example, in our case with trying to learn to love Joe, we would need to pray something like this: “Father, You know that I’m having trouble loving Joe and You know and I know that I disobeyed You today by frowning when I should have been friendly. Please forgive me.” Why the details? God’s goal is for you to grow and learn. By stating clearly what you did wrong, you will be less likely to repeat that same mistake. You see, God is not trying to catch you in a mistake and zap you! God KNOWS we’re going to have trouble following Him and being obedient – especially in the beginning stages. His goal for you is to grow and become more like Him every single day. And He’s not going to give up on you, no matter how long it takes. That’s why He designed such a beautiful system for learning to be more like Jesus! He knows that we can’t do it without His strength and His direction, so He gives us a personal tutor on the inside!

So if God’s forgiveness is so readily available, does that mean that He doesn’t really mind our sin?

Paul discusses this question in Romans Chapter 6. You might want to read the entire chapter for yourself. My summary is that there is no such thing as a little sin. That’s because of the effect it has on our hearing the next instruction from JESUS. If we begin to disregard His orders, we will soon find ourselves in bigger and bigger messes. Letting SELF lead you ensures that you will become a prisoner of sin. Only JESUS can guide you through life and help you to avoid this trap of Satan’s. Jesus died to set you free from sin. Don’t play with it; you’ll get burned EVERY TIME!

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:7-8)

Does God direct everything about your life? I mean, does He tell you which shirt to wear?

No and yes! A lot of times God just lets us choose whatever we desire – but the goal is to listen so closely that IF God wants to choose the shirt, He can! Because His ways are not our ways, we never know when we may hear His voice and we need to yield to Him immediately. We'll talk more about knowing God's will in Chapter 12.

What have you learned about sanctification?

We will continue to grow and learn and set aside more and more of our SELF for God's use until the day we step into Heaven. That next stage is called "glorification" and we'll talk about it in the next chapter. Until then, our job during "sanctification" is to learn to identify JESUS's voice as He speaks to us from our inner core and learn to obey quickly. And when we mess up, we confess and receive His forgiveness and cleansing so that we can hear better next time. This is indeed an amazing journey!

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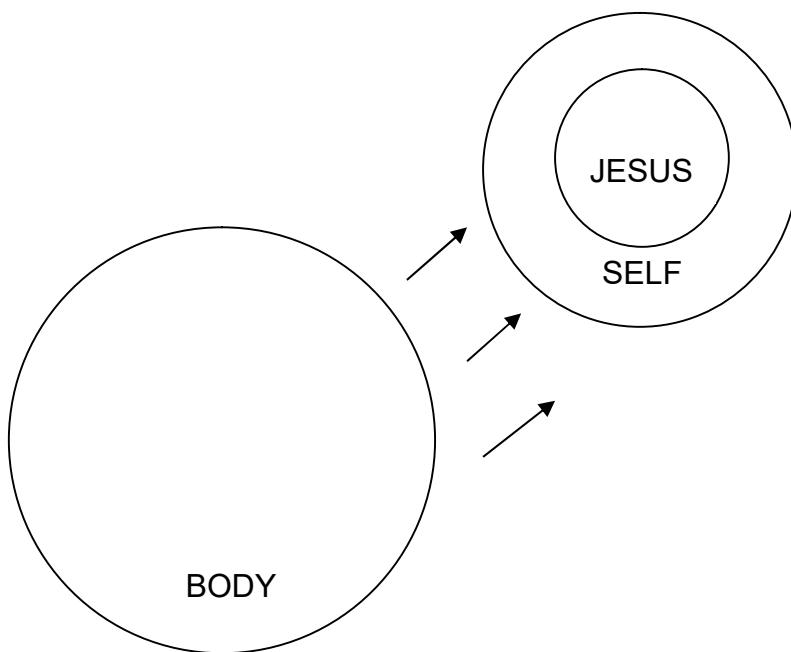
What Will Happen in the Future?

First we will discuss what happens when life on Earth is over due to earthly death, and then we will look at what happens if we are still alive when Jesus comes again. Either way, we will end up in Heaven – which is going to be glorious!

What is glorification?

You really aren't prepared to live fully until you've made preparations to die! I don't know who made that statement – but it's very, very true. For the Christian, death is simply the beginning of the next stage of salvation called glorification. While you may still experience some fears concerning the process of earthly death, I want to assure you that your eternal life in Heaven with Jesus is secure! For the believer, there is a guaranteed future in Heaven for all eternity.

Let's look at the model for glorification:



So upon our earthly death, the earthly BODY will remain here on Earth until the resurrection, but JESUS will escort the SELF to Heaven for all eternity. Then, according to Scriptures we will be given a new spiritual body to dwell in – so we

won't be ghosts or spirits – and we will be fully recognizable to our fellow believers. Don't just take my word for it; let's check out what the Scripture says.

What do the Scriptures teach us about glorification?

Jesus says, “In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.” (*John 14:2*) I like the idea of having a custom-designed home there!

In 1 Corinthians 15:35-58, Paul tries to describe the new body that we will have in Heaven. In summary – it will be good! Our bodies here on Earth wear out (are perishable) but our new body will be imperishable. Our bodies here on Earth are imperfect, but our new bodies will be perfect. I'm looking forward to that!

The Apostle John writes, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (*Revelation 21:4*)

In various Scriptures we are assured that we will be able to eat and drink at God's banqueting table. Yet in Revelation 7:16a we're told that we will never feel hunger. “Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst...” So it sounds as if eating is optional for this new body. If our bodies are like Jesus' resurrection body, then we will not be limited by the laws of this Earth. He moved through walls and appeared and disappeared and was able to fly! We have no idea what God has prepared for us there, but I can assure you it will be good.

In 1 Corinthians 13:12 we are assured that we will know each other and we will be known fully. In Hebrews 12:23 we are told that all believers of every generation will be present.

Various movies have depicted Heaven as a quiet place where we sit and play harps all day, but I would not expect that our God would prepare anything so boring! Anyone who can create the diversity and complexity of this Earth will surely prepare a Heaven that will keep us fascinated and exploring for all eternity. Some people have theorized that there will be classrooms and levels to attain, but we are not told this in Scripture. We can only imagine how good it will be. “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.’” (*1 Corinthians 2:9*)

What if Jesus returns before I die?

There's another way that we may enter Heaven and this way does not include experiencing earthly death. The Bible teaches us that some day (and it could be

very soon, or still many generations away), Jesus will return and call for all believers to join Him immediately without dying. This is called The Rapture or the Second Coming of Christ. I love the way Paul describes it.

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18)

Wow! If Jesus comes during my lifetime, I'll get to fly to meet him in the sky! How cool is that!

What do we absolutely know about this event?

No one knows when it will happen except God Himself! Jesus says, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” *(Matthew 24:36)* So when you read that someone has predicted the “end of the world” or “Jesus’ return”, remember this Scripture!

Everyone will know when Jesus comes! Jesus says that everyone will know all over the world, all at the same time. Jesus says, “For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.” *(Matthew 24:27)* Revelation 1:7a says, “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him....” So don't be deceived when someone announces that Jesus has already returned and you missed it!

We must decide to accept Jesus now because there will be no time to do so once Jesus returns! Jesus says,

“...That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.” (Matthew 24:39b-42)

Jesus continued to teach about being ready for His second coming in Chapters 24 and 25 of Matthew. The readiness required is simply to have already made your decision and invited Him into your life.

It is interesting to read about the future time periods that the Bible indicates are coming. However, remember that no one knows fully when it will happen and what all will be involved. So keep your eyes on Jesus and be assured that He will guard and keep you through whatever the future holds.

Because eschatology (the study of end times) is so fascinating to Hollywood and many books have been written to hypothesize what the end of the world will look like, I want to give you a brief outline based on the book of Revelation. Some of you may want to search the Scriptures for more understanding of this time period. This is certainly not a comprehensive list because God revealed other relevant information in many other books of Scripture. But it is a good place to start your study.

What does the book of Revelation tell us about the End Times?

The book of Revelation is primarily devoted to things that were revealed to the Apostle John concerning End Times. The book is often confusing and hard to understand even with a good study Bible or teacher. However, it is the only book of the Bible where God expressly promises us a blessing for reading it (not necessarily for understanding it!).

Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near. (Revelation 1:3)

Some of the key teachings about End Times as shown in Revelation are as follows:

The Tribulation Period: Revelation chapter 6.

The Great Tribulation Period: This period will follow the earlier period of tribulation. Revelation chapters 8, 9 and 16.

The Battle of Armageddon: Revelation 16:16 and 19:17-21.

The Millennium: 1000-year reign of Christ on Earth. Revelation 20:1-6.

The Great White Throne Judgment: Revelation 20:11-15

The New Heaven and the New Earth: Revelation 21 and 22:1-5

Are these in order of occurrence? I have no idea! This is simply the order in which they are listed by the Apostle John in the book of Revelation!

What have you learned about glorification?

Because you have made your decision to follow Christ, you are fully prepared for death or Jesus' return and whatever the End Times bring.

What a wonderful promise – Heaven for all eternity! Whether we arrive there by earthly death or by the Second Coming of Christ, we will be with Jesus for all eternity. The remaining chapters will deal with practical aspects of the Sanctification period – how to become more tuned to God and learn to be more Christ-like.

What Is Spiritual Warfare?

Who is the enemy?

During our Christian walk here on this Earth, we will have to learn to deal with Satan. You remember that in the sanctification stage our first responsibility is to learn to hear and recognize and obey JESUS' voice. Now I need to warn you that there's another voice that you must learn to recognize also – it's Satan's, sometimes called the devil.

