

Chrysalis

Believer's Guidebook

**If you're a new Christian,
coming back to Christ after a period of doubt,
trying to process the "big picture"
or just need a refresher course,
this guidebook is for you!**



CORE Discipleship is a faith-based, Christian organization. Our mission is to help you make disciples of Jesus. We provide a simple and reproducible discipleship process based on Jesus' "inner circle" or "core" comprised of Peter, James, and John. We also provide discipleship training and free discipleship resources as free downloadable eBooks.

Just like you, Father God is using the many events and circumstances of life's journey to mold and shape me into the person He desires. Occasionally, I've cooperated completely. It's in those rare moments when something extraordinary takes place - Heaven touches earth, mountains are moved, a part of me is transformed.

Through His infinite patience and unfathomable love I am learning to become the man He created me to be. As I daily surrender my life to Him through His precious Holy Spirit, I see more clearly life eternal.

My hope and prayer for you are that you too will discover God's purpose and become exactly what He has planned for you all along - His son or daughter.

May God grant that we become His disciples by His grace,

Doug Morrell

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FOREWORD

Whether you've just become a Christian, coming back to Christ after a period of doubt, trying to process the "big picture" or just need a refresher course, this could be the beginning of the most significant experience in your life.

Chrysalis is all about new beginnings - growth and discovering life in Christ Jesus. The life He gives right now is abundantly richer and fuller. It is eternal life, yet it can begin immediately. Life in Christ is lived on a higher plane because of His forgiveness, love, and guidance. Chrysalis is all about "becoming." Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). God really has an incredible plan for your life and has made every provision for you. Here are four basic concepts we'll cover in this guide.

1. **God's Word:** First and foremost, just as you eat food to sustain your natural life, the Bible is food for your spiritual life. Through His Word, God speaks to you and reveals His plan for your new life. A great place to begin reading God's Word is in the New Testament Gospel Book of John. Once you've completed this initial reading assignment, we've also included a through-the-year Bible reading plan to help guide you through the whole Bible in one year.
2. **Prayer:** Prayer sustains your life with God. Start each day with a few minutes in prayer asking to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Your conversation with God doesn't need to be formal. Let God know of your experiences, circumstances, joy, excitement, good news – as well as all your problems and burdens – because He really is very interested in everything you do.
3. **The Holy Spirit Empowered Life:** Nothing in your Christian experience will make any sense nor will it have any eternal impact apart from the power and presence of the Holy Spirit flowing in and through your life. The Bible tells us that we must be empowered by the Holy Spirit for ministry and life (Romans 8: 1-11; Galatians 5:16-25).
4. **Spiritual Parenting:** Every born-again Christian needs a spiritual father or spiritual mother in the faith (this is sometimes called "mentoring" or "discipling"). We all need an older, more spiritually mature person to help guide us on the journey.

Spiritual parenting is a part of God's plan (2 Timothy 2:2). While a spiritual father or mother is never to take the place of our relationship with our Heavenly Father, our growth as Christians can best be developed through a relationship with an older, more spiritually mature believer in the faith.

The Apostle Paul pointed out in I Corinthians 4:15, "Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel." Becoming spiritually mature fathers and mothers is our goal and we should never stop growing and continuing this process in the lives of others.

If you are not already a member of a local church, we strongly encourage you to get involved where the Word of God is faithfully proclaimed. It is in the body of Christ, His Church, that we find love and acceptance, instruction and guidance.

Though your new step of faith will be filled with great adventure and great joy, it does not mean that all

your problems will be automatically solved. In fact you may find you have some new ones such as doubt right from the beginning! You will find that the devil, which is God's enemy and yours, will try to destroy the work God is doing in you. He will try to make you seriously doubt your faith in Christ. We defeat Satan through the Word of God, the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of our testimony (Romans 8: 34-39; Revelation 12:11). Follow the example of Jesus when He was tempted in the wilderness. Each time the devil tempted Him, He reminded Himself and Satan of God's Word by quoting Scripture out loud (see Matthew 4:4, 7, 10).

Try and develop friendly relationships with other Christians at your church. The ministry of your pastor will provide incredible guidance as you walk in your new life with the Lord.

May our gracious and loving Father God richly bless you on your journey.

doug morrell

SMALL GROUP DYNAMICS

To receive maximum blessing from this guide, we recommend that another more spiritually mature believer go through this book with you.

If this study is to be used in a small group setting, everyone should have an attitude of desiring to learn from others in the group. The group is both an accountability group and a place for academic training (ideas, concepts, principles, facts, etc.).

The small group should provide an atmosphere of trust, acceptance, and love. This kind of environment will promote openness. This is key. Most people live their lives wearing a mask. You don't really see the "truth" of their lives behind the disguise. You simply see the image that they think you want to see. The purpose of the small group is not simply academic - it is to encourage and model honesty at the deepest, gut level. The small group should be the place where people find a "safe place" - a place where they can reveal themselves without fear of rejection or ridicule.

Your small group should be interactive. Remember that relationships are dependent upon communication. For relationships to be real, communication should not be a monologue, but a dialogue. When you are face-to-face with people you know who love you – who are listening to your heart and your words – the truth of the Gospel can penetrate and confront the reality of your life in a very healthy manner.

Christianity is 100% spiritual. Expect change. Expect the Holy Spirit to move in the small group. As the truth of God's Word penetrates beyond the mask, expect to see a response (these are some of the reasons why it is important to have a seasoned Group Discippler in the group). Responses are outward, visible signs of an inner working of the Holy Spirit; they can either be responses or reactions to the presence or work of the Holy Spirit. Five questions should be asked to help discern whether these responses are of God or not:

- 1. Is Jesus being lifted up?*
- 2. Is this creating a greater hunger for God and His Word?*
- 3. Is this leading people to love God and each other more?*
- 4. Is this bringing truth and greater spiritual depth?*
- 5. Is there any practical change taking place? (sometimes this must be judged over a period of time)*

SMALL GROUP MINISTRY APPLICATION

In discipleship and within the context of a small group, it is important to remain sensitive and open to the Holy Spirit. God is a God of restoration and everything He does is restorative - healing is rooted in a relationship with God and through the power of the Holy Spirit. As a person is convicted by the Holy Spirit, others in the group should issue words of encouragement, love, understanding, prayer, petition, faith, etc. When praying for the sick, Jesus usually touched those He ministered to and commanded the illness to leave. The power of touch cannot be underestimated.

PRACTICAL SMALL GROUP GUIDELINES

1. Personal Sharing (10-15 Minutes)

This is the icebreaker period. The group is allowed to talk freely and openly of whatever is on their hearts regarding the material. The Group Discippler may have to encourage some to share. When the group first meets, this time is usually longer and becomes shorter as people get to know one another.

2. Group Sharing (45-60 minutes)

This is the time to discuss real-life application, problems, concerns, and yes, the session material. It's a time for everyone to practice friendliness, sensitivity, honesty, transparency, listening, focus, to ask questions, for participation, and especially, personal application. Remember the study of the material, as a group, is not the primary purpose of the group. The purpose is to help each person become all that God intended for him or her to be so that each is more conformed into the image of Jesus!

3. Prayer (15-20 minutes)

Allow the group to minister to each other. Everyone should feel free to be a part. It doesn't matter whether or not you pray individually in smaller groups or all together, sitting or standing. The group will have requests. The group is then in a position to pray, allowing God to move, and to learn what God is calling them to do to meet those needs.

4. Close (5-10 minutes)

The Group Discipler can initial each person's completed session, make sure everyone knows what material is to be covered in the next meeting, any additional assignments, and make sure everyone knows when and where the group meets next.

STUDY TIME

Each week the Group Discipler challenges each person to complete the next week's material. Try to set aside one or two hours for a session each week on a regular basis. When your group meets, use the session material as the "spring board" for discussion. Don't forget the purpose of the small group is to build relationships for life.

PERSONAL LIFE APPLICATION

Make it a habit to keep a notebook with two page entries. On one page write out your prayer petitions to God including the date, and on the opposite page enter the date of the answer. In this manner you will be able to keep record of your requests, and their specific answers. This eliminates guesswork as to when God answers prayers.

INTRODUCTION

If you're a new believer, you've just made the single most important decision of your life. Some people refer to this new life as being "born-again". Others use the term "saved" or "converted" or "regenerated". Regardless of the term, being born-again is as easy as accepting a gift. God's plan of redeeming and restoring us to Himself requires only that we receive what He has already prepared.

Many people have wrong ideas about God and what is required for us to go to heaven. They think God has a big pair of scales in hand, weighing our good deeds on one side of the scales and our bad deeds on the other. As long as our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds, we think God will reward us with eternal life.

But that is a very wrong idea about God. The truth is, God's standard is perfection because he is a holy God who is without sin. That's why the Bible says, ***"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).***

How then can anyone be saved and have eternal life? Only by God's grace and forgiveness. And God has made this possible because Jesus Christ took our sins and our punishment upon Himself when He died on the Cross. He was entirely without sin. It was for our sins that He died.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that not one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Our decision allows Him to guide and direct our lives through the Holy Spirit giving Him the position as Lord of our lives. These are the only requirements. As He died for our sins, we die to ourselves. As God raised Him from death, so we too are raised, "born-again", by His power. Our acceptance of Jesus' death for our sins recognizes Him as our Savior.

Our most vital concern for you is that you have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life. If you haven't already done so, we encourage you to do so now by asking God to forgive you and cleanse you of your sins and give you life eternal. After you have done this, then believe that God has forgiven you - you are now His child:

"He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life." (1 John 5:12)

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:13)

As a new believer, you are now a child of God, and as such, entitled to a whole new opportunity of privileges.

When we receive Christ as Lord, Master and Savior, we also receive His Holy Spirit. Jesus said:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

As mentioned, we receive the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit when we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior (Romans 8:9). Holy Spirit baptism, or as it is sometimes referred to as the "indwelling of the Holy Spirit", is the initial, onetime experience a person has at the moment they accept Jesus as Lord

and Savior. From that moment forward, we are then instructed by the Bible to be continually “filled with” the Holy Spirit so that we can be “empowered” for day-to-day life and ministry.

A person must choose to be continually empowered by the Holy Spirit following conversion – though not necessary for salvation – to realize maximum potential for ministry (Ephesians 5:18 is literally, “Keep on being filled with the Spirit”). This “refilling of the Holy Spirit” is a continual process. Once a person receives the Holy Spirit at conversion, it is then important to be continuously empowered. On the Day of Pentecost 120 disciples (committed followers of Jesus) were “filled” with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4). This fulfilled the promise Christ had made to them a few days earlier. He had said, “John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). This initial experience of receiving the Holy Spirit is only the beginning of a lifelong experience. God wants us to remain filled with the Spirit.

To illustrate, Christians could be compared to a brand new car. When we accept Christ, construction of our new car, including the fuel tank, is complete. We now have the potential to be useful and to affect lives. But until the car is filled with fuel and the car started, no power is realized. So it is when we are “filled with and empowered” by the Holy Spirit. We open our lives to God and the Holy Spirit pours into and through us. It is then we become most effective in God’s service.

As with the fuel tank, this power-generating experience is not intended to be a onetime occurrence. It is to be an ongoing process. When our spiritual power runs low, we need to return to the Source and let the blessed Holy Spirit provide fresh power. What happens is that even though the Holy Spirit is entirely in us, we have the tendency to push Him aside, taking control instead of allowing Him to be in control. This happened to the early followers of Jesus. They had already been baptized in the Spirit, but later on, when persecution arose, they needed to be refueled spiritually; so they prayed to the Lord once again and “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 4:31).

The Christian life is a life lived on a spiritual plane. The entry point of becoming a Christian begins with conversion - being rightly related to the Lord Jesus Christ. A Christian is someone who comes to Christ in faith, accepting His sacrifice on the Cross as sufficient payment for sin (Ephesians 2:8, 9; 1 John 5:11, 12).

To live the Christian life, we must continue under the control of the Holy Spirit (Colossians 2:6).

We discover that we become a Christian because we “receive Christ Jesus the Lord.” We become empowered and filled with the Holy Spirit as we “walk in Him.”

It is possible for a person to receive Christ, be converted, and not be controlled by the Holy Spirit. To live in the spiritual plane, we must see each moment from the spiritual viewpoint. Nothing we do is coincidental, or accidental, or from luck. God is God and He is in control whether we realize, accept, or reject this truth (Proverbs 16:9).

It is important to note here that if you have received Christ Jesus as your Lord, Master and Savior, you have the Holy Spirit. Don’t let anyone try and convince you that you need more of the Holy Spirit. Don’t pray, “Come, Holy Spirit.” He’s already present within you. If you are a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit. If you are not a Christian, you do not have the Holy Spirit.

What does it mean to be “filled with the Holy Spirit?”

“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” (Ephesians 5:18)

We are commanded as Christians to “be filled with the Spirit.” A Spirit-filled believer is one who is controlled by the Holy Spirit and not by any other kind of spirit.

The Greek verb translated “be filled” is worthy of our study and will amplify our understanding. “Be filled” is:

1. In the present tense: it is something we can experience and enjoy now.
2. In the imperative mood (a command): this is not optional.
3. In the passive voice: being filled is not something a believer achieves through his or her own strength, will, or desire, but that it is done for a believer by the Holy Spirit as the believer submits to His control.
4. In the plural form: in other words, being filled is not reserved for some particular group or denomination, but is for the universal body of Christians and for you today.