Satan was once a beautiful angel who served God. The Bible tells us that he became proud and rebelled against God. God kicked him out of Heaven, so he spends his time wandering the Earth making life difficult for God's kids. He wants to be worshipped and desires to destroy God's plans. 1 Peter 5:8 says, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (NAS)

Is Satan equal in power with God?

Before we begin our discussion of Satan, I want to assure you that he is not a power equal to God. Avoid the Star Wars mentality that good and evil are equal forces. God is far superior in strength, and limits what Satan can and cannot do. While God has allowed Satan to be powerful on this Earth, He also limits what He allows him to accomplish. We see this limitation of Satan's power in Job's life. "The Lord said to Satan, 'Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.'" (*Job 2:6*) In Luke, we see Jesus insinuating that Satan must have permission to do any harm to believers. "'Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat.'" (*Luke 22:31*)

We are also assured that Satan is limited by God and will only be allowed to tempt us here on this Earth, but ultimately will be banished to Hell for all eternity. "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever." (*Revelation 20:10*) So, don't buy into the cartoons that show the devil as the boss in Hell. He is not! Hell was designed for Satan and his demons and God is the Almighty Ruler even over Hell.

So we must recognize that Satan can defeat us if we try to fight him by SELF alone, but if we follow JESUS' direction, Satan loses every time!

What is Satan's role in a believer's life?

We see Satan described pretty plainly in Scripture. 1 Peter 5:8 states that he is the Christian's adversary or enemy. As such he helps to make us stronger by pointing out our weak spots. Just as a sparring partner helps a boxer learn how to counter moves, so Satan is used to strengthen us.

In Revelation 12:10 we see him referred to as "the accuser of our brothers". Satan has **three definite agendas as accuser. One is to accuse us to God.** This involves Satan telling God that we are not worth His time and effort and love. But since God is all-wise (omniscient), we don't have to worry about those accusations.

But the more powerful role is **to accuse God to us.** Unfortunately, we often listen to those lies. As we listen to those lies, we may begin to doubt God's love, His trustworthiness, His faithfulness, His goodness, His understanding, His purpose, and anything else that Satan wants to attack. We must stand guard against these lies about God's character. We do so by searching Scripture to learn about God's character and to understand that Satan is lying in our ears. We **MUST** learn to recognize Satan's voice and understand this role in trying to separate us from God.

A third aspect of his role as accuser is **to accuse fellow Christians to us** – especially those who would help you and strengthen you in your Christian journey. An example of this is when you are being cared for or ministered to by an older, wiser Christian and Satan begins to point out every flaw and every defect in their lives. The purpose is to cut you off from spiritual help. You need to stand guard against this. Yes, we need to acknowledge that all humans have flaws and are not perfect, but be careful that you are not listening to Satan's accusations and running from a person or church or group that could offer you substantial help in your Christian journey.

What is Satan's mode of operation?

Satan's primary mode of operation is through lies. Jesus describes Satan in this way,

"... He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (John 8:44b)

I have found through study of God's Word and by my own and other's experience that Satan has three very good lies that he uses over and over and over. I've found that by learning the skills to defeat Satan in these three areas, I can eliminate a lot of problems in my life. I want to encourage you to memorize these three lies and

their intended purposes, and thereby stand firm against them. I assure you Satan will use other lies, but by learning these three you can eliminate a large proportion of the battles and make Satan work harder to think up new ones!

Satan's Lie #1 God doesn't love you – so give up!

Satan's Lie #2 God is not on your side – so look out for *numero uno*!

Satan's Lie #3 God doesn't know what is best – there's always a shortcut or a better plan!

We will look at these lies in relation to Eve's temptation in the Garden found in Genesis 3:1-7 and Jesus' temptation in the wilderness found in Matthew 4:1-11.

Now the first thing you will note is that Satan uses subtle insinuations, not direct attacks. He simply implies things to get our brain thinking and depending on SELF instead of listening to JESUS.

Now the serpent [Satan] was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree of the garden'?" (Genesis 3:1)

Do you see Satan implying that God doesn't love Eve very much?

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" (Genesis 3:2-3)

We can see that Satan's implications had their intended effect as Eve began to doubt God's love. We know this happened because she added "we can't even touch it!" God never said that, but she is beginning to doubt God's love!

"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman." (Genesis 3:4) We should add a theatrical gasp and emphasis on the word "surely" as Satan worked on Eve's emotions to make her feel not only unloved, but that God was not looking out for her best interests.

"For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:5) Satan here brings home the lie that God is not on your side and really doesn't love you; He just wants to keep you in subjection to Him because He's mean and bad. The implications are strong that God's character is not trustworthy and that, therefore, Eve should rely on SELF and not on God to direct her life.

Satan didn't even need Lie #3; Eve made her decision and followed SELF's instructions. She took what God had forbidden and the world has never been the same since.

Let's look at Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Right after Jesus' baptism, we're told that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness for 40 days of prayer and fasting and to be tempted by Satan. Once again we see Satan using the three basic lies.

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry." (*Matthew 4:1-2*) You need to know that Satan doesn't play fair; he often waits until we are tired or hungry or sick or overwhelmed to hit us with his lies. Learn to be on the alert especially during those bad times – but also during times of celebration of victory. We are especially vulnerable at our times of highs or lows.

"The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.'" (*Matthew 4:3*) Do you see the very subtle insinuation that Jesus is *not* God's beloved Son. "Maybe God doesn't love you – He doesn't even feed you!" Jesus responded by quoting Scripture and Satan tried a second time.

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" (Matthew 4:5-6)

This is Lie #1, #2, and #3 combined. Satan is saying, "God's plan is for You to go to the cross, but You had better think this through! Wouldn't it be better to have angels guard You and protect You? That sounds a lot safer to me and then You wouldn't have to die! You'd better look out for *numero uno* – or You'll end up dead!" Again, this is an insinuation that God doesn't love you and He's not on your side, so you better make your own plans. Once again, Jesus responded by quoting Scripture and Satan tried a third time.

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." (Matthew 4:8-9)

Here we see the temptation for Jesus to bypass the cross and to become the Savior of the world by bowing down to Satan. Satan claims that that would be equally good and wouldn't be nearly as painful! Again Jesus refutes the lie by quoting Scripture.

Then, we're told that Satan left Him for a time. But Luke records this statement, "When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time." (*Luke 4:13*) I promise you, Satan is closely watching for an opportune time in your life. Be on guard!

It really helps me to be able to identify Satan's voice and his lies. When I'm having a bad day and am feeling unloved, I know who is speaking to me. When I'm feeling stressed and feel that I have to figure everything out myself, I know who is speaking to me. When I hear something that sounds like a short-cut to what God has specifically told me, I know who is speaking to me. Those are my signals to go and spend some time in prayer and worship and drawing near to God so that I can hear His voice more clearly and avoid Satan's temptations.

How can I use Satan's attacks and lies to make me stronger?

One of my favorite responses when Satan jabs me with a lie is to pray: "Thank you, Father, for reminding me to make that secure." You see Satan knows our weak spots better than we do, so when he starts jabbing at a particular area, I know that I need to address that issue or question and get it totally settled.

So, when Satan brings up a question – deal with it. Get the facts. Arm yourself with Scripture and learn the truth so that he cannot defeat you in that particular area ever again!

Is doubting my salvation part of this attack?

Oh, yes! One of Satan's favorite lies is to tell a Christian that his salvation is not secure or that it never happened in the first place. So, how do we combat this attack? We answer this attack the same way we do all of Satan's jabs. We use Scripture – just like Jesus did.

Remember that you cannot determine whether a person has accepted Christ by the outward appearances. A Christian who is saying "no" to JESUS is going to look exactly the same as a non-believer on the outside. But remember that the inside is where it counts and only the Holy Spirit knows what's on the inside.

Look at this beautiful promise: "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." (*Romans 8:16*) In other words, we *know* on the inside. The Holy Spirit tells you that you belong to God. You and God are the only ones who can know for sure. Others can verify that you are being an obedient Christian when they see fruit. But no one else can judge whether you are "empty" or "filled" if you are walking in disobedience.

The Scriptures say that it's the Holy Spirit Who will confirm our salvation, so we need to spend time in prayer in order to hear Him speaking. If you cannot hear God's voice, ask yourself "why?" Is there disobedience in your life that is making it hard to hear? Then ask yourself this question: "Have I *ever* heard God guiding me, comforting me, or telling me that I'm His kid?" Maybe you are just out of practice or forgetting to listen to Him. If so, then you need to spend time in confession and let Him cleanse you so that you can hear Him more clearly. (Remember 1 John 1:9)

If, however, your answer is, "No, I have never heard God's voice inside my head", then please ask yourself this next question. "Has there *ever* been a time in my life when I've invited JESUS to not only pay for my sins, but to come in and be the new control center of my life?"

If the answer is yes, then you need to remember that God's promises in John 3:16, Romans 6:23, and Romans 10:9-10 are secure. If you have invited Him to be your Savior and Lord, then He DID come in. He saved you and transformed you from the inside out. It is not based on merit or worth or good deeds. It is based on God's promises of salvation to anyone who believes and confesses.

Does God want you to know for sure? Did you know that the word "know" in all its forms, i.e. knew, knowing, knowledge, etc., is used over 1500 times in the New Testament alone. Yes, I *know* God wants you to *know* for sure that you are His child. So He instructs the Holy Spirit to confirm it on the inside – where it counts!

If, however, you are reading this and feel certain that you have never invited JESUS to be the control center of your life, to take away your sins and make you into a new creation – you can do that right now. You can turn to page 60 and follow the Scriptures that tell you how to become a believer. Then, I suggest you start reading this book again at the beginning. This time, JESUS will be on the inside and guiding you step by step as you begin to grow in Him.

What have you learned about spiritual warfare?

The first thing I hope you've learned is that as a Christian you will always, at least as long as you are on Earth, experience Satan's temptations and hear his voice making suggestions to lead you off track. This little proverb has helped me to remember my responsibility: "You can't keep a bird from landing on your head, but you can keep him from building a nest." In other words, Satan will always be whispering his suggestions to you to try to get you to rely on SELF instead of JESUS. You cannot prevent that – but your job is to *shoo* him away as quickly as possible and not let his thoughts linger in your head.

Spiritual warfare is hard stuff, but it boils down to a very simple rule. Obey JESUS one instruction at a time and don't listen to Satan's lies to the SELF that are intended to get you off track! Learn Satan's favorite lies and their intended effects so that you will be prepared and ready to stand firm. And pay attention to the areas that Satan is attacking because they often define a weak spot that needs to be reinforced. In this way, we get stronger and sturdier in our faith and can live victoriously.

6

What Is Prayer?

I want us to look at constant prayer, daily prayer times, supplemental or emergency prayer times, and public prayer. All of these are essential to hear God's direction for us.

How Do I Stay in Constant Prayer?

Remember in Chapter 2 I stated that it was imperative for you to listen and learn to recognize God's voice once you've invited Him into your inner core? We said that He would begin to speak in a very gentle and quiet way and that usually the first things you hear are directions to follow. That is the first half of prayer. The other half is when you begin to speak back to Him. You see, the Holy Spirit, Who now resides in your inner core, is providing a two-way communication between you and God. That two-way communication system is called prayer.

In order to live in vital union with Him, you need to be continually speaking with Him and listening to Him. It won't be verbal – it will be just the same as He speaks to you through the Holy Spirit. It will feel like “thinking prayers,” or we sometimes call them “silent prayers,” but they are God's designed way for us to communicate with Him and for Him to communicate with us. Paul says that we should be praying continually and without ceasing. “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.” (*Ephesians 6:18*) And very simply, “Pray continually.” (*1 Thessalonians 5:17*)

This communication should go on all day long. So, I assume your first question would be: How do I get any work done if I must be praying all day? Simple – you take God to work with you! As you are digging a ditch, you talk to Him about the beauty of His world, asking for strength, asking for Him to relieve the pain in your shoulder, asking Him to bless your home, asking Him to keep your thoughts pure – just talking to Him the way you would your best Friend. But maybe you are concerned because your job involves a lot more concentration than digging a ditch. Then, I would suggest that you be asking Him for the concentration and wisdom and strength to excel at your job. And every time your mind wanders, you ask Him again for that concentration and let Him be the provider of it.

The purpose of this two-way communication is to give you access to the mind of God, the Creator of the Universe. I cannot imagine any job that would not benefit from His input! If you are a brain surgeon, then you can talk to Him because He is the Creator and knows exactly what needs to be done. And, it may surprise you,

but I believe God can help you with computer programs or nuclear reactors or anything else that man created, because He is omniscient (has all wisdom).

So, let's review our example of learning to love Joe. Joe walks into the room and we hear JESUS giving the direction for us to be friendly. Our prayer back to God may be something like this: "Father, I'm not sure that that will work, but I'm willing to try. Guide me so that I don't get it wrong." Or "Father, I'm scared. I know he doesn't like me. Show me how to love him." Or "Father, I can't do this! I don't want to disobey You, but I'm too afraid right now." This is the beginning of a conversation that should never, never end.

I talk to God from the time I wake up in the morning until I go to bed at night and often throughout the night if I am awake. He is my constant companion and I am never alone. This is God's design for Christians, but so many miss it by trying to fit God into a set prayer time once a day and leaving him out of the other 23 hours. I believe that this is the key to a life filled with joy, peace, and love.

Do I need a Daily Prayer Time?

We're told in Scripture that Jesus made it a habit of setting aside specific times to pray. Even though He was in constant communication through the Holy Spirit, He also set aside times of prayer in order to talk and listen to God in more detail. Luke tells us that Jesus' normal custom was to go the Mount of Olives after dinner each night to pray. "Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him." (*Luke 22:39*) Matthew records that even after a hard day's work, Jesus took time to pray. "After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone." (*Matthew 14:23 NAS*)

If Jesus needed to set aside time for daily prayer, I believe that it is **essential** that you and I set aside some time each day to pray. In Chapter 8, we'll discuss setting up a Quiet Time, a once-a-day time for prayer and Bible study and worship. But, regardless of when you set your Quiet Time, I highly recommend that you make time to pray first thing every morning in order for God to prepare you for the day ahead. And I suggest that you make time every evening before you go to bed to talk with God about how the day went and ask Him for a good night's rest. These are two critical times of prayer, because they prepare us to be dependent on Him for the upcoming time period. These don't have to be lengthy times of prayer, but I believe that if you will set aside 5 minutes, soon you'll be longing for more time with Him.

What do I pray about?

Everything! God already knows, but this is really a time for you and God to examine how you are thinking, feeling, relating, behaving, etc. Prayer is a two-way communication with God about anything that is happening or not happening in your life. The book of Psalms contains many of King David's prayers and they show us that it's really okay to be totally honest with God about every aspect of our lives. King David talked with God about his responsibilities as king, his feelings of depression and worry and fears, his friendships, his temptations and failures – about everything. He celebrated his victories with God and he talked to God about his burdens. There's nothing too big, or too small, to pray about.

When my children were just beginning to talk, I taught them to say "Night-night, Jesus," before they went to sleep. This reminded them that God was watching over them through the night. As they grew, they began to talk to God about their concerns. My grandchildren always ask God to give them nice dreams and not scary ones. Even though they are little, they trust that God will hear their prayers for themselves, their friends, and their family. We need to come to God with that same childlike faith that tells Him everything that is on our minds. And we need to begin to thank Him for His provisions and blessings.

Did you know that different personality types have different needs when it comes to praying?

Some people can pray for long periods of time inside their head – but other people are too distracted. Many Christians have found that it helps to write out their daily conversation to God, much like writing a letter! I did that for years, until arthritis made it too painful, so I switched to typing out my prayers on my computer! Amazingly, our God understands techno prayers! I pray in my head all day long, but for my daily prayer time, I type out a letter to God and it helps me to really connect with Him. It feels more like a "chat-room" than a letter, because I can stop and talk with Him and listen to Him "real time."

Are there additional prayer times that would help me to remember to pray continually?

Another time that many Christians set aside for prayer is just before meals. Each time they eat, they take a few seconds, either verbally or silently, to thank God for His provision of food. This is a good time to re-focus our lives since we all need to stop and eat throughout the day and we can remember to tune in to Him again.

Some people make it a habit to pray anytime they are in the car alone. For some reason, sirens remind me to pray. When I hear a siren, I not only pray for those

responding to a call and those needing help, but it also reminds me to return to continual prayer.

What about when I have a special need or crisis or decision to make?

Jesus also spent large chunks of time in prayer whenever He felt the need to know God's heart on a matter or when he was troubled about anything. "One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God." (*Luke 6:12*) This particular time of prayer was just prior to choosing the twelve men who would be his disciples. I believe that He was discussing those choices with God and getting the input He needed in order to choose wisely. We, too, can spend time with God – as much time as we desire. It pleases God when we are seeking to know His will. We'll talk more about seeking and knowing God's will in Chapter 12.

What is corporate or public prayer?

The final kind of prayer that you need to understand is corporate or public prayer. Many times in a church service or gathering, someone will lead in public prayer. When someone is leading the prayer, your responsibility is to join your heart in prayer with them. That is why you may hear others "agreeing" with the prayer by saying "Amen" or "Yes, Lord". As they are stating the prayer aloud, you need to be praying silently about the same things. This agreement in prayer allows God to act in a more powerful way and give direction to a group of Christian all at the same time. Jesus tells us,

"Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." (Matthew 18:19-20)

What have you learned about prayer?

So, there is constant prayer, daily prayer, extra prayer, special-needs prayer, and public prayer. But all of it adds up to one thing: listening to and speaking with the God of the Universe through His Holy Spirit. What an incredible privilege we have been given as His children, to run to Him with all our questions, our problems, our concerns, and our joys!

7

Is There an Instruction Manual?

The Bible is God's Word to us. It's alive!

*For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.
(Hebrews 4:12)*

That means the Bible will be unlike any other book you've ever read. If you will recall, one of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to remind us of what Jesus has said. To the first Christians, that was literally what they had heard Jesus say while on this Earth, but today the Holy Spirit reminds us of what is written in the Bible. Therefore, it is essential for us to read God's Word and to learn everything we can about Him and His plans for us.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

These two verses together tell us that the Bible is essential for our Christian walk. It will help us sort out whether something is right or wrong. It will correct us if we chose wrongly. It will help us clarify our motives and attitudes so that we understand ourselves and why we do things. It is the primary tool that God uses to grow us. I cannot comprehend trying to live this life without God's living Word to guide me. It is our interactive Instruction Manual for life.