As Spirit-filled believers serve the Lord in their moment-by-moment lives, there is a tendency to become “self-led” - relying more on our fleshly desires than the Holy Spirit’s presence and power. It becomes important to ask for a refueling by the Holy Spirit in order that His power may be replenished. As said, the command in Ephesians 5:18 is literally, “Keep on being filled with the Spirit.” Herein lies the key to Spirit-filled living. The Spirit-filled life is a continuous process of receiving and giving, of being filled and sharing with others, of receiving power from God and spending it in His service.

The Holy Spirit marks the beginning of the Christian experience. We cannot belong to Christ without His Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9); we cannot be united to Christ without His Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17); we cannot be adopted as His children without His Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:6-7); we cannot be in the body of Christ except by baptism in the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13; Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16).

The Holy Spirit is the power of our new lives. He begins a lifelong process of change as we become more like Christ (Galatians 3:3; Philippians 1:6). When we receive Christ by faith, we begin an immediate personal relationship with God. The Holy Spirit works in us to help us become like Christ.

The promise of the Holy Spirit is a gift for every believer for all generations and an experience for you today.

The following is a step-by-step overview of this blessing:

1. You must be a born-again believer: The person who is going to be empowered by the Holy Spirit must have the indwelling Spirit and must belong to Jesus (Romans 8:9).
2. You must ask: The Bible says, if you ask for the Holy Spirit, that prayer will be answered (Luke 11:13). Then, you must continually ask for the infilling presence of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).
3. You must surrender: The Apostle Paul made this clear in the Book of Romans when he said, “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1).
4. You must be willing to obey the Spirit: God does not give this blessing/power to someone and allow

him or her to say, “I’ll pick and choose what I like.” If you want to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, you must be prepared to obey the Spirit (Acts 5:32).

5. You must believe: Apostle Paul said, “Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” (Galatians 3:2). Faith is key. A person must believe that just as when they received Jesus as Lord and Savior they can receive the fresh and continual empowerment of the Holy Spirit in the same way.

6. You must use what you’ve been given: Having asked, having received, having been willing to obey, having believed, you must now exercise. This is why discipling (a seasoned, more spiritually mature saint walking alongside a younger born-again believer) is so vitally important in today’s church. Just as parents serve in this position in the home, spiritual parents should function in the same model in the church.

Now that we’ve covered the basics of conversion and being Holy Spirit-filled and empowered, let’s turn our attention to a few promises of God. These are so very important and will help you greatly in the days ahead.

THE BLUEPRINT

As a new Kingdom child, citizen and representative, you most likely have a lot of questions like “What am I supposed to do now?” Or “What am I supposed to be like?” Or “Is it normal for me to feel so much doubt?” Or “Am I really saved?” All of these are normal questions and deserve real answers.

Becoming a Christian or disciple of Jesus is all about change for the better. It’s about discovering who you really are in light of God’s truth. It’s the most adventurous and wonderfully exciting experience you’ll ever have. There are times when you’ll feel as though you’re alone, but know this first and foremost, you are never alone for God promises that He will never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). Additionally, when you received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, He sent His Holy Spirit to dwell within you - what was “dead” to God is now alive in Christ! You’ll begin noticing things you never noticed before. You’ll be able to read God’s Word and understand what it means to you. You’ll also notice a deeper degree of relationship with those who are your brothers and sisters in Christ - we’re all part of God’s family and our love of one another because of Jesus Christ is the pathway we follow.

Becoming a Christian is not about learning a bunch of rules and regulations and then trying to make your life fit within those guidelines. It’s all about learning God’s heart, His life, and His ways. Along the journey, you’ll see others who have been on the pathway longer than you, but they’re there to help you. Remember, they’re on the journey, too. They’re not perfect and they, just like you, should be viewed as “works in progress”. They may have more experience walking with God than you, but you have just as much right and opportunity to learn, obey and walk in God’s Holy Spirit as anyone else.

As Christians we are called to “not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,” with its behavior and customs that are selfish and corrupting. You’ll begin noticing that much of your former “worldly” behavior does not line up with your new life as a Christian. Every born-again believer has felt this way and through the Holy Spirit, they begin to make changes; changes from the inside out. Please note, the Spirit and our flesh are completely opposed to one another. There is a relentless conflict going on within every believer and victory cannot be accomplished in our own strength; we must be filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit if we are to be victorious (Galatians 5:17; Romans 7:15-23).

Now that you’re born again, have received and are walking in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, it is only now that you are empowered to take captive “rogue” thoughts – thoughts in opposition to “God thoughts”.

In other words, the real battlefield is in your mind.

The Apostle Paul said, ***“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5)***. The purpose is to bring every disobedient thought into obedience to Christ. As you begin studying and living out God’s Word, you’ll begin to notice thoughts you once believed to be acceptable by the world’s standards as unacceptable to God. As these thoughts come, you are then equipped and empowered to take those thoughts captive and not fall to those old temptations. You can walk blamelessly before God! And don’t be surprised if these thoughts come again and again. You must take each thought captive each time it comes and then you will discover that those thoughts will begin to have less influence on you. In those times when you realize you’ve sinned, the Holy Spirit is faithful to remind you. He will “convict” you. Now, this is not the same as feeling “guilty”. The Holy Spirit is the One Who reminds us when we fail to abide in God’s plan. Our enemy, Satan, tries and makes us feel guilty. Remember that conviction comes from God. Guilt comes from Satan. Don’t allow yourself to feel condemned by Satan through his tactics (all forms of manipulation, intimidation, and domination are tactics of Satan regardless where they come from). The difference between Satan’s condemnation and the Holy Spirit’s conviction is that the condemnation makes us want to pull away from God, because we feel unworthy, while the conviction makes us want to go to God to make things right. Jesus doesn’t want to condemn us. He pleads our case for us.

Realize that all believers sin, but you can immediately pray to our Father asking Him to forgive you as well as go to others who you might have wounded by your sin for their forgiveness, too. As Paul said, ***“So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man” (Acts 24:16)***. Through this process, you will find yourself at peace with God and your conscience cleared (Hebrews 13:18). In other words, you will discover great joy and peace with both God and man as you begin to walk blamelessly.

It helps to think of your new Christian life as a journey. It is learning the rhythms of God’s grace and mercy and applying those truths to your life in God’s timing rather than learning a bunch of “do’s” and “don’ts”. It is only when the Holy Spirit renews, reeducates, and redirects our minds that we can be truly transformed.

“So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life’– your sleeping, eating, going to work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for Him. Don’t become so well adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what He wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.” (Romans 12:1, 2; The Message)

“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)

This guidebook is all about new beginnings and purposes to outfit you with all the basic training tools you’ll need to get started on the right track. It lays a firm foundation for spiritual growth for the new believer and it works great for those needing a “refresher” course in spiritual renewal, too.

As such, we will introduce a few basic concepts such as “What is a Christian?” and “What is a disciple?” and “What are the basic essentials of Christianity?” We’ll then provide an overview of three really important Kingdom concepts: God’s Word, Covenant Life and God’s Kingdom. You could say this is like spiritual bootcamp!

As you go, we want to encourage you to visit with your local church leadership and get involved in the church and in fellowship meetings with other believers. These smaller group meetings are called cell groups, small groups, family life groups, or discipleship groups that meet in homes or in Sunday Schools, but they all have in common the goal of developing deeper relationships with other believers and especially with Jesus. You might even ask a more spiritually mature believer if they will become your “big brother” or “big sister” in the Lord; we all need spiritual “dads and moms” in our lives just like natural children need their parents for safety, nurturing and growth.

BEGINNING CONCEPTS

1. What is a Christian?

The word Christian first appears in Acts 11:26 where the believers were called Christians (“Christ-ones”), because all they had in common was Christ – not race, culture, or even language. It is Christ living in man and man living in Christ. To be a Christian is to be in relationship with Jesus Christ (John 3:15; 8:12; 1:12; 14:15; 15:15; Luke 9:23; 12:48). It literally means, “to be a follower of Christ.” A person becomes a Christian when he or she believes in Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior (Acts 16:31). It is a new birth (John 3:3; Titus 3:5) and a new life providing these incredible truths:

- We are saved (Romans 1:16; Luke 19:10; Ephesians 2:8,9)
- We are justified (Romans 5:1, 3; 2 Corinthians 5:21)
- We are sanctified and being sanctified (1 Corinthians 1:2, 30; Hebrews 13:12)
- We are reconciled (Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:13-18; 3:12; Colossians 1:21-22)
- We are redeemed (Revelation 1:5, 6; 5:9, 10; 1 Peter 1:18-20)
- We are forgiven (Psalm 103:12, 1 John 1:7-9; 3:4; Acts 2:38, 39)
- We have eternal life (John 3:16; 1 John 14:1-4)
- We are transferred (Colossians 1:13). The gift of salvation (the initial experience) comes through the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8,9).

2. What is a disciple?

This may surprise you, but the word “Christian” appears only three times in the New Testament. The word “disciple” in all its forms appears more than 300 times. Simply put, a disciple is a student of Jesus enrolled in His lifelong process of discipleship growing as a child of God as he or she learns to become a spiritually mature son or daughter through the understanding and application of God’s Word through the power of the Holy Spirit.

3. How does spiritual growth take place?

To understand how spiritual growth takes place, we must first understand why it takes place. ***“For this is the will of God, your sanctification.” (1 Thessalonians 4:3)***

Sanctification has to do with what I am, not what I do. The word sanctification comes from the same root word from which we get our word holy. We are to grow in holiness. What makes something or someone holy? It is that it or they belong to God. It is God’s desire that we become entirely His property. “This is the will of God, your sanctification; that you become God’s property.” So, we must first understand that

we now are God's property and our lives and attitude should reflect this new standard.

Spiritual maturity is not determined by your birth date. Rather, spiritual maturity is determined by the degree in which we walk in love and unity. Therefore, our growth as disciples of Jesus could be determined using this simple equation:

“May the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

The indwelling presence of God in our entire being is the will of God for us, but it is something we must choose moment-by-moment. Love never compels, and God is love. Therefore, God's desire is that we voluntarily allow Him to occupy our threefold being – spirit, soul and body (we'll talk more about these areas a little later). It is God's will for us that He dwell in us and that we be Holy Spirit controlled. However, we must agree to it. He will never force the process of your becoming holy or as some call it “set apart” or “sanctified”.

So what is absolutely essential before a life is pleasing to God? “Without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Hebrews 11:6). Please note, it does not say it will be difficult – it says it is impossible. Therefore, the life that pleases God is the life that is lived by faith and we must recognize the distinction between belief and faith; you can believe in Christ, but you must move out in faith to demonstrate the sincerity of your belief. We must live a life of faith to be pleasing to God. In fact, the Bible says, ***“everything that does not come from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).***

We must believe that God's view of everything is true regardless of popular opinion. If God says something is good, and we say it is bad, we can never experience freedom. If God says something is bad, and we say it is good, we are deceived.

When you are united with Christ by trusting Him, you experience the power that raised Him from the dead. That same mighty power will help you live a morally renewed and regenerated life; it is the power of the Holy Spirit. But before we can walk in newness of life, we must also die to sin. Just as the resurrection gives you Christ's power to live for Him, His crucifixion marks the death of your old sinful nature. We can't know the victory of the resurrection without personally applying the crucifixion – we must die to ourselves daily, which means we're no longer fulfilling our old sinful desires of the flesh.

In the future we will become fully like Christ, but until then we must overcome three very powerful forces: 1) This world's temptations; 2) Satan's deceptions; and 3) Our selfish desires. This means we will experience difficulties that help us grow. We rejoice in suffering not because we enjoy pain or deny its tragedy, but because we know God is using life's difficulties and circumstances, Satan's attacks, and our own sinful nature to build our character. The problems that we run into will develop our perseverance, which in turn, will strengthen our character, deepen our trust in God, and give us greater confidence about the future!

Spiritual growth is personal (Philippians 2:13), progressive (Deuteronomy 7:22), joyful (1 Peter 1:8-9), painful (John 15:2; 16:8; Hebrews 12:5; James 1:2-4), and productive (John 15:2, 8, 16).

To become spiritually mature we must:

- Be submitted to God's Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16);

- Be equipped by God’s team (Ephesians 4:12);
- Demonstrate mutual, unconditional love of one another (2 Thessalonians 1:3);
- Have daily spiritual nourishment from God’s Word (1 Pet. 2:2);
- Have opportunity to exercise faith (Philippians 1:6);
- Have an understanding of moral absolutes (2 Peter 1:5-11);
- Be grounded in essential doctrine (Hebrews 5:11-14).

4. What essentials do Christians believe? (11 Key Biblical Teachings)

The basic teachings or “doctrine” of the Christian faith are pretty much summed up in something called the Apostles’ Creed, written around AD 750.