The Bible was supernaturally written. The Scripture says that it was breathed by God (inspired) into the lives and hearts of approximately forty men of many occupations. They wrote the 66 books over a period of approximately 1,500 years, and in three languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Yet it is cohesive and continually points to Jesus Christ as its main and central character.

What will I find in the Old Testament of the Bible?

There are 39 books of the Old Testament covering the creation of the world until approximately 400 BC (before the birth of Jesus Christ).

The 5 Books of Moses, or the Pentateuch:

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy cover the beginning of the world, the beginning of God dealing with man, the beginning of the Mosaic Law, and the beginning of the nation of Israel and its earliest history.

The 12 Books of History: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther tell the history of God's work among the Israelite nation from the time of entering their promised land, through captivity, and then to their return. Note, though, that part of 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Chronicles are a parallel record to 1 and 2 Kings. They cover the same time period. The rest of the books in this section are in chronological order. These books of history take us up to approximately 400 years before Christ.

The 5 books of Poetry: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes are not chronological. They are a collection of poetry that covers all of the Old Testament time period.

The 17 Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are all books of the prophets. These 17 books are also not chronological. They are sermons and messages and biographies of the prophets that God sent to various nations. It is helpful to have a study Bible to be able to insert these teachings into the proper time period of history and better understand what is happening culturally. Throughout the Old Testament time period, God sent His Word through the Prophets and these books record a little bit about their lives and their messages. Since God does not change, the teachings recorded here are still relevant today!

What will I find in the New Testament of the Bible?

The New Testament is a collection of 27 books that covers the time period from Jesus' birth to the end of this world.

The 4 Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are parallel writings. They each tell the story of Jesus' life here on Earth. Each one is slightly different, but they obviously overlap. Each is written from the author's unique perspective, but together they tell a complete story of Jesus' life on Earth.

1 Book of History: There is only 1 book of history in the New Testament besides the Gospels. Acts is a book that deals with the beginning of the first Christian churches after Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. It would be more appropriately called the Acts of the Holy Spirit since it details the transition from Jesus being on Earth as a human, to Him filling us on the inside supernaturally with His Spirit.

21 Books of Instruction: Fourteen of these books were written by the Apostle Paul. They are each written in the form of a letter to either an early Christian church or to an individual. Their goal is to instruct us in how to live the Christian life. They are essential to your growth and understanding.

1 Book of Prophecy: Revelation contains the prophecies of the Apostle John concerning the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the end of the world, and the beginning of eternity.

You have probably already discovered that each book of the Bible has been conveniently divided into chapters and verses. This is for the convenience of the reader and was not part of the original text. Chapter and verse numbers were added by scribes at a later time. John 3:16 refers to the book written by the Apostle John, chapter 3 and verse 16. This reference simply helps us to find a specific portion of Scripture. Sometimes you see an “a” or “b” or “c” after the verse. This refers to which phrase within that verse is being cited. Another confusing thing for new readers of God’s Word is that some book titles occur multiple times with the number 1 or 2 or 3 before them. And you need to note that there is a difference between the Gospel of John (referred to as John) and 1, 2, and 3 John which are letters. All four books were written by the Apostle John.

What kind of Bible do I need?

There are essentially two types of Bibles available. One kind is a **translation**, the other is a **paraphrase**. A **translation** is done by looking at the oldest manuscripts available and translating from the Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic into our language today. It will be as accurate as the translator is able to make it. One of the oldest translations on the market today is the King James Version (KJV). Your parents or grandparents probably used that version. But since it was written, older manuscripts were found that clarified some of the teachings. So, better, or more accurate at least, translations are available today. Two of the more popular ones are the New International Version (NIV) and the New American Standard Version (NAS), but there are several more. A **paraphrase** is written by taking a translation and making it even easier to comprehend. So, it is slightly less reliable as a study Bible, but generally easier to read and understand. Two good paraphrases are The Living Bible (TLB) and The Message (TM), but there are several others.

In this text, I have primarily used the NIV translation, but have also referred to the NAS when it seemed clearer or easier to understand. I have also included one passage from TLB and one from TM, two paraphrases of God’s Word, in order to make the text as clear as possible for your comprehension.

Some Bibles are called “study Bibles” and contain notes and explanations to the text in addition to the actual text. These can be very helpful and aid in your understanding. I personally like the Ryrie Study Bible, but there are a lot of good ones available.

What method should I use to learn the Bible?

Just as there are various types of prayer, so there are various ways to dig into God’s Word. I’ll share a few here:

Pleasure reading: I enjoy taking a good paraphrase Bible and just sitting down and reading an entire book of the Bible at one sitting. It is helpful to be able to see the book as a whole and not just as individual verses.

Meditating: This is when you take one verse or one small passage and dwell on it. Think about it and pray about it and really let God speak to you concerning the meaning and application of this verse.

Memorizing: It is important that you memorize key verses in the Bible, such as 1 John 1:9 or John 15:5. Many Christians memorize whole chapters that are meaningful to them. Once it is memorized, then the Holy Spirit can help you recall the verse when you need it to guide you.

Studying: It is good to take time to really study God’s Word. You need to take the time to stop and look up words that you don’t understand. If you have cross-references in your Bible, it is helpful to check them and see the whole picture. There are good concordances and cyclopedic indexes that will help you find particular words or particular subjects in the Bible. I’ve been told that www.BibleGateway.com and www.Biblecrosswalk.com are good resources for comparing translations and doing deeper studies on-line. Sometimes a workbook is helpful to guide your studies. These can be purchased through Christian books stores or ordered on-line.

Listening to messages from your pastor or from other Christian teachers: Attending the weekend services and listening to your pastor preach from God’s Word is a great way to learn more. There are great books and tapes that will increase your knowledge of Scripture. And there are radio and television stations, as well as internet sites, that will guide your Bible study. Just be careful to verify the source.

Attending Bible study groups: I believe that Scripture also encourages us to learn as much as we can from others in group settings. Many churches offer weekly Bible study groups or cell groups that will help you learn God’s Word. You may also be able to locate a Bible study group in your community that is attended by members

of various churches. We can benefit from hearing what the Holy Spirit has revealed to others.

Read, read, read: And while all of these are important and fun, the most important thing you can do is to simply read the Scriptures. If you've never read the Bible before, then I suggest you begin with the Gospel of John, the 4th book of the New Testament. It was written by John, a fisherman who was called to be a disciple of Jesus, so it is written in very simple, easy-to-understand language. From there, keep reading through the Books of Instruction.

It is important that you not try to read too much at one sitting. I would rather you read slowly and spend time meditating on what you read, than to read quickly and miss the understanding. It's okay if you don't understand everything. But if you are feeling totally confused, call a Christian friend or pastor and ask them to explain what you are reading.

After you get familiar with some of the favorite Books of Instruction, you'll be ready to tackle more. For years I just chose a book to read and then moved to another book. But I realized that I was missing some of the books and I wanted a better plan. So, now I simply read from Genesis to Revelation and then start all over again. Some mornings I only read a few verses. Some mornings I read several chapters. I stop whenever I hear God speaking to me and telling me to listen to what He's saying through His Holy Spirit.

How does God speak through His Word?

Letting God teach you and speak to you is key to understanding. So, it's important to begin your time in God's Word by asking Him to help you understand what you are reading. As you are reading, you'll discover that certain words or passages just seem to be talking directly to you. Some people say that they seem to be in "bold" or that they "light up". The theological word for this is informative – it's called "illumination". By definition, it means that the Holy Spirit shines a light on certain passages just for you! Isn't that incredibly wonderful! That's why this book is called the Living Word, because God wrote it in order to personally tutor you through your journey of sanctification.

What have you learned about the Bible?

I want to encourage you to set aside a time to take in God's Word on a daily and regular basis. There are a variety of ways to do so. Most Christians do this during their Quiet Time. We'll talk more about establishing a daily Quiet Time in the next chapter. You can read God's Word at any time. It can be in the morning, in the evening, or on your lunch break at work, but find a time to read. When you realize

that God is speaking to you uniquely and directly through His Word by His Holy Spirit, you'll discover that you are hungry for more!

8

What Is Worship?

My definition of worship is this: whenever we get a glimpse of Who God is and who we are not! These times of worship can occur in private, with friends and family, in nature, and with our church body. They are essential for re-tuning our hearts and minds and helping us to see God as He really is. Don't fall into the bad habit of thinking that you can only worship on Sunday at a particular church. But also don't fall for Satan's lie that you don't need time on the weekends to worship with your church family! Let's look at both types of worship.

What is Corporate or Group Worship?

Corporate worship simply means worshipping with a group of other believers. Our church ministers plan the worship services, but it is up to the individual to choose whether they actually worship or not. It is an individual choice. How do you personally enter into worship? We must get our minds and thoughts focused on Who God is and not focused on ourselves.

When we get our hearts and minds focused on God and away from the everyday drama of life, we feel an amazing sense of God's presence and goodness. We realize that He is holy and just and righteous and good. We feel renewed and refreshed and ready to receive whatever He wants to teach us.

We must battle SELF in order to worship. You see, the Holy Spirit or JESUS inside of you wants to worship, but the SELF is often occupied with its own interests. We must command our SELF to be still and quiet and let the Holy Spirit within us worship. We must do battle against those thoughts that keep us from concentrating on God. So, worship is a lot of work sometimes! But it is always worth it!

We must also battle Satan in order to worship. As we attempt to worship, we must do battle with Satan's attacks, because his desire is for us to keep concentrating on SELF. That's why he constantly reminds you that the seat is uncomfortable, or that your back hurts, or that you have plans to make for the afternoon, or that you need to worry or fret about tomorrow. So, that's a battle, too – but worship is always worth it.