“I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, my Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; He descended to the dead. On the third day He rose again; He ascended into heaven, He is seated at the right hand of the Father, and He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”

a. Concerning the Bible

The original writings of both the Old and New Testaments were breathed out by God to prophets, apostles, and others through the Holy Spirit, who chose the words used according to the personality and background of the human authors. The writings are without error and are of supreme and final authority in the lives of believers in any age.

b. Concerning God

There is but one God, who eternally exists as three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who exclusively share in the work of creation, maintenance of the universe, redemption and judgment.

c. Concerning Man and His Need

Man was created in the image of God, but because of Adam’s sin that image was damaged. All human beings are born with a sinful nature, are unable to function in moral responsibility before God, and need a spiritual renewal or “regeneration” before they can become what they were meant to be.

d. Concerning the Son

The Eternal Son entered the human race as the virgin-born son of Mary, was named Jesus, fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah, was rejected by Jewish leaders, condemned by Pontius Pilate, crucified by the Romans, buried in a borrowed tomb, but on the third day arose bodily from the dead in accordance with the predictions of the Old Testament scriptures. Jesus Christ - fully God, fully man.

e. Concerning Redemption

Jesus died upon the Cross as a sinless substitute for sinners of all ages and times, and that the Father was thus, by means of the Holy Spirit, reconciling the world to Himself. All who receive the risen Jesus as Lord, by faith, are spiritually born into permanent membership in the family of God (Romans 1:16; Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 2:8,9).

f. Concerning the Holy Spirit

The resurrected Jesus ascended to heaven and on the day of Pentecost He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell,

guide, teach and empower all who believe by imparting to them the life of Jesus so that they may live godly lives and engage in loving service to any who are in need (John 20:21, 22; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20).

g. Concerning the Church

The Church consists of all who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and finds expression as local churches, operating under the direction of Jesus, as Lord and Head of His body, through gifts that Christ gave for the nurture and equipping of His church, as described in the scriptures (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 2:14, 15; 19, 20; 4:11-13; Matthew 24:14).

h. Concerning Ordinances

Salvation is a gift of God to all that place their faith in His Son Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Jesus directed new believers to follow that step of faith with water baptism as an outward symbol of their spiritual identification with His death, burial, and resurrection. Jesus also directed His followers to participate together in the memorial supper to remember His death until He comes again in glory.

i. Concerning the Christian's Responsibility

All believers have been made new persons in Christ, through spiritual rebirth. We are still capable of acting on the urges of the sinful nature (the flesh) with which we once were identified. When we do so, we can produce only works that are not pleasing to God. We can choose, rather, to rely upon the Holy Spirit and His love living within us. The choice leads to a fruitful life that glorifies and pleases the Father. A believer can choose to walk blamelessly and with a clear conscience before God and man.

j. Concerning the Future

We look for the visible, bodily return of Jesus Christ to earth. This hope calls us to holy living, genuine witness and encouragement of heart. The return of Christ will bring His kingdom to completion, judge the world in righteousness and fulfill His promises to His people (Israel and the Church). His future work on earth will conclude with the destruction of all evil and the creation of a new heaven and earth.

k. Concerning Eternal Life

All who have died will be brought back from beyond - believers to everlasting communion with God and unbelievers to everlasting separation from God.

5. How do I Study the Bible?

The Bible is absolutely necessary for spiritual growth. In determining scriptural conduct for the Church, we use hermeneutics, or scriptural interpretation, as our guide. If something was taught by Christ, practiced in Acts, and taught in the epistles, then it can be properly practiced by the Church. God promises great blessings to those who read and obey His word including: Successful living (Joshua 1:8); healing and deliverance (Psalm 107:20); direction and guidance (Psalm 119:105); victory over sin (Psalm 119:11); abundant peace (Psalm 119:165); overflowing joy (Jeremiah 15:16); abundant life (John 10:10); freedom from bondage (John 8:31, 32); growth in faith (Romans 10:17); and preparation to serve (2 Timothy 3:17). These blessings are given so that we can grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

The Bible is made up of 66 books written over 1,500 years in three languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek inspired by the Holy Spirit through 35 different authors all from various backgrounds. The Bible is divided into two parts called Testaments or Covenants. The Old Testament (39 books) covers history from the creation of the world to 400 years before the birth of Jesus. The New Testament (27 books) covers his-

tory from Christ's birth through the Apostolic Age (AD 96) and predicts future events into eternity with Christ at His Second Coming.

It was the custom of the Hebrew people to keep written records of God's words and works (Exodus 40:26). The Old Testament was canonized or "sanctioned by Church authority" completely before the time of Christ.

For 20 years after Christ's ascension the gospel was preserved by oral testimony. The early church accepted the 39 Old Testament books and later added the apostolic writings. The 27 New Testament books were canonized around AD 400. The foundation of the church rests on the teachings of the prophets, Christ Jesus, and the Apostles (Ephesians 2:19, 20).

John Wycliffe translated the first English Bible in 1384, followed by the works of William Tyndale (1484-1536) and a group of scholars commissioned by King James (1604). The credibility of the Old Testament rests on Jesus' recognition and endorsement of it as inspired.

Christians regard the Bible as the only inspired, error free, and authoritative revelation from God in written form (2 Peter 1:20, 21).

We need to read, study and apply the Bible properly. There are five basic guidelines you should remember as you study God's Word:

1. Study the original meaning of the individual words of a passage noted in the original language. A Bible dictionary or commentary helps.
2. Observe the grammatical structure.
3. Consider the wide passage from which the text is drawn.
4. Answer important questions about a biblical book such as, "Who wrote it?" and "When was it written?" and "Why was it written?" and "To whom was it written?" and "What was their situation and the timing?"
5. Compare other Scriptures that relate to a specific passage being considered. Always, Scripture must interpret Scripture.

In time, you might find it helpful to have:

- A Bible Concordance;
- A Bible Dictionary;
- A Bible Atlas;
- Bible Commentaries.

There are three principles we should always adhere to when studying the Bible:

- a. Read the word reverently.
- b. Interpret the Word accurately.
- c. Obey the Word joyfully.

6. How can I Pray with Results?

God created us to have fellowship with Him (Genesis 3:8) and to appoint us to rule over the Earth (Genesis 1:28). He desires that we share in His Kingdom through prayer. Prayer is the pathway for fellowship

with God and releasing spiritual authority.

Samuel Chadwick wrote, “The one concern of the devil is to keep Christians from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, and prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.”

Prayer is simply your talking with and listening to God. It is a dialogue; you talk, God listens – God talks, you listen. Prayer can take many forms such as:

- Thanksgiving (Psalm 100);
- Confession (Psalm 51);
- Intercession (John 17);
- Petition (Colossians 1:9-14);
- Communion (Psalm 139).

God has given His church the authority to bind the deceptive forces of Satan to release people from satanic bondage (Matthew 16:18, 19; 18:18-20; 2 Corinthians 4:4, 7; Ephesians 1:15-22).

In prayer, submission is the gateway to receiving God’s fullest blessings. Jesus said, “Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24). Jesus placed a priority on prayer.

SEVEN STEPS OF FOCUSED PRAYER

Jesus teaches that prayer is focused. Although Jesus says we are actually to say this prayer, He does not suggest that this become a rigid ritual, but that it be used as a guide as we pray:

“This then, is how you should pray: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:9-13).

- a. Our Father: to begin, we must silence the activity of our noisy environment and soul, thinking about Who God is and who we are in relationship to Him – we are His children, He is our Father.
- b. Hallowed be Your Name: enter His presence through praise and worship; as you think about Him, speak to Him of His goodness and virtue.
- c. Your kingdom come: ask for the establishment of God’s rule today in the lives and circumstances of those in authority (government at all levels, those in places of leadership, the church), your family, loved ones, those in need of prayer as you remember them in meditation, as well as yourself.
- d. Give us: pray daily asking for God’s provision as He sees fit – learn to be content with whatever He provides; invite the Holy Spirit daily, moment-by-moment, to empower you for worship, witness, and warfare (Galatians 5:16).
- e. And forgive us: ask God to forgive you knowing that God will only forgive our sins as we forgive others who have sinned against us; if you have something you’ve been holding against another brother

or sister in Christ, it is imperative that you go to that person and mend the relationship, asking God to forgive. Regardless of the outcome - be at peace - knowing that you've done all you can to bring healing and restoration to the relationship.

f. And do not lead us: ask for God's strength to stand in His might; put on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-20); pray for a hedge of protection about yourself and your loved ones.

g. For Yours is the kingdom: thank God for sharing His kingdom, power and glory with you.

End by say, "In the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN" (John 14:13, 14). We must remember that our asking must be in Jesus' name – Jesus Christ – and according to God's character and will. God will not grant requests contrary to His nature or His will, and we cannot use His name as a magic formula to fulfill our selfish desires. If we are sincerely following God and seeking to do His will, then our requests will be in line with what He desires, and He will grant them in His time (John 15:16; 16:23).

7. What is Worship?

We worship or honor God as our Sovereign Creator and Father. The word "worship" means to bow down or lay prostrate as well as to kiss (Psalm 2:12; 95:6, 7; Romans 12:1).

We worship God in various ways through expressions of praise, thanksgiving, celebration and adoration. The most basic reason for our praise to and of God is because He is "worthy to be praised" (Hebrew hallel, 'praise with a loud voice'). Praise and worship creates an atmosphere inviting God's rulership into our midst (Psalm 30; 54; 57; 60; 150; 1 Corinthians 14:14, 15; Ephesians 5:18, 19; Colossians 3:16; Romans 12:2).

True worship is spiritual and is offered from both the mind and the human spirit (John 4:24) and is your entire life presented before God (Romans 12:1, 2).

8. What is the Church?

The word "church" comes from the Greek word, *ekklesia* (ek-klay-see-ah) meaning assembly. Many believe the church to be a place, but the Word of God speaks of the church as much more than a building; it is the body of Christ, both universally and locally, both presently and for all eternity.

The church is referred to as "the body of Christ" (Ephesians 1:23); "the bride of Christ" (Revelation 21:9); "the building of God" (Ephesians 2:21); "the temple of God" (1 Corinthians 3:16); "the family of God" (Ephesians 3:15); and "the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10).

The word "church" is used most frequently in the New Testament in the context of a local body of believers and the life within as illustrated by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

We all need the church for many reasons including:

- A sense of belonging;
- Inspiration;
- Accountability;
- Mutual encouragement;
- Celebration in worship;
- For healing;

- Spiritual covering and authority;
- To grow in our spiritual giftings;
- For unity;
- For discipleship.

9. Who is the Holy Spirit?

Jesus is our model of the Spirit-filled, Spirit-empowered life (Acts 10:38). The activity of the Holy Spirit is evident at every phase of the life and ministry of Jesus. It was by the power of the Holy Spirit that Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb (Matthew 1:18, 20). Before Jesus began His public ministry, He was filled with the Spirit of God (Matthew 3:16), and followed the Spirit's leading into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil as further preparation for His messianic role (Matthew 4:1). The power of the Holy Spirit enabled Jesus to heal (Matthew 12:15-21) and cast out demons (Matthew 12:28). Additionally, the Holy Spirit is found in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20). Disciples are commanded to go and make disciples of all nations, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). In other words, we are to baptize them into the name – the authority – of the triune God. As we obey this commission, His Holy Spirit assures us of His ongoing presence with us. Likewise, the Bible declares to all generations, "Be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18) for "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14).

“And with that He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22).

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, the One who draws us to Christ, convicts of sin, enables us to accept Christ as our personal Savior, assures us of salvation, enables us to live the victorious life, opens our eyes to the truth contained in the Bible, prays alongside us according to God's will for us, empowers us in our witness, worship and warfare, and enables us to build lasting interpersonal relationships with others as God desires.

We become Christians through the work of the Holy Spirit. He brings new life; even our faith to believe is a gift from Him ("gift" in the Greek is charisma [khar-is-mah] used also in Romans 1:11; 6:23; 12:6; 1 Corinthians 1:7; 12:4; 12:9; 12:28; 12:30, 31; 2 Corinthians 1:11; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6; 1 Peter 4:10).

The Holy Spirit instructs, guides, leads, and gives us power. He ends our bondage to evil desires, and He creates in us love, joy, peace, and many other wonderful changes.

When we choose to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, He produces His fruit in us. Just as we are saved by faith, not deeds, we also grow by faith. By believing and choosing to obey Christ by following the Holy Spirit's leading, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit within us, helping us to live for Christ.

Our salvation – when we accepted Jesus as Lord, Master and Savior of our lives – is based on the acceptance of God's unmerited grace and we then continue to become individually unique expressions of Christ, not as the result of any effort, ability, intelligent choice, or acts of service on our part. In truth, we received "the promise of the Spirit" (Acts 2:38, 39) in the exact same manner and at the same moment we received our initial salvation through Christ Jesus.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that our Christian lives, which began with faith in Christ and Him crucified and were certified by the gift of the Holy Spirit, are altogether apart from the Law. The point is clear; we began our Christian life by the Holy Spirit (salvation), we continue to be changed by the Holy Spirit

(sanctification), and we will be glorified by the Holy Spirit (glorification). The same Spirit who regenerated us causes our new life to grow. It is only by the Holy Spirit, when we consciously and deliberately choose to submit to His control and actively walk in Him, who enables us to die to the flesh (Galatians 5:16, 17), delivers us from the tyranny of the Law (Galatians 5:18), and causes the fruit of holiness to grow in our lives (Galatians 5:22, 23).

As said, you are a Christian if the Holy Spirit of God is living in you. If you have sincerely trusted Christ for your salvation and acknowledged Him as Lord, the Holy Spirit has come into your life, and you are a Christian. You won't know that the Holy Spirit has come if you are waiting for a certain feeling; you will know He has come because Jesus promised He would. When the Holy Spirit is working within you, you will believe that Jesus Christ is God's Son and that eternal life comes through Him (1John 5:5); you will begin to act as Christ directs (Romans 8:5; Galatians 5:22, 23); you will find help in your daily problems and in your praying (Romans 8:26, 27); you will be empowered to serve God and do His will (Acts 1:8; Romans 12:6); and you will become part of God's plan to build up His church (Ephesians 4:12, 13).

As the Holy Spirit leads you, He produces His fruit in you. We are obeying Christ only as we follow the Holy Spirit's leading and this is a deliberate, conscious, moment-by-moment decision we must make.

The Bible reveals that the Person of the Holy Spirit has been the primary agent in the entire ministry of the Word from the very beginning. The Apostle John demonstrated that the Spirit's role encompasses every part of our lives. In regard to unbelievers, He works as the agent who convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-11). The experience of being "born of the Spirit" is descriptive of New Birth (John 3:6). Because God is Spirit, those who worship Him must do so spiritually as directed and motivated by the Holy Spirit (John 4:24). Additionally, it is the Spirit who is the divine enabler for all true, authoritative ministries (John 20:21-23).

The Holy Spirit does not draw attention to Himself nor does He speak in His own authority. In truth, His mission is to glorify Jesus and to declare Christ's teaching to His disciples (John 16:14). The Bible teaches that the function of the Holy Spirit is to continue the work Jesus began, to lead believers into an understanding of the meanings, implications, and imperatives of the gospel, and enable us to do even "greater works" than those done by Jesus (John 14:12).

The Holy Spirit-filled and empowered life is not our trying to live like Christ, it is not our trying to be Christ-like, and it is not Christ giving us the power to live a life like His. It is simply Christ indwelling us, living His life again through us by His Holy Spirit. That life was designed to be lived out in our everyday, normal, seemingly unspiritual lives. One acid test of our faith is how we are at home. Would you say you're the same at home as on Sunday morning? Would your spouse, children, or friends agree? Our Christian journey will never make any sense if we do not realize that what God began in the Holy Spirit, we can no less finish without Him. It is only through His Holy Spirit that we can understand and apply God's Word and purpose to become more effective, intimate, and authoritative in our witness, worship, and warfare. Walking in God's Spirit is never a burden.

Generally speaking, the Bible divides people into two categories – those who are controlled by their sinful natures, and those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit. All of us would be in the first category if Jesus hadn't offered us a way out.

“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.” (Romans 8:5)

Each day we must consciously choose to center our lives on God, walking and practicing His presence. We must use the Bible to discover God’s guidelines, and then follow them. In every situation we should ask ourselves, “What would Jesus want me to do?” Then, when the Holy Spirit points out the direction, we should do it joyfully.

The Bible encourages us not to live according to the flesh, but to put to death the deeds of the body. Being “led by the Spirit of God” involves a daily, progressive putting to death of the sinful desires of our fleshly nature. Now, while all Christians are in some ways being “led by the Spirit of God” there are various levels or stages of being led. Regardless of how long you have walked with God, there is always room for growth. As you are more fully surrendered and agree to be led by the Holy Spirit, the more completely you will be obedient to God and become conformed to His holy standard. You don’t have to be mature to enter into the Kingdom of God or make sound choices, but you do have to be mature if you are to experience all of God’s blessings for you now.

UNDERSTANDING WHY WE RESPOND AS WE DO

All of us realize that we have a body. However, most believers need to understand that there is a difference between their “soul” response and their “spirit” response. Obviously we know we exist and there is certainly more to us than our physical bodies, but is there some easy-to-understand way we can learn to tell the difference between the soul and spirit?

Genesis 2:7 will help us understand who we are so that we can begin to understand why we do what we do.

“The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground (the body) and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (God breathed spirit into man), and the man became a living being (a living soul).”

These three parts of man - spirit, soul and body - were formed and the whole person began to function. Let’s look a closer look at soul and spirit.

The Human Soul

Human Soul: What many call our conscience, the Bible calls the soul. The soul receives information from the five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste and touch). The soul consists of:

- a. My mind (my ability to reason);
- b. My emotions (my ability to feel);
- c. My will (my ability to choose).

Soul: psuche (psoo-khay) is the seat of the feelings, will, desire, emotions, mind, reason, and understanding. Psuche is the inner self or the essence of life. The word is often used for person or self (Acts 2:41, 43; 1 Peter 3:20). It is understood that body and spirit may be separated, but spirit and soul can only be distinguished. The mind and emotions feed information and assert direction upon the will. Those who have not received Christ as Lord and Savior make decisions based entirely from this highly subjective level. Christians who have not learned to distinguish between that which comes from the soul and that which

come from the Holy Spirit are also subject to this soulful, conscious level. Major life-changing decisions should NEVER be based on our soul response.

Heart: Another word which we often see in the Bible is the word “heart.” Heart, kardia (kar-dee-ah), means “to quiver” or “to palpitate.” It can mean the physical organ of the body, the center of physical life, the seat of one’s personal life (both physical and spiritual), the center of one’s personality, the seat of one’s entire mental and moral activity, containing both rational and emotional elements. It is the seat of feelings, desires, joy, pain, and love. It is also the center for thought, understanding, and will. The human heart is the dwelling place of the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It is the heart that the Lord sees into - that place where all decisions concerning Him are made.

The Human Spirit

Human spirit: In the New Testament pneuma (pnyoo-mah) refers to the Holy Spirit, the human spirit and evil spirits - when lowercased pneuma refers to the “spirit of man”. Pneuma is defined as: giving life, giving inspiration, giving illumination, imparting power and anointing for service. The Holy Spirit encounters man and interacts with man by the human spirit (Proverbs 20:27). In the conversion process, the Holy Spirit and man’s spirit blend together harmoniously (Romans 8:16). As such, we can invite the Holy Spirit to “envelope” our life so that we can be Spirit-filled, Spirit-led, Spirit-controlled, and Spirit-empowered for service. Just as there is a conscious area of our lives, there is an unconscious area called our subconscious. The Bible calls this the spirit. For those not born-again, this area is present, but “dead” to God meaning the person is unable to have a relationship with God; it is dark, chaotic, confused, uncertain, and void of any truthful direction. Our conscience is a function of the spirit, but the conscience can be very misleading. Non-Christians who seek guidance from this “inner power” are often misled, uncertain and perplexed.

When we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord He begins to assert His authority over and in our lives – we are born-again. The spirit within is made alive at this new birth. Does this mean only Christians do good? Of course not – many people do well to others. On a relative scale, many are moral, kind, and law-abiding. Comparing these people to criminals, we would say that they are very good indeed. But on God’s absolute scale, no one is good enough to earn salvation, “you were dead in your transgressions and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). Only through being united with Christ’s perfect life can we become good in God’s sight.

The Bible emphasizes that we do not need to live any longer under sin’s power. Christ miraculously destroyed the penalty of sin and its power over us on the Cross. Through faith in Christ we stand acquitted, or not guilty, before God (Romans 3:21, 22). God does not take us out of the world or make us robots – we will still feel like sinning, and sometimes we will sin. The difference is that before we became Christians, we were dead in sin and were slaves to our sinful, soulful nature. But now we are alive with Christ (Galatians 2:20). Our spirit became a place of glory and beauty, fully capable of being under the control of the Holy Spirit as we allow Him to guide us.

We Are What We Think: “As a man thinks so he becomes. As he continues to think so he remains.” We find that in our normal routine of life, we are faced with many circumstances and situations. We can’t choose our situations, but we can choose our response to any situation – it’s all about choice. A Spirit-filled and empowered believer discovers that much of what they’ve been taught is from the world. In truth, becoming a spiritually mature believer has a great deal to do with “unlearning” the world’s ways and “learning” God’s way. Let’s review how we learn.

There are basically three ways from which we gather and process knowledge or understanding:

- a. Perceptual Knowledge: what we gather from seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching.
- b. Conceptual Knowledge: what we gather by reason and inquiry.
- c. Spiritual Knowledge: what we gather through love.

There are basically two elements necessary to know the things of God:

- a. A revelation from God by the Holy Spirit.
- b. An appropriate spiritual response by man (1 Corinthians 2:14-3:4).

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Matthew 6:22, 23)

Spiritual vision is our capacity to see clearly what God wants us to do and to see the world from His point of view. But this spiritual insight can be easily clouded. Self-serving desires, interests, and goals block that vision. Serving God is the best way to restore it. A “good” eye is one that is fixed on God.

As a man’s own inner thoughts are known only to him, so only God’s Spirit knows the mind of God. Spirit answers to spirit, not spirit to mind. The Holy Spirit interprets spiritual things to spiritual people. The Bible itself was given to us as the Holy Spirit put spiritual “ideas” into specific spiritual “words” of His own selection.

It will be helpful to understand some of the terms used in the Bible to describe both born-again Christians (the born-again Christian being either “carnal” or “spiritual”) as well as those who have never received Christ Jesus as evidenced by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (“unregenerate” or the “natural man”). All people fall into one of these three spiritual categories. An understanding of each will help clarify how the human spirit receives the revelation of the Cross by the Holy Spirit (review 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:4).

As we discussed, man is made up of three parts - spirit, soul and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 4:12). If you are a Christian, you are the “house” where God’s Holy Spirit lives (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16).

AN UNBELIEVER OR “THE NATURAL MAN”

An unregenerate person (not “born-again”) is anyone who does not have the presence of the Holy Spirit; this person’s mind is so corrupt it can just barely receive revelation from God; sees the world only through a limited, worldly perspective and bases their world view from the processing of both perceptual and conceptual knowledge; cannot appreciate nor grasp God’s Kingdom realities; is both repelled and mildly attracted to authentic, Holy Spirit-filled people. Only the Christian has this conflict between the flesh and the spirit. The non-Christian lives in harmony with the desires of his flesh.

A Believer who is Carnal

The carnal “fleshly” man is someone who is regenerate or “born-again”, but who demonstrates a life-style resembling that of an unbelieving, unregenerate person (1 Corinthians 3:1). The carnal Christian is a believer with childish ways, as seen in a jealous, competing, divisive and sectarian spirit; an immature Christian who lives more for human approval than for Kingdom of God realities. Because a carnal Christian is neither hot nor cold, they live in a spiritual paradox having little to no impact in the lives of others.

They are often times viewed as being “hypocritical” by unbelievers for though they are “born-again”, their lives are not much different from unbelievers.

A Believer who is Spiritual

The spiritual man, regenerate and possessing spiritual maturity, as seen in freedom from sectarian strife (1 Corinthians 3:3, 4), has a nature that responds to the truth; unbelievers find the spiritual man difficult to understand while carnal Christians find this person to be both attractive and repulsive; their life-styles, like a living tree, indicates progressive change and maturity; the single most evidence of a Spirit-filled person is their demonstrable love relationship with God, expressed in love toward all others. It is often times said of these that they are “Christ-like”. Christians desire and try to bring the flesh into conformity with the will of God. The spiritual man’s will and desire is to serve God. A spiritual man realizes that though he must actively put forth effort to become holy in heart and mind, thought, word, and deed, it is only “by the Spirit” - by the Holy Spirit’s power - that he can succeed.

Receiving Jesus involves turning to God from “self” and trusting Jesus to come into your life and then living His life through the Holy Spirit. Which one of these illustrations best represents your life? Is your life all about you or all about God? Would your closest friend agree?

In the “new way of the Spirit” found in the New Covenant, the Holy Spirit gives us power to obey God, a power the Law by itself can never provide. The Law is good, but it cannot empower us to obey it. We must agree that there will always remain a struggle with sin in the lives of each and every Christian believer (Romans 6:12-16; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Galatians 5:16; 1 Peter 2:11).

Some people try to earn their way to God by keeping a set of rules (obeying the Ten Commandments, attending Church faithfully, or doing good deeds), but all they earn for their efforts is frustration and discouragement. However, because of Christ’s sacrifice, the way to God is already open, and we can become His children simply by putting our faith in Him. No longer trying to reach God by keeping rules, we can become more and more like Jesus as we live His life day-by-day. We should let the Holy Spirit turn our eyes away from our own performance and toward Jesus. He will free us to serve Him out of love and gratitude. This is living “in the new way of the Spirit.”

Keeping the rules, laws, and customs of Christianity will not save us. Even if we could keep our actions pure, we would still be doomed because our hearts and minds are perverse and rebellious. Like Paul, we can find no relief in the synagogue or church until we look to Jesus Christ Himself for our soul’s salvation that He gives us freely. When we do come to Jesus, we are flooded with relief and gratitude. Will we keep the rules any better? Most likely, but we will be motivated by love and gratitude, not by a desire to get God’s approval. We will not be merely submitting to an external code, but willingly and lovingly seeking to do God’s will from the inside out.

The realization of sin through the tool of the Law makes us conscious (aware) of our spiritual death. The Law cannot deliver a person struggling with sin. Yes, the Law can enlighten our conscience, but it is powerless to produce holiness of life. You see, the fault is not in God’s Law – it is entirely spiritual – the fault is with the law of sin.

“We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.” (Romans 7:14)

“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.” (Romans 7:23)

The “law at work in the members of my body” is the sin deep within me even after I am “born-again.” This is our vulnerability to sin; it refers to everything within us that is more loyal to our old way of selfish living than to God.