What is the value of Corporate Worship?

Is worship worth the battles we have to fight to get there? Oh, yes! Worship renews us and reminds us that we are God's kids and not alone. It helps us to see God as Almighty and Provider and Creator and Omnipotent (all powerful), Omniscient (all

knowing), and Omnipresent (always present everywhere). It is essential for our well-being to be reminded of these things. Otherwise Satan would just continue pulling us farther and farther from the Truth. I highly recommend a weekly dose of corporate worship – twice a week if you have the opportunity.

Within our corporate worship services you will experience several things that will help you worship: prayer, music, praises, Scripture readings, testimonies from other Christians, words of encouragement, and messages from God's Word.

In addition, there are two special times of worship that occur during our corporate worship time. They are baptism and communion.

What is Baptism?

Baptism is a ceremony or sacrament commanded by Jesus and modeled by Jesus. It is a picture of salvation.

We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. (Romans 6:4-7)

If you have seen a baptism, you know that the person is immersed in water that represents a burial. This part represents our death to emptiness and SELF being the one in charge of our life. Then the person is raised up out of the water to picture the resurrection and new life that God has given us. This represents the birth of JESUS inside of us that gives us new life. Notice I say “represents” because it is a picture of something that has already happened – baptism does not cause it to happen!

Who should be baptized?

Anyone who has experienced justification for their sins and wants to begin to walk in obedience to what JESUS commands should be baptized. Baptism is a picture of your decision or commitment to be obedient to JESUS and to begin to grow and follow Him in obedience. It is a way of marking your new beginning in public. It is a good way to show your non-believer friends that you are starting a new journey – a

new life -- because you are a new creation. Throughout the New Testament we see that new believers followed the Lord in baptism. Jesus commanded us, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.'" (*Matthew 28:19*)

Each time we see a new believer following the Lord's command for baptism, we should be reminded of our own decision to follow Jesus Christ. As we draw near to Jesus and praise Him for what He has done in our own lives, we should experience worship. So the baptism service is a part of our corporate worship time.

What is communion?

Communion is another special worship service or sacrament commanded by Jesus. We see in 1 Corinthians 11:23-31 a full description of the service. In summary, we are to take a piece of bread and let it remind us of Jesus' body, sacrificed on the cross in our place as our substitute. We are to take a cup of grape juice to remind us of His blood that was the price of our sins. We are not told how often to do this, but simply that as often as we do it, we should let it remind us of the terrible price that was paid for our sins. We are also commanded to remember that He is coming again to take us to Heaven. There is also a discussion in these verses of using this time of communion to confess our sins and really commit ourselves to being obedient to His leading. Because it is a time of re-commitment, communion should remind us to get back on track in obedience. It is essential that we have these reminders during our corporate worship time in order to keep us from straying and listening to Satan's lies. Each time you participate in communion (also called the Lord's Table or Lord's Supper), you need to examine yourself and see if there are areas that need to be cleaned up and confessed. According to 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." This is a special time of worship.

Corporate worship, like Bible study and prayer, is essential for our growth. We need to schedule times to worship with fellow believers as well as time to worship alone.

Can you worship outside of church?

Certainly! You can worship God anywhere, watching a beautiful sunset or in a ghetto, because He is there. You simply need to become aware of Who He is and who you are not. Many of my prayers begin with a time of just pure worship, praising God for Who He is and how much I need Him.

Worship, like prayer, is something that you can do anywhere and at any time. As you turn your thoughts toward God and begin to praise Him, worship happens! It is

important for us to set a stage for our worship so that it happens often. Some people like to play Christian music to remind them to worship. Some people, like me, like peace and quiet. I often break out in praise songs to my God while I'm going about my daily tasks. Some people like to worship while they walk outdoors. Some people worship in their cars as they are driving to and from work. Singing praises to God and picturing Him in His greatness helps you to worship God any time during the day or night.

How do I establish a daily Quiet Time for worship, prayer and Bible reading?

Establishing a daily Quiet Time for worship, prayer and Bible reading is essential for your growth. I don't know of a single successful Christian who does not set aside a daily time of worship, called a Quiet Time. It should be at a set time every day – even though it does not matter when. I also recommend that you have a set place to meet God. I have a special room for worship now that my children are grown. Before that, I had a particular chair that I would sit in to worship. I prefer to do my Quiet Time early in the morning before anyone else in the house is stirring because I need the house to be quiet. My husband does his Quiet Time in the morning, in the living room, regardless of what is going on around him. Noise doesn't bother him at all. So a "Quiet Time" doesn't necessarily have to be quiet! We're told that Susanna Wesley had her Quiet Time by pulling her floor-length apron over her head. This was the signal for her 12 children to leave her alone so that she could spend time with God! Everyone is different. But every Christian needs a daily Quiet Time. Jesus apparently made his Quiet Time in the evening after dinner.

What does a Quiet Time look like?

It varies for each individual. The essentials are a time of worship and praise, a time of prayer, a time of Bible reading or study, and a time of reflection and listening to God. My suggestion is that you set aside a time and set a timer for at least 15 minutes. As you become consistent with this time, you will notice that you will want to extend the time that you spend with God. Some Christians spend 1-2 hours per day in their quiet time. My own quiet time varies from 45 minutes to 2 hours depending on what God and I are talking about and what's going on in my life. It's not a rigid time frame. I simply start with prayer and/or worship and then move to Bible reading. Then I usually return to prayer and often read a devotional book to teach me more about God's Word and living the Christian life. Then I spend some time in quiet meditation and thinking about what I've read and inviting God to talk with me about what's on His heart. Together we plan the day and I commit to Him that I want to be obedient and be able to hear His voice all day. As I've stated before, my prayer time at the beginning is usually in the form of typing out a letter to God, but as I enter into worship and praise, I may sing or pray aloud or talk to

Him silently. Sometimes I sit at the computer, sometimes I sit in my rocking chair, and sometimes I kneel on the floor or even lie prostrate in prayer. I just spend that time with God and we talk together about everything that needs talking about!

This time of quiet, private, personal worship is essential for my day. If I find that, because of an early flight or some emergency, I cannot do my entire quiet time, I try to find at least 2 or 3 minutes that I can be still and talk to God about the situation. I believe that it's important for me to keep my commitment to meet Him first thing every morning. Even on vacation, I try to slip away (usually hiding in the bathroom of the hotel room so that I can have quiet) and spend a few minutes in worship and praise before starting my day.

I consider my Quiet Time to be like tuning a guitar. You can't play for very long without it moving farther and farther from the right key. I need my Quiet Time to re-tune me to the Father and remember that He's the One I serve – not SELF. A Christian without a Quiet Time will become weak and powerless as Satan moves them farther and farther away from God's plan for their lives.

What have you learned about worship?

Worship is an essential part of a Christian's life. As we worship, we draw near to God and feel close to Him and ready to hear His voice. We need times of worship with fellow believers and we need daily worship times alone with Him. Our personal Quiet Time is an intimate time for us to draw near to God and feel His presence.

9

Where Does the Joy Come From?

Jesus is our model for living the Christian life. But He is not JUST the model! He is also the power and strength and direction within not only to instruct us, but to empower us to live victoriously. Living in obedience to JESUS' instructions brings incredible rewards like joy and peace. Let's look at how this works.

How did Jesus manage this life without sin?

If you study the life of Jesus Christ on Earth, you will discover that He was in constant communication with God the Father. The Scripture teaches us that Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit the same way that we are and listened to and communicated with God through this inner core on a constant basis. "Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil." (*Matthew 4:1*) "Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts...." (*Mark 2:8a*) Jesus said, "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." (*John 5:30 NAS*) Again Jesus says, "...My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me." (*John 7:16b*)

As we look at Jesus' life here on Earth, we see that He lived a perfect life as a human being. Sometimes, I think we tell ourselves that because He lived in a different culture and time period, that He really didn't experience the same difficulties that we do. If you read the Gospels carefully, especially the book of Mark, I think you'll agree that He lived in a pretty stressful environment. The first pressure was from the government. Israel had been conquered and was currently ruled by Rome. Roman soldiers demanded allegiance and kept strong control of all happenings in Israel. There was heavy taxation on the people that caused financial hardship. Jesus was also in conflict with the religious leaders of that day – and in that culture the religious leaders were the rulers of the land. They controlled everything under Rome's supervision. They eventually managed to have Jesus crucified because they considered Him dangerous to their authority. Jesus was in conflict with his family of origin because they didn't understand Him. His younger half-brothers tried to persuade Him to fit in and to quit rocking the boat! Then there were probably close to 200 people who were "groupies", those who were always surrounding Him and positioning themselves to get favors from Him. They needed to be trained and taught in order to carry out the work after Jesus was crucified. Then there were the people in all the surrounding communities that mobbed Him with requests for healing and miracles. Let's be honest. He certainly had every opportunity to be stressed and overwhelmed, yet we never see Him hurrying. We never see Him exploding in rage when His plans got interrupted. We don't see Him

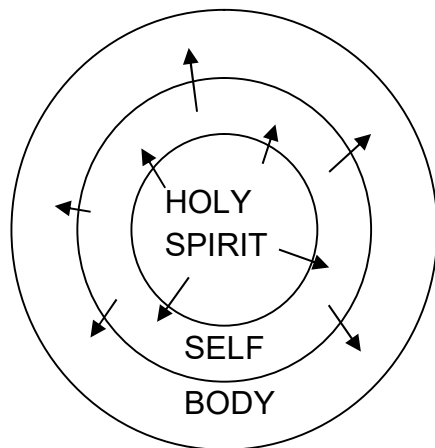
frustrated when His sermons got stopped by people wanting healing or miracles. We don't even see Him ruffled over the subject of taxes.