THE HOLY SPIRIT - WHAT HE’S LIKE

a. The Holy Spirit Is A Person

The Holy Spirit has been given as a gift to the church to assure that the continued ministry of the resurrected Christ is expressed and verified. The Holy Spirit has all the characteristics of a person:

1. He possesses the attributes of mind (Romans 8:27), will (1 Corinthians 12:11), and feeling (Ephesians 4:30).
2. He engages in such activities as revealing (2 Peter 1:21), teaching (John 14:26), witnessing (Hebrews 10:15), interceding (Romans 8:26), speaking (Revelation 2:7), commanding (Acts 16:6, 7), and testifying (John 15:26).
3. He has a relationship with human persons: He can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30), lied to (Acts 5:3), and blasphemed (Matthew 12:32, 32).
4. The Holy Spirit possesses the divine attributes of the Godhead: He is eternal (Hebrews 9:14), omnipresent or “present everywhere” (Psalm 139:7-10), omnipotent or “all powerful” (Luke 1:35), and omniscient or “all knowing” (1 Corinthians 2:10, 11).
5. He is referred to by such names as the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit of promise, the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of grace, the Spirit of life, the Spirit of adoption, and the Spirit of holiness.
6. He is illustrated with such symbols as fire (Acts 2:1, 2), wind (Acts 2:1, 2), water (John 7:37-39), a seal (Ephesians 1:13), oil (Acts 10:38), and a dove (John 1:32).

b. Nothing To Be Fearful About

Being Spirit-filled and empowered is not some mysterious, abstract experience. There is however a difference between being filled with God’s Holy Spirit and being filled with some other kind of spirit. Jesus highlighted this when he said:

“If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him? (Luke 11:11-13)

The abundantly clear promise of Jesus is that anyone who asks to be filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit will not come up with something hard and dry (stone), something destructive (scorpion), or satanic (snake). We must see the Holy Spirit for who He is, entirely and beautifully different from those from the realm of darkness and confusion.

c. What the Holy Spirit Is Like

The Holy Spirit is just like Jesus. To help His disciples prepare for His departure and the Holy Spirit's coming, Jesus said:

“And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever”— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him, for He lives with you and will be in you.” (John 14:16, 17)

Jesus says, “I will send another Comforter.” The word “another” in the Greek means one of the exact same kind. By saying this, He was saying that the Holy Spirit would help them and be to them precisely as He did and was.

d. The Holy Spirit Is Our Teacher

As a teacher, the Holy Spirit's assistance is not so much academic as one of inward instruction. He teaches us what to do and say at important times. He helps us keep our life (conduct and standards) in accordance with what Jesus wants. He helps us understand and keeps us consistent with our Father's heart and purpose.

“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you.” (John 14:26)

e. The Holy Spirit is Our Helper

Jesus sent His Holy Spirit to help us in the task of touching the world with God's love. He strengthens us within and stabilizes us to withstand circumstances and moves us forward in power.

“When the Counselor comes, whom will I send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, He will testify about me. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.” (John 15:26, 27)

f. The Holy Spirit Is Our Convincer

No one can remain passive when the Holy Spirit is at work. He convinces people that sin separates them from God; that Jesus is God, and that this is the focal point of salvation; and that this world system is headed toward destruction. He does what we could never do: He convinces people that God is right, that man needs a Savior. Our role is not to attempt to convict or condemn others by zeal, argument, guilt, or ability. Our work is to bear witness to others of Jesus Christ, pray, and let the Holy Spirit accomplish the task that only He can perform.

1. The Holy Spirit Convicts/Convinces: Often times, our tendency is to attempt the work of the Holy Spirit. We can never accomplish what He has been sent forth to do. Have confidence in His abilities to convict and convince.

2. The Holy Spirit Convicts/Convinces People: The Holy Spirit is fully capable of breaking through every barrier in the soul of man. We are called to sow seed and to water. Ours is to witness in the power of the Holy Spirit and pray, believing it is God who will accomplish the bringing forth of harvest. Prayer “energizes” the Holy Spirit. As said, manipulation, intimidation, and domination in any form are never characteristics of those led by the Spirit of God.

“But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.” (John 16:7-11)

g. The Holy Spirit Brings Glory To God

One of the evidences of the Holy Spirit’s presence in a believer’s life is that Jesus will be praised. Jesus will be honored. Jesus will be worshipped as God’s Son. Jesus will be announced as Lord and King. There is much confusion regarding the evidence of whether or not a believer has in fact been “filled” with the Holy Spirit. Lord Jesus said ***“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8).***

The absolute test or evidence of first having received, and walking (continuously) in the Holy Spirit, is less controversial, less popular, less “showy”, and even more Biblically sound than the “evidences” most suggest; it is an increasing measure of Christ-likeness as evidenced by the “fruit” of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. According to John 15: 1-8, the fruit is godliness - Christ-likeness is what our Father looks for in His people (Galatians 5:22, 23).

“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)

Jesus said that people will know when we are empowered by the Holy Spirit: ***“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:35)***

One thing is for sure; Satan will not glorify the Son of God. The Holy Spirit’s ministry of making Jesus real – glorifying Him – is His highest desire.

“He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.” (John 16:14, 15)

WHAT ARE SPIRITUAL GIFTS?

A spiritual gift is a divine empowerment for service. The word “gift” is from the Greek word “charisma” (khar-is-mah) meaning a free spiritual endowment. It is a measure of God’s grace enabling you to minister for Christ. God’s gifts are not to be confused with natural talents and abilities, though at times, they may appear similar. For instance, a person can be gifted with a natural singing voice and not be anointed in this capacity for ministry. Likewise, a person can have a degree in business and not be anointed for church administration.

Every believer is given a spiritual gift to encourage others in the Body of Christ (1 Peter 4:10, 11).

The Bible maintains three broad categories containing 20 individual listings of gifts found in Ephesians 4:11, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:27-31; 1 Peter 4:10, 11. As you review these gifts, highlight those you think are your gifts. Next, visit with a spiritually mature believer or your pastor and ask for their counsel.

Apostle:

One sent forth – as God sent forth His Son, Jesus – into the world with the message of salvation (Hebrews 3:1). Jesus, in turn, sent forth His twelve apostles, empowered by the Holy Spirit with the good news of salvation (Matthew 28:19-20), and universal authority in matters of doctrine for His disciples. These twelve apostles became the first building blocks to be placed on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:20; 4:11, 12). They were also given the responsibility to equip saints for ministry within the church as well as minister to their surrounding community. Each new generation has submitted to the authority of Jesus Christ, His apostles, and their writings up to this very hour. Beyond the distinct role filled by the original founding apostles, the New Testament also mentions additional apostles and prophets (2 Timothy 1:11; Galatians 1:19; Acts 14:14, 15; 1 Corinthians 4:6-9; Romans 16:7).

Prophet:

The spiritual ability to speak forth the mind and counsel of God. Prophets in the Old Testament were used by God to speak to Israel about current and future events. Jesus was the prophet to come (Deuteronomy 18:18; Acts 2:22-23). The prophets in the body of Christ were called to speak forth the word of God about present and future events (Acts 2:17-18; 11:27-28), equip the saints for ministry (Ephesians 4:11, 12), as well as edify, comfort and encourage believers within the body of Christ and reveal the secrets of men's hearts (1 Corinthians 14:3, 23-25). Agabus (Acts 21:10-11) and the four daughters of Philip, the evangelist, were given the gift of prophecy among so many (Acts 21:9). The ministry of the prophet is the forth telling of the mind and heart of God, helping to maintain spiritual balance in the church by protecting the people against false teachings. The office of the prophet differs somewhat from the exercising of the gift of prophecy listed in 1 Corinthians 14:3 in that the office is a permanent calling.

Evangelist:

The spiritual ability to communicate the good news of Jesus Christ's redemptive story to a dying world lost in their sin and shame (Romans 3:23). Jesus modeled this gift of evangelism with Nicodemus (John 3:16). The good news is, in the words of Paul; "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). The evangelists were also called of God to equip others to develop their spiritual gifts (Ephesians 4:11, 12). Philip was known as an evangelist (Acts 8:4-13, 21:8).

Pastor and/or Teacher:

The spiritual ability to shepherd the flock of God (guarding, guiding, encouraging, warning, etc.), feed them the Word of God, and equip them to find their gifts so that they, too, can do the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11, 12; John 21:15-17; 1 Peter 5:1-15).

Serving:

The spiritual ability to meet the physical needs of people within a given community of believers or unbelievers. One of the first examples of the serving gifts in action was recorded in Acts 6:1-6 when the apostles selected seven men out of their group to minister to the poor Hellenistic Jewish widows who needed food. This in turn set the apostles free to minister with their spiritual gifts.

Teaching:

The spiritual ability to take the truth from the Word of God and explain it clearly so that the flock of God can understand it and apply those spiritual truths effectively to their daily lives. It appears that a person can have the spiritual gift of teaching without being a pastor and/or teacher. The natural gift of teaching

can communicate any subject but yields just understanding of that subject. The spiritual gift of teaching communicates biblical truth and motivates men and women toward a life of godly obedience to that truth. Apollos and Paul had the spiritual gift of teaching (Acts 18:24-28, 2 Timothy 1:11).

Encouragement:

The spiritual ability to come alongside a person who may be hurting spiritually or emotionally and offer them a word of comfort concerning the past, a word of encouragement, admonishment (truth in love), and challenge so that they will be able to walk in the steps of the Holy Spirit in the future. A man named Joseph was renamed Barnabas (son of encouragement) by the apostles because of his ministry to the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 4:36-37).

Giving:

The spiritual ability to give financially or materially to the needs of others within the body of Christ or the community in which they live. They express this spiritual gift in simplicity to the glory of God without drawing attention to themselves. Barnabas sold a field and gave the money to the apostles for the good of the church (Acts 4:36-37).

Leadership:

The spiritual ability to stand before a group of people and lead them in a deep walk with the Lord, or mission project, the building of a new community of Christians, or an elder's meeting, etc. The apostle James gave leadership to the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15).

Mercy:

The spiritual ability to manifest pity and give aid to those who are physically, emotionally or spiritually helpless. The ability to express compassionate loving action and lift up the one who is downtrodden and to do it joyfully (Acts 9:36).

A Word of Wisdom:

The spiritual ability to perceive life and truth from God's perspective and then apply that wisdom to specific situations. Its fruit can discern wisdom. "But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere (James 3:17). James used his spiritual gift of wisdom at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:13-21). Paul was given a vision, while living in Asia Minor, to preach the gospel in Europe (Acts 16:6-10).

A Word of Knowledge:

The spiritual ability to communicate spiritual truth that has been acquired through the investigation of God's word. Stephen was a great example of a man of spiritual wisdom and knowledge when he spoke before the Supreme Court and broke open the scriptures to show them that Jesus was their Messiah (Acts 7:1-53).

Faith:

The spiritual ability to see what isn't, believe it to be, and trust God to do it in His way and time. Faith to move mountains.

Healings:

The spiritual ability to heal one who is sick. Note that Paul called it the gifts (plural) of healings which may mean this gifted person could make one who is sick whole – either spiritually, emotionally, or physi-

cally. Physical healing is a symbol of how God wants to heal all of us spiritually. An example: Peter and John's experience with the lame man at the temple gate (Acts 3:2-10).

Miraculous Powers:

The spiritual ability to do works of a supernatural origin and character, such as could not be produced by natural agents and means. Philip (Acts 8:13), and Paul (Acts 13:9-12).

Discerning Spirits:

The spiritual ability to discern from God's Word between the spirit of evil and of God, the flesh and the spirit, and truth and error, before the fruit is evident. Paul had this experience with Elymas the magician (Acts 13:9-12).

Helps:

The spiritual ability to come alongside others and support them and their ministry in physical ways. See Paul's list of friends in Romans 16:6, 12.

Administration:

The spiritual ability to give guidance, pilot or steer. The spiritual ability to be a helmsman for a local church in helping direct its life and order. One who deals with people and not paper. The idea of governing as seen in the ministry of Stephanas (1 Corinthians 16:15-18).

Tongues:

The spiritual ability to speak an unknown foreign language without learning it beforehand. Speaking in tongues is mentioned in two New Testament books – Acts and 1 Corinthians. Acts 2 describes the coming of the Holy Spirit on the gathering of believers. This account says that “all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2:4). The many foreigners who were gathered in Jerusalem were amazed to hear these believers talking about the wonders of God in their own languages. Bible scholars differ in their opinion as to whether the speakers were given a special ability to speak or the hearers were given a special ability to understand. In 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, speaking in tongues are also addressed. In this book, the apostle Paul is actually writing in order to teach the church in the city of Corinth. In reading these chapters we can learn several things: 1) there is a definite gift of tongues, possibly different from the one described in the book of Acts; 2) the gift of tongues is only one of the many gifts that the Holy Spirit may choose to give; 3) the gift of tongues is given by the Holy Spirit as He decides to do so; 4) the gift of tongues is not a gift that every believer receives, nor is it the most important gift; and 5) the tone of the writing indicates that the gift of tongues, as is still true today, may easily be abused. Many believers testify to the private devotional use of tongues as a means of praising God and enjoying His fellowship. This seems to be most consistent with Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 14:18-19.

Interpretation:

The spiritual ability to translate the foreign language of the person speaking to the audience listening. The one who does the translation of that foreign tongue would be able by the Spirit, to interpret without learning the language beforehand (1 Corinthians 14:27).

One of the best settings to discover your gifts is in the context and safety of a small discipleship group overseen by the church. It follows, then, that you can develop your gifts through:

- Interest: where do you most often times find yourself invested?

- Fulfillment: you will have a sense of personal fulfillment and peace.
- Confirmation: others will be able to confirm your gifting.
- Results: others are ministered to.
- Evaluation: an honest discernment from others and self.
- Godly counsel: what do other more spiritually mature people say?

We can develop our gifts through:

- Discipleship;
- Humility;
- Use of the gift;
- A spirit of cooperation;
- Accountability.

The goal of gifts is never self-centered, nor self-promotion; they are grace gifts to serve others (1 Peter 4: 10, 11).

THE “A-B-C’S” OF GOD’S KINGDOM

A. GOD’S WORD (THE INSTRUCTIONS)

1. Divinely Inspired

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16)

God’s purpose in giving us the Bible is that we might know what it takes to become a spiritually mature person. The story of how the Bible came into being is one of absolute fascination. The apostle Peter tells us the Bible was written by men who were “moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). No one has ever been able to analyze that process. How was it that ordinary men like ourselves, some from the most common callings of life, could have been so led by the Holy Spirit in recording what they thought and felt that they would succeed in capturing in human words the thoughts and attitudes of God Himself? We do not really know. It is an amazing miracle. All we can know is that is what did happen, and if it had not, the Book could not have come into being.

The Bible is not a collection of stories, fables, myths, or merely human ideas about God. It is not a human book. Through the Holy Spirit, God revealed His Person and plan to certain believers, who wrote down His message for His people (2 Peter 1:20, 21). This process is known as inspiration. The writers wrote from their own personal, historical, and cultural contexts. Although they used their own minds, talents, language, and style, they wrote what God wanted them to write. Scripture is completely trustworthy because God was in control of its writing. Its words are entirely authoritative for our faith and lives. The Bible is “God-breathed.” We are to read it, and use its teachings to guide our conduct.

The whole Bible is God’s inspired Word. Because it is inspired and trustworthy, we should read it and apply it to our lives. The Bible is our standard for testing everything else that claims to be true. It is our safeguard against false teaching and our source of guidance for how we should live. It is our only source of knowledge about how we can be saved. God wants to show you what is true and equip you to live for Him. Read it regularly to discover God’s truth and to become confident in your life and faith. At the end of this guidebook, you’ll find a plan for reading the whole Bible, not just familiar passages, in just one year.

2. Is Completed

“Every word of God is flawless; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words, or He will rebuke you and prove you are a liar.” (Proverbs 30:5, 6)

The word “canon” is used to describe the completed number of the books of the Bible – the closed canon of the 66 books of the Holy Scriptures (39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament). It’s significant to note that of the 64 times Jesus quoted from the Old Testament, not once did he refer to or quote from any other book in the world except the Old Testament. The Bible is complete, trustworthy, and entirely sufficient to answer all of life’s questions or anything you’ll ever need to know for salvation.

3. Is the Authority over our Lives

“Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. Your faithfulness continues through all generations; you established the earth, and it endures. Your laws endure to this day, for all things serve you.” (Psalm 119:89-91)

Here we learn that God’s Word is the absolute authority for all of life. Though seasons, customs, governments, and philosophies will and do change, God’s Word endures forever. Jesus sovereignly declares this in John 8:47.

4. Spiritual Maturity through God’s Word

“Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly-mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere men? What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task.” (1 Corinthians 3:1-5).

Paul called the believers in Corinth infants because they were not yet spiritually healthy and mature. The proof was that they quarreled like children, allowing divisions to distract them. Immature Christians are “worldly”, controlled by their own desires; mature believers are in tune with God’s desires. No amount of experience or revelation can make up for lack of understanding and application of God’s Word in the believer’s life. It is through both Spirit and Word that we become spiritually mature. This can only be accomplished as we devote ourselves to God’s Word and separate ourselves from the influences of worldliness.

We learn to know God through the pages of Scripture, as interpreted and taught by the Holy Spirit and put into actual practice in our lives. We cannot separate the Word and the Spirit. The Bible without the Spirit leads to dullness and intellectual pride – to a dead Christianity. The Spirit without the Bible leads to fanaticism and folly. It takes both the Spirit and the Word for a well-balanced life.

5. Reading, Studying, and Memorizing God’s Word is Essential

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

Because God will examine what kind of workers we have been for Him, we should build our lives on His Word and build His Word into our lives – it alone tells us how to live for Him and serve Him. Consistent

and diligent study of God's Word is vital; otherwise we will be lulled into neglecting God and our true purpose for living. We are to read, study and memorize God's Word (John 8:32; Psalm 19:10; 1 Timothy 4:13; Psalm 119:11; Hebrews 4:12; Ephesians 6:17).

B. COVENANT LIFE

1. God is a God of Covenant

“And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. God called the light ‘day’ and the darkness he called ‘night.’ And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day.” (Genesis 1:3-5)

From the beginning we learn that God is a God of covenant (a solemn, binding agreement) and the maker of covenant. Here in Genesis chapter one we learn that the phrase “God said” is spoken ten times.

2. Atonement is Only Possible through the Blood

“For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.” (Leviticus 17:11)

“The life of the flesh is in the blood” is the clearest statement of the necessity of blood as it relates to sacrificial offerings. In Genesis 15:10 we learn that blood sacrifice is the means of establishing a covenant. The shedding of lifeblood certified the sacred nature of this bond. How does Jesus' blood relate to the new covenant? People under the old covenant (those who lived before Jesus) could approach God only through a priest and an animal sacrifice. Now all people can come directly to God through faith because Jesus' death has made us acceptable in God's eyes (Romans 3:21-24).

The Old Covenant was a shadow of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31; Hebrews 8:1), pointing forward to the day when Jesus Himself would be the final and ultimate sacrifice for sin. Rather than an unblemished lamb slain on the altar, the perfect Lamb of God was slain on the Cross, a sinless sacrifice so that our sins could be forgiven once and for all. All those who believe in Christ receive that forgiveness.

“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28).

3. Why Blood Sacrifice?

“The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt” (Exodus 12:13).

The blood of sacrificial animals was used as an offering for sins and was first called “the blood of the covenant” (Exodus 24:5-8). This points forward to a time when Jesus' blood for our redemption, justification, and sanctification would be made.

4. Blood is Essential for Right Relationship Before God

“What have you done? Listen! Your brothers' blood cries out to me from the ground.” (Genesis 4:10; see Genesis 4:1-10)

Both Cain and his brother Abel had made sacrifices to God, and Cain's had been rejected. Cain's vegetable offering, the fruit of his own strength and work, was an offering of disobedience. Abel's offering was pleasing to God. God's sacrifice in the garden had already established that blood sacrifice was neces-

sary for approaching God. Right standing before a covenant-making God was shown to be a matter of life and death. Cain's reaction gives us a clue that his attitude was probably wrong from the start. Cain had a choice to make. He could correct his attitude about his sacrifice to God, or he could take out his anger on his brother. His decision is a clear reminder of how often we are aware of opposite choices, yet choose the wrong just as Cain did.

5. Christ's Sacrifice

"He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption." (Hebrews 9:12)

Redemption refers to the process of paying the price (ransom) to free a slave. Through His own death, Christ freed us from the slavery of sin forever.

Here we see the difference between the covenants of God through Moses (Mosaic Covenant) and Jesus (New Covenant).

Moses	Jesus
Animal sacrifices	Jesus was the sacrificial Lamb of God
Temporary relief for guilt	Permanent relief for guilt
Bond in the blood of animals	Bond in the blood of Christ
Repeated annually at the tabernacle	Once for all who believe
Symbol of God's eternal altar	Applied to the actual altar in heaven

Though you know Christ, you may believe that you have to work hard to make yourself good enough for God. But rules and rituals have never cleansed people's hearts. By Jesus' blood alone:

- We have our consciences cleansed;
- We are freed from death's sting and can live to serve God;
- We are freed from sin's power.

If you are carrying a load of guilt because you are finding that you can't be good enough for God, take another look at Jesus' death and what it means to you. Christ can heal your conscience and deliver you from the frustration of trying to earn God's favor.

6. Christ's covering

"The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them." (Genesis 3:21)

The covenant of God required that innocent animals be sacrificed to provide garments of skin as covering for Adam and Eve. This first instance of "covering" foreshadows the innocent being judged to provide covering for the guilty. Likewise, in the New Testament, we are required to be clothed in Christ, rather than our own good works (Galatians 3:22). This is called "substitutionary atonement."

7. Right Relationship with God

"God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice, because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished." (Romans 3:25)

God presented Christ Jesus as our sacrifice of atonement. In other words, He died in our place, for our sins. God is justifiably angry with sinners. They have rebelled against Him and cut themselves off from His life-giving power. But God declares Christ's death to be the appropriate, designated sacrifice for our sin. Christ then stands in our place, having paid the penalty of death for our sin, and He completely satisfies God's demands. His sacrifice brings pardon, deliverance, and freedom. It is the shed blood of Christ that ultimately satisfied the requirements of God's justice. God's judgment was entirely and fully placed upon Christ, for all sins past, present and future. It is only through faith in the blood of Christ that we can be justified in God's eyes. The blood of Christ is forever the only means of right relationship with God Almighty.

Key Word Concepts:

Election: (Romans 9:10-13)

God's choice of an individual or group for a specific purpose or destiny.

Justification: (Romans 4:25; 5:18)

God's act of declaring us 'not guilty' for our sins; initial experience and occurrence.

Propitiation: (Romans 3:25)

The removal of God's punishment for sin through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Redemption: (Romans 3:24; 8:23)

Jesus Christ has paid the price so we can go free. The price of sin is death; Jesus paid the price.

Sanctification: (Romans 5:2; 15:16)

Becoming more and more like Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit; an ongoing process.

Glorification: (Romans 8:18-19, 30)

The ultimate state of the believer after death when he or she becomes like Christ (1 John 3:2); ultimate experience and occurrence.

8. The Blood of Christ Buys Us

"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." (1 Peter 1:18, 19)

Human value can be determined by how much God paid to redeem mankind – He gave his only Son (John 3:16). Jesus willingly shed His blood and died for us tells us the value of salvation and the relationship we can have with God. It is only through the Holy Spirit, by the New Birth, that we can be renewed and recover that which was destroyed in the Fall (John 3:5, 6). We must accept Jesus Christ by faith. We cannot escape from sin on our own; only the life of God's Son can free us.

C. GOD'S KINGDOM

1. God is sovereign

"In the beginning God created the Heavens and the earth." (Genesis 1:1)

"In the beginning God". That's where Genesis begins and where we meet the Sovereign of the universe. All at once we see Him creating the world in a majestic display of power and purpose, culminating with a

man and woman made like Himself (Genesis 1:26, 27). But before long sin entered the world, and Satan was unmasked. Bathed in innocence, creation was destroyed by the fall (the willful disobedience of Adam and Eve). Fellowship with God was broken, and evil began weaving its destructive web. In rapid succession, we read how Adam and Eve were expelled from the beautiful garden, their first son turned murderer, and evil bred evil until God finally destroyed everyone on earth except a small family led by Noah, the only godly person left.

2. The Fall

“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.” (Genesis 3:6)

Man fell by choice; it was a deliberate act of rebellion and disobedience. Just as he does today, Satan tried to make Eve think that sin is good, pleasant, and desirable. Knowledge of both good and evil seemed harmless to her.

Notice what Eve did: She looked, she took, she ate, and she gave. The battle is often lost at the first look. Temptation often begins by simply seeing something you want.

One of the realities of sin is that its effects spread. After Eve sinned, she involved Adam in her wrongdoing. Sin is never an isolated event – it produces ripples.

3. What the Fall Did

“After He drove the man out, He placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.” (Genesis 3:24; see Genesis 3:16-24)

Through disobedience, man “falls” resulting in the loss of his “dominion” with Earth coming under a curse as he becomes separated from God. Here we learn that because of his disobedience to God and submission to the Serpent’s suggestions, man’s rule has been forfeited to the Serpent. However, God begins to move redemptively and plans for a recovery of that which was lost in that the Seed of woman – Jesus – would someday crush the Serpent’s head.

4. The Gospel

“After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:14, 15)

What is the good news of God? These first words spoken by Jesus in the Book of Mark give the core of His teaching: that the long-awaited Messiah has come to break the power of sin and begin God’s personal reign on earth. Most of the people who heard this message were oppressed, poor and without hope. Jesus’ words were good news because they offered freedom, justice, and hope. We are to hold to the full “gospel of the kingdom” and expect the Lord to confirm that “word” with the signs He promised (Mark 16:15-18).

5. Repentance

“In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.” (Matthew 3:1, 2)

The first call to the Kingdom of God is to repentance. Here John the Baptist burst onto the scene. His theme was “Repent!” Repentance means doing an about-face – a 180-degree turn – from the kind of selfishness that leads to wrong actions such as lying, cheating, stealing, gossiping, taking revenge, abusing, and indulging in sexual immorality. A person who repents stops rebelling and begins following God’s way of living prescribed in His Word and little by little, begins to become mature. The first step in turning to God is to admit your sin, as John urged. Then God will receive you and help you live the way He wants. Remember that only God can get rid of sin.

God doesn’t expect us to clean up our lives before we come to Him – it is a gradual process - throughout this life a conflict goes on between your new nature and the old, but there is a way to victory: Christ Jesus frees you to live in the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 7:25 - 8:11).

6. New Birth

“Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.’” (John 3:5; see John 3:1-5)

Upon repentance, you are able to have a relationship with God and now able to “see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3), God’s Word becomes clear, and the Holy Spirit’s operation in your life is now possible.

Jesus explained the importance of a spiritual rebirth, saying that people don’t enter the kingdom by living a better life, but by being spiritually reborn.

7. Kingdom Now and to Come

“Then he told them many things in parables, saying: ‘A farmer went out to sow his seed.’” (Matthew 13:3; see Matthew 13:1-52)

Jesus used many illustrations, or parables, when speaking to people. A parable compares something familiar to something unfamiliar. It helps us understand spiritual truth by using everyday objects and relationships.

Nearly half of Jesus’ parables were direct references to the kingdom of God. These stories related to various time frames, both present and future. To reduce confusion, we must remember that all parables have one meaning unless otherwise specified by Jesus.

8. The Kingdom Within

“Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.’” (Luke 17:20, 21)

As said, Christianity is 100 percent spiritual. Jesus said, “the kingdom of God is within you.” The kingdom of God begins with the work of God’s Spirit in your life and in relationships. What this means is that full salvation brings a restored relationship to God and potential for His kingdom rule “within us” as we walk with Him through the power of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 4:18; John 1:16; 1 John 2:20, 27; 4:17). It is only on these terms that a believer can say, “the kingdom of God is in me.”