How was Jesus "like us" during His time on Earth? Wasn't He God?

We are told in Scripture that when Jesus came to Earth,

...He emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:7-8 NAS)

Jesus set aside His equality to God when He came to Earth and instead operated as a human being, listening to God's orders and choosing obedience. Now saying that He became a "bond-servant" is simply stating that He became obedient to the Holy Spirit by choice. A bond-servant was a servant who had purchased or earned his freedom, but chose willingly to stay and serve his master. Calling Jesus a bond-servant is stating that even though He was God, while on Earth, in the form of a man, He willingly chose to be under submission to God through the Holy Spirit – just like we are! So, what did Jesus look like while He was on Earth? Let's look at the model of Jesus:



Jesus received orders from God through the Holy Spirit and He instructed His body to obey. The difference between Him and us is that He never once disobeyed what God told Him to do. Therefore He was perfect and able to die in our place as the perfect payment for our sins.

If you want to learn how to live this life with the same peace and love and joy that Jesus had, you must learn to obey JESUS' commands from your inner core.

Are there rewards for obedience?

Oh, yes! When we are obedient, there are beautiful results (just like there were in Jesus' life). We are told that the result or reward of living in obedience to JESUS produces fruit in our lives.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)

When you meet Christians who are overflowing with love and peace and kindness and joy, you can be assured that they are walking in obedience to JESUS. And their lives radiate with the characteristics of Jesus (fruit) that is within them. They are living like Jesus lived while He was on this Earth.

Did you know that the word enthusiasm is actually derived from two Greek words that mean "in God" or "in Theos". No one had more enthusiasm for life than Jesus and this is the life that He desires for you. Look at this promise from Jesus, "...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (*John 10:10b*)

Once again the key is obedience. When we let JESUS give the directions from our inner core, He will instruct us in how to live according to His plan, not ours.

How do I get joy and peace?

Many Christians have been taught that they must produce these Christian virtues of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control by gritting their teeth and straining with all their might. "I'm going to have joy if it kills me!" But we don't see this in Scripture. These virtues are described simply as fruit of the Spirit. Does an apple tree strain to produce fruit? I don't think so. What it does is put down its roots deep into the soil and draw up nourishment and water from the soil. (That's similar to our need for Bible study). Then it goes through the very complicated routine of turning sunlight into life-giving energy (very similar to the way prayer works in our life). It simply does what it was created to do – and *voila!* An apple begins to grow at the right time and in the right season. So it is with the Fruit of the Spirit. I love the way The Living Bible paraphrases this verse.

And now just as you trusted Christ to save you, trust him, too, for each day's problems; live in vital union with him. Let your roots grow down into him and draw up nourishment from him. See that you go on growing in the Lord, and become strong and vigorous in the truth you

were taught. Let your lives overflow with joy and thanksgiving for all he has done. (Colossians 2:6-7 TLB)

As you grow and walk in obedience, your friends and family will begin to notice that you are changing into someone who has Christ-like character and characteristics. In fact, Jesus tells us, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (*John 13:35*) Where do we get the kind of love that people notice? We get it by obeying JESUS.

Can you give me a personal example of growing fruit?

I want to share with you a personal example of the way I began to grow in one particular area when JESUS reminded me that I needed to live my life in obedience to Him – not doing things the way SELF controlled me! I had been married several years and my husband was in a really good job as a computer engineer with a good company. I loved it that he was happy and enjoyed his work. But I HATED his working overtime. My SELF resented it terribly! Every time he would call and say that he needed to work a couple more hours, I would literally explode in anger. Sometimes I would punish him with the silent treatment for a couple of days. It was nasty! But sooner or later, I would hear JESUS reminding me that I needed to ask David’s forgiveness, so eventually, I would apologize and promise that it wouldn’t happen again. And then it would happen again! Over and over this would happen and it was really becoming a dangerous conflict in our marriage. Then JESUS began telling me that this was unacceptable behavior for a Christian and that I needed to respond in love. I asked Him to help me to remember that and waited for the next occurrence. Sure enough, the phone call came and once again I exploded in rage. But after a few hours, I would be filled with regret and call him back and apologize before he came home. I kept asking JESUS to teach me how to respond with love and patience and joy and each time he called, my rage would end quicker. Even though it took a while, the day finally came when David called and I said very simply, “Okay, let me know when you’re on your way and I’ll reheat your dinner.” I was SO proud of myself! I could see God at work in my life! But God was not through with me. He began to show me that I could actually enjoy that special unexpected time by jumping in a bubble bath and soaking – something I rarely had time to do when David was home. God changed me on the inside (over a period of 6 months) so much that I actually looked forward to him deciding to work late. I would rather have him home, but I enjoy the times when he works late occasionally.

Can God really take my messed up life and make it good?

I want you to know that God is in the transforming business. He can change you from an impatient person to a patient one. He can change you from harsh to gentle. He can change you from being depressed to being filled with joy. He loves you and

wants the very best for you. His plan is to transform stressed out, overwhelmed lives into lives of peace and love and joy. He's already changed you from a sinner to totally clean before Him. Now let Him transform you completely through obedience and He'll make you into a totally new person from the inside out! And I promise, even if this is the umpteenth time you've started over, God wants to clean you up and start growing you again. That's His perfect plan! No matter how long it takes, He loves you and wants to transform you into the person He planned long ago for you to be.

What have you learned about the Fruit of the Spirit?

Jesus is our perfect model, but He's also our strength and wisdom and personal instructor. Without Him, none of this would be possible! If we live our lives in obedience, following His instructions, the rewards will follow. The rewards are those things that we see in Jesus' life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control.

10

Where Do I Fit in God's Family?

Actually the description of the way believers should fit together is closer than a family – it is described as parts of a body. “So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” (*Romans 12:5*) You are part of God's family of believers which encompasses all believers from all generations, from all nations all over the globe. Someday we will all be assembled together in Heaven for all eternity.

Do I need a Church group?

Yes! Different Christians will need different churches depending on worship style or preference of teaching styles – but all need a place to grow and belong in a body where God's Word is being taught and practiced. Not all churches are mature and growing bodies, so you need to let JESUS direct you in finding a church where you can grow and participate. In 1 Corinthians 12:18 we see, “But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.” Paul spends quite a bit of time in 1 Corinthians 12 describing how this body should work together.

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body....Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.” (1 Corinthians 12:12 and 14)

Within the local body of believers or local church you will find people fulfilling different roles. Some are elders or pastors, some are teachers, some do administration, some do childcare, some prepare the music, some type the bulletin, some sweep the floors or care for the building. There are many, many different jobs within the church. But Scripture teaches that no one is more important or essential than anyone else. We are all equal in God's church. Our responsibility is to be obedient to what God is showing us to do. Paul addresses this by writing,

As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don't need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don't need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so

that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. (1 Corinthians 12:20-25)

In other words, we may not think our liver is very pretty or necessary, until it fails – then we learn to appreciate it very quickly! Every single person who makes up the body is vitally important. New members are just as important and vital as older, more experienced Christians because they challenge the older Christians to dig deeper for answers and they provide fresh enthusiasm!

I like to describe the Christian body as a team of individuals going through basic training for the Marines! You learn to work together or you fail! Living the Christian life is a very personal journey – but it must be shared with other members of the body or it will fail. Satan knows that a Christian who is not actively involved with a body of believers is like a coal that he can drag away from the fire. It becomes cold much more quickly than the group of coals that stick together.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another -- and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

The purpose of our gathering together is to encourage and “spur one another on”. What are we encouraging each other to do? Listen to God and be obedient! He will direct your path, but you will need a body of believers around you in order to fully become all that God intended. It is only in community that we are able to see the discrepancies between our behavior and our beliefs.

The New Testament church met in houses and so, by necessity, was small. Every member was known and accepted. If you are attending a modern-day church that has a membership of over 100 people, I suggest that you find a small group. Many larger churches have small groups that will enable you to experience body life the way God intended. Just as the human body has many divisions, so the church can be divided into systems, organs, tissues, and cells. Many churches call their small groups “cell groups”. This is to remind us that we are all part of a large whole. If your church does not have organized small groups, then I suggest that you join a Bible study group, a mission organization, a ministry group, or some other small group within the church in order to begin your growth. Talk with your pastor, or call the church office to find out what is available at your church or in your community.

What is a Spiritual Gift?

We've talked a lot about JESUS filling your inner core and making you into a new creation. But I want now to inform you that when He comes into your core, He brings a gift with Him – a Spiritual Gift. Certainly, our biggest and best gift is salvation and having Him in the center of our lives and having life with Him for all eternity. But, He also promises in His Word that He brings you a special Spiritual Gift. You receive it immediately upon salvation, but it usually takes a while to discover it and begin to put it to use. “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.” (1 Peter 4:10)

Let's look at some things you need to know about your gift. First and foremost, **it is a free gift from God and comes at salvation; it's not earned or deserved.** And your gift is **specifically chosen for you by God and brought to you by the Holy Spirit.** “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.” (1 Corinthians 12:11) Finally, your gift **is to be used for the common good of the body to encourage and build up your fellow members.** While we may use our Spiritual Gift in our family or work places, its primary use is to be in the body of Christ, the church. “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12:7)

Is a Spiritual Gift the same thing as a skill or personality trait?

No! It is not the same thing as personality. Your personality was present at birth – your spiritual gift is given at your new birth (salvation). It is not the same thing as ministry. Many people confuse their spiritual gift with the role they play and make the mistake of saying, “I have the gift of doing childcare or the gift of singing solos.” Those are ministries that may involve the use of our gift, but the gift is separate from the ministry. 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 states that there are a variety of gifts, a variety of ministries or service opportunities, and a variety of works or effects (results from their use), but these are three distinct things.

So, what are the gifts and what do they look like?

Seven of these gifts are listed in Romans.

We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach. If it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. (Romans 12:6-8)

Are there more than seven? Some people think so, but these are the ones listed in Romans 12, so it's a good place to start.

Prophecy is one of the Spiritual Gifts given to some Christians. It is the ability to understand deeply the things of God and to state them clearly and boldly to others. Many persons with the gift of prophecy have very strong feelings about right and wrong and they supernaturally know what pleases God and what displeases Him. Every church body needs at least one person with the gift of prophecy to warn them if they are off track or disobedient to God's Word.

Service is a Spiritual Gift given to many Christians. While all of us are called to serve, these Christians have the supernatural ability to serve others in ways that bless their lives and minister to their needs. These Christians are the foundation of most churches as they are the ones who are willing to work behind the scenes and make amazing sacrifices in order for others to grow and worship.

Teaching is one that is often confused with the role of teaching and that's sad, because some teachers are supernaturally gifted and others are not. If you have the gift of teaching, I believe that you have the supernatural ability to understand and apply God's Word and a love for studying it deeply. Those with the gift of teaching are needed to share their insights into God's Word with the rest of us.

Encouragement or exhortation is a Spiritual Gift that again is often misunderstood. Many people confuse this gift with the word "admonishing". "Admonishing" means to correct with words. "Exhortation" simply means to encourage and to "come along side of". Sometimes that encouragement comes in the form of admonishing, but not always. Someone with the gift of exhortation is a coach to those who desire to receive instruction in Christian living. They supernaturally see simple ways to explain complex ideas and to motivate and encourage others to follow God. My gift is exhortation, and I hope that this book encourages you to follow God's ways more closely.

Contributing to the needs of others or giving is another gift that is easily misunderstood. Every Christian is encouraged to give his time, talents, and income to support the work. But the gift of giving is, once again, supernatural. It involves giving above and beyond what is humanly possible. These are people who support the work in such a way that only God could have provided the funding. George Mueller was such a man. He never had more than \$75 in his personal account at any one time during his entire lifetime. But God used him to establish and completely support multiple orphanages in England in the early 1900's.

Leadership or the gift of administration is a supernatural gift given to a few Christians in each body. This gift enables them to lead without offending and to

establish a following and a respect from fellow Christians. They are attentive to the details that others might ignore. They have a special capacity to carry the weight of the group on their shoulders. While many attempt to lead, you will notice that some do so supernaturally.

Mercy is again often misunderstood, since we are all called to show mercy to our fellowman. However, those with this gift have a supernatural compassion for people in pain or trouble. They are able to care supernaturally in a way that blesses and helps those in need very much like Christ. Mother Teresa comes to mind when I think of this gift.

Now you will notice that for most of these gifts I have noted that they are often misunderstood or confused. Why? I believe it is because Satan wants Christians to be confused and to misunderstand these gifts. Why? Because these gifts are vital to each body to enable them to function supernaturally! When you come together in a small church or group and each member of that body actively participates using his or her supernatural Spiritual Gift given by the Holy Spirit, you will find amazing, supernatural power there. You will also find an abundance of peace and love and joy and all the other fruits. You will experience God's presence and His plan for your group.

What have you learned about being a part of God's family?

This is God's plan for the family of God. We come together, each one with different skills and personality and each one with a special Spiritual Gift. We help each other to grow and become a whole, fitted together perfectly to form a local body of believers. Paul describes it this way:

*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.
(Ephesians 2:19-22 NAS)*

How Do I Tell Others What Has Happened to Me?

What is evangelism?

Evangelism is simply showing the world what's inside you! It's telling others what has happened in your life and inviting them to come and see what God can do for them. Like the spiritual gifts that Satan wants to confuse and make hard, evangelism is a scary word for many people. If they realized how very, very simple it is, they wouldn't be afraid.

Jesus called us the light of the world. He said that the world we live in is in darkness. When you accept Him into your life, you've discovered Light and you need to let it shine wherever you are. Here's what Jesus said, paraphrased from *The Message*,

"You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand – shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:14-16 TM)

Peter writes, "...Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." (1 Peter 3:15b) That's just a complicated way of saying, "When someone asks you why you are so different from your peers, or from the way you used to be – tell them!"

Just remember that when you let your light shine, people will notice! They will begin to come to you like moths to a flame to investigate the light. Be ready to tell them what has happened to you and the joy that you are discovering as you continue to learn about God and His plan for your life. Be honest with them about what is changing and happening in your life.

You are not responsible for getting people to accept Christ. That is an important truth. You cannot hogtie them and bring them into the Kingdom – nor can you argue them into believing. Only God can save people and only His Holy Spirit can

convince them that it is time to do so. Your job is simply to keep telling others what has happened to you and invite them to investigate your claims!

Keeping it simple and non-threatening is the key to becoming a life-long light for Jesus. When we begin to tell people what *they ought* to do, we quickly become discouraged, because, quite frankly, people don't like to be told what to do! You must simply shine your light into their darkness and let them see the joy and peace and love that have changed your life completely. Be patient as they ask you questions and as you tell them what God is doing in your life. It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict them and convince them that they need to seek God. When the time is right, JESUS will lead you to share with them how they, too, can experience His love and forgiveness and begin this new life.

Are there different ways to do evangelism?

Oh, yes! How you share your story will certainly depend on your personality and comfort level, but it will probably be most impacted by your spiritual gift.

If you have the gift of prophecy, you may feel totally comfortable standing on a street corner and telling strangers about how you came to know the Lord. You may be gifted with the boldness to speak to large groups about your salvation experience. But this does not exempt you from letting your light shine in your everyday situations – your home, your office, your extended family, your neighbors, etc.

If you have the gift of service, you may feel more comfortable with friendship evangelism, where you simply serve someone until they ask why. Then you share with them what God has done in your life and why you love to serve. You may be more comfortable with inviting someone to attend church with you than talking to them about their souls. That's okay. Just continue to let your light shine and soon they will want what you have found.

If you have the gift of teaching, you may write books to lead others to the Light. You may feel comfortable sharing your story with classrooms of people and you may write books to encourage others to share their light. But, again, that doesn't exempt you from being a light in your everyday world.

If you have the gift of exhortation, you may feel more comfortable sharing one on one with individuals that you are already encouraging. Because people with this gift are often "people persons," they often assume that everyone knows why they care, but the truth is, we have to speak the truth boldly and let people know that it is JESUS in our lives and not just our personality that makes us lovers of people.

If you have the gift of giving, you may be able to support missionaries and others that will multiply your message. But, again, this does not exempt you from sharing your light in your place of business, your home, your club, etc.

If you have the gift of leading, you may set up times for evangelism outreach activities or programs to teach others how to share their light. But don't forget that you have the responsibility not only to lead others to do evangelism, but to lead by example, by making it a daily part of your life.

If you have the gift of mercy, you may feel more comfortable sharing one on one with someone that you have helped who is in need of physical as well as spiritual help. It is a natural and beautiful step from helping with the physical to telling them how you have been changed by inviting Jesus into your heart.

How do I start?

Sharing with others what God has done in your life should be a natural and everyday occurrence for you. You can include it in your everyday activities – when you strike up a conversation with those standing in the check-out line, when you are sharing a cup of coffee at the office, when you are walking to lunch, when you are sitting down visiting, or running around a track. Learning to make God a natural part of your vocabulary is the key to being comfortable talking about Him with those who don't yet know Him.

Remember that everyone has the God-shaped vacuum inside of them and many will be ready to hear what you are willing to share! I'm amazed at the number of times that I have timidly shared my story with another person, only to have them say, "That's what I've been looking for! I want what you have found. Tell me how to accept Jesus!"

When you have the opportunity to share with someone about what God has done in your life, you need to be prepared to show them how they, too, can invite Jesus into their hearts.

What do I need to know in order to help someone accept Jesus?

All you really need to know is the ABC's of salvation. It's that simple.

A – Admit that you are a sinner. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” *(Romans 3:23)*

B – Believe that God sent Jesus to die for your sins. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” *(John 3:16)*

C – Confess with your mouth that Jesus is your Lord and Savior.

That 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. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. (Romans 10:9-10)

What have you learned about evangelism?

God asks us to go through our normal lives planting seeds – dropping hints, if you please, about the most important happening in your life. Since Jesus called us to be “fishermen” for souls, we might consider this part putting out the bait. We need to be sharing daily, with anyone who will listen, what God has done for us. Some will want to know more and others will ignore us. That's okay. One of the greatest joys of this life is sharing the Light with those in darkness and seeing them begin to shine radiantly for Jesus!

How Do I Know God's Will?