9. Childlikeness

“And he said: ‘I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never

enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3; see Matthew 18:1-4)

We are not to be childish (like the disciples, arguing over petty issues), but rather childlike with humble and sincere hearts.

Humility is the greatest virtue in the kingdom of God; pride is the greatest down fall.

10. Forgiveness

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.” (Matthew 18:35; see Matthew 18:15-35)

God has forgiven all your sins. As a result, we should not withhold forgiveness from others. Realizing how completely Christ has forgiven us should produce a free and generous attitude of forgiveness toward others. When we don't forgive others, we are setting ourselves outside and above Christ's law of love.

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.” (Matthew 18:15)

Jesus provided clear, unmistakable guidelines for dealing with those who sin against us. These are meant for (a) Christians, not unbelievers, (b) sins committed against you and not others, and (c) conflict resolution in the context of the church, not the community at large. They are designed to bring harmony and reconciliation.

As hard as this may be, Jesus tells us that we should go to the person who has wronged us first. Then we should forgive that person as often as he or she needs it (Matthew 18:21, 22).

11. Integrity and Morality

“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9, 10)

God expects His followers in any age to have high standards. Here we learn various characteristics of unbelievers. This doesn't mean that idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexuals, thieves, greedy people, drunkards, slanderers or swindlers are automatically and irrevocably excluded from heaven. Christians have been saved from many of these same backgrounds. However, though Christians may still struggle with evil desires, they should not continue in these practices.

Those who say that they are Christians but persist in these practices with no sign of regret for their sin will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Holiness keeps the lines of communication open with God and allows access for the Holy Spirit to work in any situation.

12. Holy Spirit Ministry

“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15)

Jesus' ministry did not begin until He received the anointing as Messiah. "Anointing" simply means empowerment when the Holy Spirit infills a believer (Mark 1:10, Acts 10:38). Jesus never attempted ministry without the Holy Spirit's power. As a believer, you too, are "born of the Spirit" (John 3:5, 6). Your spiritual rebirth saved you, but spiritual empowerment is needed daily for ministry in kingdom work. Each day we are to ask for and "be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18) so that we may "live by the Spirit, and not gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Galatians 5:16).

Being filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit involves your desire to hear, the readiness to obey God's Word, and the sensitivity to discern or tell the difference between your feelings and His promptings. We are to live each day controlled and guided by the Holy Spirit.

13. We are Authorized for Ministry

"When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick." (Luke 9:1, 2)

Just as Jesus empowered His disciples, He has empowered us, giving us specific instructions so we know what to do, how to deal with difficult times, and that we will be held accountable. Jesus is both God and man, both spiritual and physical; and the salvation He offers is both for the soul and the body. Any group or teaching that emphasizes soul at the expense of body, or body at the expense of soul, is in danger of distorting Jesus' Good News; balance is always needed.

14. Prayer

"He said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us of our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation." (Luke 11:2-4)

Jesus teaches us that when we pray, forgiveness is the cornerstone of our relationship with God. God has forgiven our sins; we must now forgive those who have wronged us. To remain unforgiving shows we have not understood that we ourselves deeply need to be forgiven. It is only through God's power that can change things and bring God's kingdom. Prayer is the pivotal prerequisite for victory.

15. Kingdom Power

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8; see Acts 1:3-8).

Jesus said that the Holy Spirit must be received. At Pentecost (2:1-4) the Holy Spirit was made available to all who believed in Jesus. We receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (are baptized with Him) when we receive Jesus Christ.

a. The Holy Spirit is the beginning of the Christian experience. We cannot belong to Christ without His Spirit (Romans 8:9); we cannot be united to Christ without His Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17); we cannot be adopted as His children without His Spirit (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:6, 7); we cannot be in the body of Christ except by baptism in the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13).

b. The Spirit is the power of our new lives. He begins a lifelong process of change as we become more like Christ (Galatians 3:3; Philippians 1:6). When we receive Christ by faith, we begin an immediate per-

sonal relationship with God. The Holy Spirit works in us to help us become like Christ as we consciously ask for and are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

c. The Spirit unites the Christian community in Christ (Ephesians 2:19-22). All can experience the Holy Spirit, and He works through all (1 Corinthians 12:11; Ephesians 4:4).

16. We're not Alone: Satan has a System

“The devil said to Him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” (Luke 4:3; see Luke 4:1-12).

The devil, who tempted Adam and Eve in the garden, also tempted Jesus in the desert with the same three aspects of temptation: lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (see 1 John 2:16; Genesis 3:6; Luke 4:1-13). Jesus resisted Satan by using the Word of God, His humble obedience, and suffering. Likewise, we are to submit to God, resist Satan, and we too can be victorious through the testing.

	First Adam	Last Adam (Jesus)
“the lust of the flesh”	“the tree was good for food”	“command this stone to become bread”
“the lust of the eyes”	“it was pleasant to the eyes”	“the devil...showed Him all the kingdoms”
“the pride of life”	“a tree desirable to make one wise”	“throw yourself down from here”

Satan is a real being, a created but rebellious fallen angel, and not a symbol or an idea. He constantly fights against God and those who follow and obey God.

Knowing and obeying God's Word is an effective weapon against temptation, the only offensive weapon provided in the Christian's "armor" (Ephesians 6:17 - "sword"). Jesus used Scripture to counter Satan's attacks, and you can, too. But to use it effectively you must have faith in God's promises, because Satan also knows Scripture and is very good at twisting it to suit his purpose. Obeying the Scriptures is more important than simply having a verse to quote, so read them daily and apply them to your life.

Times of questioning can help us sort out our beliefs and strengthen our faith, but those times can also be dangerous. If you are dealing with doubt, realize that you are especially vulnerable to temptation. Even as you search for answers, protect yourself by meditating on the unshakable truths of God's Word.

Sometimes what we are tempted to do isn't wrong in itself. Turning stones into bread wasn't necessarily bad. The sin was not in the act but in the reason behind it. The devil was trying to get Jesus to take a shortcut, to solve Jesus' immediate problem at the expense of his long-range goals, to seek comfort at the sacrifice of His discipline. Satan often works that way – persuading us to take action, even right action, for the wrong reason or at the wrong time. The fact that something is not wrong in itself does not mean that it is good for you at a given time. Many people sin by attempting to fulfill legitimate desires outside of God's will or ahead of His timetable. First ask, "Is the Holy Spirit leading me to do this? Or is Satan trying to get me off the track?"

Often we are tempted not through our weaknesses, but through our strengths. The devil tempted Jesus where He was strong. Jesus had power over stones, the kingdoms of the world, and even angels, and Satan wanted Him to use that power without regard to His mission. When we give in to the devil and wrongly use our strengths, we become proud and self-reliant. Trusting in our own powers, we feel little need for God. To avoid this trap, we must realize that all our strengths are God's gifts to us, and we must dedicate

those strengths to His service.

Christ's defeat of the devil in the desert was decisive but not final. Throughout His ministry, Jesus would confront Satan in many forms. Too often we see temptation as once and for all. In reality, we need to be constantly on guard against the devil's ongoing attacks. We are in continuous battle.

17. Taking Authority

“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the Cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the Cross.” (Colossians 2:13-15)

Jesus' victory over sin and evil powers was accomplished at the Cross. Before we believed in Christ, our nature was evil. We disobeyed, rebelled, and ignored God (even at our best, we did not love Him with all our heart, soul, and mind). A believer, however, has a new nature. God has crucified the old rebellious nature (Romans 6:6) and replaced it with a new loving nature (Colossians 3:9, 10). The penalty of sin died with Christ on the Cross, God has declared us not guilty, and we need no longer live under sin's power. God does not take us out of the world or make us robots – we will still feel like sinning, and sometimes we will sin. The difference is that before we were saved, we were slaves to our sinful nature and had no choice but to sin. Now we are free to live for Christ and daily choose righteousness (see Galatians 2:20).

The written code that was canceled was the legal demands of the Old Testament law. The law opposed us by its demands for payment for sin. Though merely keeping that code can save no one, the moral truths and principles in the Old Testament still teach and guide today.

We can enjoy our new life in Christ because we have joined Him in His death and resurrection. Our evil desires, our bondage to sin, and our love of sin died with Him. Now, joining Him in His resurrection life, we may have unbroken fellowship with God and freedom from sin. Our debt for sin has been paid in full; our sins are swept away and forgotten by God; and we can be clean and new.

18. Worshipful Priests

“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. ‘These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites. “So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the LORD had commanded Him to speak.” (Exodus 19:5-7)

God chose Israel as His nation though he knew that no nation on earth was good enough to deserve to be called His people, His “treasured possession.” He chose Israel, not because of anything they had done, but in His love and mercy He chose Israel in spite of the wrong the nation had done and would do. He chose a special nation on earth to represent His way of life, to teach His Word, and to be an agent of salvation to the world. “All nations on earth” would be blessed through Abraham's descendants (Genesis 18:18). Gentiles (non-Jewish people) and kings would come to the Lord through Israel, predicted Isaiah (Isaiah 60: 3). Through the nation of Israel, the Messiah, God's chosen Son, the Lion of Judah, would be born. God chose one nation and put it through a rigorous training program, so that one day it could be a channel for His blessings to the whole world.

The essential priority of the priesthood then and now is worship.

19. Building God's Throne

"Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel." (Psalm 22:3)

The pathway to God's presence is through praise. When we feel isolated, alone, or depressed we should praise God! When we praise God, He inhabits or takes up residence in our lives and leads to deliverance from satanic attack, torment, or bondage.

20. Worship and Praise

"and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of earth. To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father – to Him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen." (Revelation 1:5, 6)

Christ demonstrated His great love by setting us free from our sins through His death on the Cross ("freed us from our sins by His blood"), guaranteeing us a place in His kingdom, and making us priests to administer God's love to others. The fact that the all-powerful God has offered eternal life to you is nothing short of spectacular. We are under the King of kings as kings in the sense that we have been delegated authority to extend God's rule. This rule is effective only to the extent that worship and praise is raised.

21. Commissioned to Win

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

God gave Jesus authority over heaven and earth. On the basis of that authority, Jesus told His disciples to make more disciples as they preached, baptized, and taught. With this same authority, Jesus still commands us to tell others the Good News and make them disciples for the kingdom.

We are to go – whether it is next door or to another country – and make disciples, teaching them to obey all that He has commanded. It is not an option, but a command to all who call Jesus "Lord." We are not all evangelists in the formal sense, but we have all received gifts that we can use to help fulfill the Great Commission. As we obey, we have comfort in the knowledge that Jesus is always with us.

May you continue to seek God with all of your heart as you purposely adventure and apply His precious life and Word in your life.

"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).

FAQS: ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS WE ALL HAVE

>>Q: *What is the “trinity”?*

The Godhead consists of three divine Persons - Father, Son and the Holy Spirit - each fully God. All three are eternal and have existed forever - three distinct Persons functioning as One.

>>Q: *The day after I made my dedication to Jesus I felt an overwhelming sense of doubt. What happened to me?*

This may have been scary for you, but most new believers experience this feeling. Many people express incredible feelings of peace, sometimes remarking how they felt that a weight had been lifted from their shoulders when they accept Jesus as their Savior. What you're experiencing is real; our enemy, Satan, is trying to get you to believe that you are not a Christian. He does this by twisting the truth and trying to deceive you. However, your salvation experience came as a result of God's Holy Spirit touching you and coming to reside in you the moment you received Jesus into your heart. Now that you have begun your relationship with Jesus, there are steps you can take each day to grow in this relationship. If you do not have a church home right now, we encourage you to find one. Pray that God will lead you to one where the people are eager to love Him and live the way His Word instructs us to. Pray to find a church home where you can grow closer to God and other Christians. If you are a part of a church home, we encourage you to ask God to help you find your place there. Get connected with a small group. Remember, your decision to dedicate all of life to Jesus was not an end, but a beginning. The Christian church and Christian friends will help you continue. We also encourage you to set aside time each day to spend with the Lord. Share your heart with Him in prayer and get into His Word.

>>Q: *If I sin, do I lose my salvation?*

No. An act of sin cannot cause you to lose your salvation. However, acts of continual sin can cause you to lose the joy of your salvation.

>>Q: *Is Jesus coming soon?*

Nobody can say for sure. Since Jesus' resurrection, we have lived in the latter days and most assuredly we are in the latter days of the latter days. Regardless, each and every person faces death. In that moment, the Bible teaches that if absent from the body, we are present with the Lord.

>>Q: *Will my family be in heaven, too?*

Each person must make a personal decision to receive Christ Jesus as his or her Savior and Lord. If each person in your family has decided to follow Christ, then, it could be very possible that your family will be in heaven.

>>Q: *Is hell real?*

The Bible teaches that a person's soul is eternal and will live forever. In other words, the real you – the part of you that thinks, feels, dreams, aspires; the ego, the personality – will never die. The Bible also teaches that your soul will live forever in one of two places – heaven or hell. The moment a believer in Christ dies, he goes immediately into the presence of Christ. If a person is not a believer in Christ, then the Bible teaches that their soul goes immediately to a place Jesus called “hades” (Hay-Dees), or hell, where they will await the judgment of God. Everyone who finds him or herself in hell will be there because they have rejected God's free gift of salvation.

>>Q: *What is sexual immorality?*

Many people are surprised to know that the Bible, God's Word, has a good deal to say about love and sex.

Sexual immorality is anything sexual not allowed in the Bible outside of marriage. For instance, sexual intercourse between a married person and someone who is not his or her spouse is called adultery. Fornication is sex between two unmarried people. God prohibits all sexually immoral acts such as adultery, fornication, masturbation, homosexuality, lesbianism, and bestiality.