Knowing God's will is a crucial part of living the Christian life, but think about this: If you are being totally obedient to everything that you've heard God say up to this point, then aren't you, by definition, right in the center of His will? What many Christians mean by "knowing God's will" is that they want a clear understanding of everything in the future road ahead – yet Scripture repeatedly shows us that God generally doesn't work that way. Instead we see Him asking people to follow Him without giving them the whole picture. We see God calling Abraham with these words, "...Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.'" (*Genesis 12:1b*) In the New Testament we see Jesus calling Matthew. How much information was Matthew given? "As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew, sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me,' he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him." (*Matthew 9:9*) So, instead of asking, "How can I know God's will for the rest of my life?" we must instead ask, "What is God's will for this hour, this day, this choice, this decision right now?"

What does the Bible say about determining God's will?

There are some specific guidelines in Scripture to help us hear His voice so that we will know which way to turn in a given situation. Look at these beautiful promises: "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'" (*Isaiah 30:21*) God told the prophet Jeremiah, "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know." (*Jeremiah 33:3*)

"I delight to do Thy will, O my God." (*Psalms 40:8 NAS*) The first step in seeking God's will is to ask yourself if you really want to know it! Are you eager to obey whatever He says and go wherever He leads? Do you sincerely delight in obedience? If not, you may find it hard to hear Him. Some of that is because of built-up sin, and some of it is because you have not trained your ear to hear Him. God is not like a nagging mother! He does not compel us to obedience. He speaks softly and gently and invites us to join Him on this wonderful adventure of the Christian journey. If you are delighting in obedience, you will find it much easier to "know His will" on a particular matter.

"Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground." (*Psalms 143:10*) "Teach me" implies a process of learning day by day. Learning to hear God's voice and learning to walk in obedience take time and effort, just like learning a new language or a new math technique. It takes practice. You

don't wait until you are in a crisis and then expect God to lead you. It's a day-by-day learning process. The more you are reading God's Word, the more you will understand His character and His methods of operation, so that discerning His direction is easier. Learn from Him daily so that you can hear Him clearly when you need to make a decision. I am amazed at the Christians who totally ignore God in their daily life – until they must make a decision. Then they come to me crying that God is not answering them. That is as ludicrous as expecting me to remember how to do algebra problems that I haven't done in years! God is gracious and often bails us out of these tight spots. But we would not find ourselves in "tight spots" nearly as often were we daily walking with Him.

This is part of the model prayer that Jesus said we should use: "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'" (*Matthew 6:10*) Again the key is whether or not we truly want God's will to be done. It is imperative that we decide before we ask. Do I really, really want God's will or do I want my own will to be done? God often keeps silent until we are ready to do His will. Sometimes we don't even understand our motives until we spend time in prayer and realize that deep down we just want to do what we want to do, and we are not really, really desirous of knowing God's will.

"Who is the man who fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way he should choose." (*Psalms 25:12 NAS*) This is not talking about being afraid of God, but rather of loving Him with a reverential awe. Do you fear God? Do you understand that He is Almighty God, Jehovah, Creator of the Universe, Sustainer and Maintainer of all that is, King of Kings and Lord of Lords? Do you understand that you are simply a bought slave, purchased by the blood of Jesus? But He has elevated you to the place of an heir! Wow! Don't come demanding that God answer you! Come humbly before Him in reverence and worship.

"So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer." (*Ezra 8:23*) At times God will call us to seek His face diligently – not because He's trying to hide His will from us, but because He wants to teach us something or grow us in some way. Sometimes, when we need to make a decision, God calls us to come before Him in prayer and fasting to seek His face. This prepares our heart and mind to really listen to what God has to say.

This is what the Lord says -- your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea. (Isaiah 48:17-18)

It is very hard to determine God's will if you have an accumulation of sin in your life. Now, do you remember the definition of sin? Sin is choosing to do what SELF wants instead of obedience to JESUS. First deal with the sin in your life (1 John 1:9) and then seek His face to know His direction.

The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail." (Isaiah 58:11)

And also, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." (*Proverbs 3:5-6*) As you seek God's will, you need to know that it is God's plan and intention to tell you His directions. He is simply waiting until you are ready to receive those directions and be obedient. He is pleased when we seek His face and not just assume that we know which way to go. "God helps those who help themselves" is NOT from the Bible. It is a statement made by Benjamin Franklin and is counter to Scripture!

These are important Scriptures to consider as you seek to know God's will on a particular decision or choice that needs to be made.

How can I know for sure that what I'm hearing is God's voice and not my own SELF or Satan's?

That's a very good question. Here are some guidelines for you.

Make it a habit to hear God's voice so you can recognize it readily. One thing is to learn early to recognize God's voice and then you won't feel so confused when there's an important decision to make. Make it a habit to seek His face daily and you will be in a good position to know His voice.

Make sure it is consistent with God's character. The more you read God's Word, the more you will learn about God's character. His character is unchanging and He will never lead you to do something that is contrary to His character. Let's look at the 4 moral characteristics of God:

God is holy. This separates Him from sin and wrong. He is holy – clean and pure and set apart from those of us who are not.

God is righteous. This means that He can do no wrong. He cannot ignore sin or evil. By definition, He is always right, even when we do not understand it.

God is truth. He is the defining measure of truth. He has created the universe and everything is in harmony with His truth – there are no

discrepancies. If something is contrary to God's truth, it is wrong! Further study will confirm this because He is truth.

God is love. This characteristic overshadows all the other traits of God. This is His strong suit! One of the first verses my children learned from the Bible was 1 John 4:8b, "...God is love." Love involves absolute loyalty to its intended. Throughout Scripture you will see God's love extended to His people. The Hebrew word "*hesed*" is translated as "lovingkindness" or simply "kindness" in English. But its meaning is absolute loyalty and overwhelming love for a person. We are told multiple times that God's *hesed* is toward those who love Him.

Since we know that God will always work according to His character, if we are hearing a voice that is contrary to God's character, we can be assured that it is not JESUS speaking.

Make sure it is consistent with God's Word.

Another good rule of thumb is to check and see if what you think you are hearing from JESUS is contrary to anything in God's Word. God's Word is a reliable check point for us to make sure that the voice we are hearing is indeed God's and not our own or Satan's. If the voice is asking you to do something that is contrary to the commands or rules that God has laid down in Scripture, then I suggest you spend some time in worship and seeking God's clarification, because it is not God's voice that you are hearing. He will never lead you to disobey His own rules.

We can start with the 10 Commandments, but we will see many, many other commands in His Word. These are summarized from Exodus 20.

- #1 Don't worship other gods before Me.
- #2 You shall not make for yourself an idol.
- #3 Don't misuse God's name or speak it lightly.
- #4 Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.
- #5 Honor your father and your mother.
- #6 You shall not murder.
- #7 You shall not commit adultery.
- #8 You shall not steal.
- #9 You shall not bear false witness.
- #10 You shall not covet.

Jesus summed up these commands,

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-39)

As you read Scripture you will discover many other commands teaching you how to behave and how to respond to other people. The voice you are hearing must be consistent with all of these – or you are not hearing JESUS' voice!

What if I miss God's will?

Today's GPS system is a really good analogy to the way JESUS speaks to us through His Holy Spirit. If you've ever used one of these gadgets, you know that they are very helpful to find a particular location and to stay on track. If you make a wrong turn, they simply re-compute. They don't yell and scream at you or call you a stupid idiot! They simply compute a new route – which often involves a U-turn. God guides us in a very similar way. His Holy Spirit is constantly re-computing where we need to go or be next. We know that one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit is patience – and He shows incredible patience with us as we navigate through life. If God is directing you to make a U-turn, do so! He has great plans for you. You don't want to miss them! I can assure you that if the desire of your heart is to know God's will, He will help you to discover it!

Is it okay to ask for help if I feel confused about knowing God's will?

“Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory.” (*Proverbs 11:14 NAS*) Titus 2:1-8 states that the older men and older women in Christ are to teach the younger men and women. And I believe, on the basis of Paul's teachings about the body (Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12), that we must be interdependent with our fellow body parts, asking them for prayer and learning from their experiences.

But we also have this warning:

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the Lord. (Isaiah 31:1)

This verse warns against seeking other's advice or wisdom, instead of seeking God. It does not say that we should not seek a wise counselor who will pray with us and help us to seek God. I went to a respected leader in a former church and asked her to pray with me about a decision that I needed to make. Instead, she immediately replied, “Well, I think you need to do *this*.” I was horrified! I was not seeking *her* wisdom or *her* thoughts – I was asking her to pray with me for God's wisdom. Be careful that you do not take an opinion poll. That quickly leads to missing God's direction!

So, yes, it is okay and even advisable to ask for help in trying to determine God's will for you. Seeking someone who is more experienced or who has a more thorough knowledge of God can give you insight. But you and you alone will have to determine what God is saying to you.

What have you learned about discovering God's will?

God wants you to know His will – probably more than you want to know it! So, seek diligently and let Him guide you in the direction He desires. More than likely, God will not lay out a life map in front of you. Instead, He will give you simple, easy-to-follow steps, one at a time, to get you where He wants you to be. Learning to trust His directions day by day is the key to staying right in the center of God's will.

A Final Thought

My dear friend, I pray that you will grow in your understanding of this new life with Jesus Christ. I hope that by now you've learned that it's okay to ask questions! As you grow and study God's Word you will have more and more questions. Some of them will be answered over time and with additional study, some you'll need to ask in your small group, some you may ask another Christian teacher or pastor, and some you'll just have to wait until we get to Heaven and ask Jesus there! But don't be afraid to ask questions! It's the best way to grow.

May God bless you as you enjoy this incredible journey with Him!

In His service,
Dale Weatherford