>>Q: *Is it OK for a Christian to be in the military?*

Those who are involved in various roles such as the military or as police-persons and who maintain God's moral and ethical standards can serve as "God ministers." Their purpose is to restrain evil.

>>Q: *Is it OK for a Christian to disobey government?*

The only time a Christian should disobey authority is if it refuses to allow God's people freedom to worship and to obey God.

>>Q: *Do I really have to give everything away to be a Christian?*

You can be holy and prosperous or you can be prosperous and miserable. Poverty is a curse, not a blessing. Sometimes people are moved by God to take vows of poverty and that's all right, too. The point is that each person must be convinced in their own mind and must always remember that everything belongs to God.

>>Q: *Are demons real?*

Yes. Demons are fallen angels and their characteristics can sometimes be seen in people who exhibit sinful lust, homosexuality, witchcraft and the like.

>>Q: *Is one sin greater than another?*

The greatest sin is pride. Any sin can keep us from God, so on a relative scale, we have all sinned and fallen short of God's measure.

>>Q: *Do other beings on other planets really exist?*

The Bible does not give us any clues as to whether life exists on other planets or not. It's focused entirely on our world and our relationship with God. We serve a big God and the universe is a big place.

>>Q: *Do I need to be baptized to get into heaven?*

It's true that both Jesus (Matthew 28:19) and the apostles (Acts 2:38) commanded that believers be baptized. At the same time, the Bible does not say that baptism is necessary for salvation. The Bible is very clear that the only basis of our salvation is the forgiveness of sin through the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9). When Jesus died on the Cross, He paid the full penalty for our sins. We are forgiven for all our sins and accepted by God into His family when we receive Jesus Christ by faith (John 1:12, Romans 5:1). Baptism is a way we can show outwardly that there has been a change on the inside. Baptism doesn't cause our heart to change. It's more like the final stamp on our faith in and commitment to Jesus. Much like a man and woman placing rings on each other's fingers during their wedding, baptism is a visible sign of our new loyalty to Christ. If you're a Christian and you haven't been baptized, we'd encourage you to talk with a parent, a more spiritually mature believer, or a pastor about taking this step of obedience to Christ.

>>Q: *How does God talk to people? How do you really know it's Him? And what do you have to do to hear Him?*

When Christians say that God "told" them something, it usually doesn't mean they heard an audible voice. Instead, they mean that they "heard" God "speaking" to their innermost being – impressing them

about something. He does this through His Holy Spirit who dwells within the heart of every true believer. The Holy Spirit is our Guide and our Teacher, directing us to do what God wants us to do. The Bible, God's love letter to us, is probably the biggest way that God "speaks" to us. For example, you might read a verse in the Bible that seems like it was written just for you and your particular situation that day. Or, the pastor's message from the Bible may seem like it was made just for you. But the Holy Spirit will "speak" to you at other times and in other situations as well. He will let you know when you have done something wrong, or bring to mind someone to pray for, or give you peace (or lack of peace) about a certain decision. This is usually called your conscience. When you pray, ask God to give you a sensitivity to His Holy Spirit, so that you will be alert to the many ways that He "speaks" to you throughout each day.

>>Q: I know I should read the Bible, but every time I go to read it I end up falling asleep. I just don't find it that interesting. What should I do?

You're not the only one who's fallen asleep while reading the Bible. Although you can read God's Word any time of the day, we encourage you to set aside a particular time when you can meet with God each day when you're alert and awake. Make a "date" with Him. Choose a special spot where you can be alone, without distractions from others. Make it a place that is inviting – a place you look forward to being in. As you meet with God each day, share your heart with Him in prayer before you open up your Bible. Tell Him about your struggles to really get into His word. He understands. Ask Him to reveal more of Himself through what you are going to read. Pray with the psalmist "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" (Psalm 119:18). Ask Him to make His Word come alive to you!

>>Q: Does it make God mad when you don't attend church?

Church attendance is not what makes us loved and accepted by God. God loves and accepts us, not because we do all the right things, but because of His choice to show compassion and kindness to those who reach out to Him through faith in Jesus Christ. We don't know if God gets mad when His children avoid the Christian family at church, but we know He is genuinely concerned. If you have become a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ, God desires that you do what is best to grow in your relationship with Him. As a loving Father, He wants to relate to you personally, and public worship with other Christians is a time and place where God often touches our lives – if we will let Him. God does not demand perfect attendance. There may be reasons why you can't attend church that are beyond your control. God understands. If this happens, do what you can to spend time with God on your own. Read the Bible and pray to keep that connection with Him alive.

>>Q: I am having trouble trying to explain to someone why it is so important to dress in something nicer than shorts and a T-shirt for church. Does it matter what we wear to church?

God doesn't look at outward appearances. It's not that God doesn't care what we wear, but He does place far more emphasis on what's inside of us than what's on the outside (1 Samuel 16:7). The bottom line is God cares about your heart. He knows if you're dressing up to honor Him, or if you're just showing off for your friends. He also knows if you're wearing a ratty T-shirt out of laziness or because it's all you have. Don't try to impress others and don't try to get away with being as slack as you can be. However you dress for church, just keep your heart pure before God.

>>Q: How does evolution tie in with God and creation?

It's important to note that there can be no real conflict between the facts of the Bible and the facts of science, since God was the author of both. The problems arise when we begin to interpret those facts. One thing is clear from the Bible: God is our Creator. He loved us so much that He offers us salvation through His Son Jesus Christ.

>>Q: *How do dinosaurs fit in with Scripture?*

There are many Christians who believe that the days of creation mentioned in the account of Genesis, chapter one, were literal 24-hour days. Dinosaurs would have been created along with all the other creatures and flourished especially during the period from Adam to the Flood because of the warm and humid climate that characterized the entire pre-flood world. They did not become extinct before Adam, for he was given dominion over all kinds of animals (Genesis 1:28). This is confirmed by the discovery of human footprints in the same rock layers with the footprints of dinosaurs. Those who hold this view also note that whole dinosaur bodies have been found intact. This would be explained by some certain catastrophe such as the Flood, or else the substance of the bodies would have quickly decomposed. From another viewpoint, God's work of creation may have taken place over long periods of time called "age days" rather than in six literal 24-hour days. Those who hold to this idea of a progressive creation feel that dinosaurs could have developed, lived during a prehistoric time, and become extinct, even before the creation of humans. In Job 40-41, creatures are mentioned which have not been identified – the behemoth and the leviathan. These creatures have been thought by some to refer to dinosaurs, since their description does not seem to fit any present-day creatures unless one stretches his imagination. Others feel that these creatures are simply exaggerated descriptions of present-day creatures, like the hippopotamus and the crocodile, meant to figuratively symbolize the cosmic forces of evil at work in the world.

>>Q: *Is there a life after death for animals?*

An animal lives by its instincts, has limited capacity for thought, and makes restricted choices. The essential difference between an animal and a human is that while an animal has no responsibility toward God, man is responsible toward God and his fellow men (Romans 14:2). There is no indication in the Bible that animals are capable of knowing God or that they possess immortality. Only humans are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and have the capacity to know, worship and serve Him. The Bible doesn't indicate that there is life after death for animals. Their purpose may be fulfilled here on earth. But God may have other plans.

>>Q: *One of the Ten Commandments is "Thou shall not kill," but throughout the Bible there is killing that God has agreed with. Why does God contradict Himself?*

As you know, "You shall not kill" is one of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:13). Deliberate murder of a person, rooted in hatred and anger, is what this commandment has in mind. Homicidal acts like this may differ from acts such as a man defending his family, a policeman doing his civic duty, or a soldier protecting his country (see Romans 13). Ultimately, murder begins in the heart (see Matthew 15:19). It's important for us to see that God loves and He is just. The two are not mutually exclusive. God is a holy God who cannot tolerate sin – it must be dealt with. There were times in the Bible when His judgment came upon wicked people or nations – and He sometimes used man to pour out His judgment. However, God did this out of His loving, just nature. God says: "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezekiel 33:11). Psalm 145:13b reads: "The Lord is faithful to all of His promises and loving toward all He has made". God considers life to be precious; this is why He willingly died for us. In Christ's death on the Cross, the love and mercy of God were combined with His holiness and justice. The Cross was the greatest demonstration in history of both the love and hatred of God – love for people drowning in their sin, but a holy hatred poured out in judgment on sin. His justice demanded that sin be punished; at the Cross His love provided a way for each of us to escape that punishment.

>>Q: *I'm going through a hard time right now, and I feel like Jesus is not with me, that He doesn't care for me! How can I know that He is here with me?*

Our feeling can be larger than life at times – and they can also change like the weather. This is why it's

important to anchor our souls in the truth of God's Word. The anchor of God's Word can help steady us in the midst of a raging storm of troubles. Pour out your heart to God. Be real with Him. Even if you don't sense His presence, talk to Him. He's listening. Then, focus on the truth of God's Word. The truth is that God has promised to never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). The truth is that His everlasting arms are underneath you (Deuteronomy 33:27). Even if you don't feel Him, this doesn't change the reality that He is there. How do you know? His Word tells you! Then, make the decision to offer a sacrifice of praise to God (Hebrews 13:15). Praising God is a powerful remedy when you feel distant from God. It's one of the best remedies for fears, doubts, discouragement and depression. To praise God is to worship, honor and glorify Him. Most of all, remember that Jesus loves you. This is not a sappy sentiment. This is rock-solid reality. His love is unchanging, even when yours isn't. He understands what you are going through, and He only asks for you to come to Him (Matthew 11:28). Remember: "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18).

>>Q: *I've read in scripture that there is one unforgivable sin – blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. I'm worried that I may have committed it, and feel very insecure in my faith. What is the sin? And how can I know whether I have or haven't committed it?*

If you've given your life to Christ there's no reason to believe you've committed this sin. In Mark 3:28-30 and Matthew 12:31-32, Jesus explains the unforgivable sin, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, in response to religious leaders who refused to accept the witness of the Holy Spirit to who Jesus was and what He had come to do. Jesus said concerning the Holy Spirit, "When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). Instead, the religious leaders hardened their hearts, rejected the Spirit's witness about their sin and about Jesus, and even accused Jesus of being demon-possessed! To blaspheme the Holy Spirit is to intentionally, consistently and maliciously reject His testimony. IF a person keeps doing that until they die, there is no hope of forgiveness and eternal life in heaven. Once again, the unforgivable sin is not some horrible sin committed by a Christian before or after accepting Christ, nor is it thinking or saying something terrible about the Holy Spirit. Rather, it is deliberately resisting the Holy Spirit's witness and invitation to turn to Jesus until death closes the door on all opportunity.

>>Q: *Is it wrong in God's eyes to be a friend with an unbeliever/sinner or someone who does not want to have Jesus Christ as his/her personal Savior, if I myself am a Christian?*

In Luke's gospel, we have the story of Jesus' friendship with notorious sinners. "Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to His disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:29-31). The Bible tells us two clear reasons why Jesus could hang out with sinners so often and still remain strong: He knew the Scripture backwards and forwards, and He spent time with His Father every day. In our culture, voices speaking against you need to face the truth that either your life will influence others to come closer to God, or their lives will influence you to leave your faith. Follow in the steps of Jesus; love the lost, but stay firmly connected to your Heavenly Father. Without Him, you have no real hope to offer or depend on.

>>Q: *Where did God come from?*

That's a great question! Like you, many people have wondered about where God came from. They ask, "God created the world, but who made God?" The Bible teaches that God is the Creator of all things and did not have a beginning. Genesis 1:1 declares, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

In other words, God has always been, even before the beginning of time and the physical universe. God has no beginning and no ending. He is the One forever self-existent. This means that God has always been, and He always will be. That's a difficult concept to wrap our minds around, but it doesn't change the fact that it's true. God not only created us, He created us to have a relationship with Him.

>>Q: *I know that if it is meant for me to marry, God will send me the person He has made for me. My question is how will I know who that person is?*

To start, we can tell you the number one way to not evaluate marriage prospects, and that's to listen only to your feelings. Romantic feelings are only part of knowing that someone is God's best for you. God doesn't want us to throw out our brains when making one of the biggest decisions of our lives. Let's talk a minute about how God guides us. Sometimes He "speaks" to us through that still, small voice. More often, however, He transforms our hearts and minds through the work of the Holy Spirit, so our reasoning abilities increasingly become a reliable source of guidance. In other words, knowing whom to marry isn't just an emotional or spiritual experience, it also requires clear thinking. A special someone may make you feel wonderful. You can't wait to be with them. But does this person share your commitment to Christ? Or have a vision for establishing a Christ-centered marriage and family? Does this person respond to difficulties or communicate with others in a mature way? When the forest fire of romantic love has settled to a campfire, would you and this person have similar interests or goals that you can work toward together? Do you see? Careful and prayerful questioning is part of the process of knowing God's will. It also helps to get the input of other mature Christians. They may be able to see the situation more objectively than you can. It's sad to see people blindly rushing into marriage, relying only on feelings, rejecting the advice of others, and ending up in a failed relationship. Keep your eyes wide open. There's no formula for knowing if a certain someone is the right one to marry. But if you let Jesus Christ be the guide of your heart, you'll be in the best position to understand His plan for your life.

>>Q: *Where do the souls of bad people go?*

The Bible teaches that a person's soul is eternal and will live forever. In other words, the real you – the part of you that thinks, feels, dreams, aspires; the ego, the personality – will never die. The Bible also teaches that your soul will live forever in one of two places – heaven or hell. The moment a believer in Christ dies, he goes immediately into the presence of Christ. If a person is not a believer in Christ, then the Bible teaches that their soul goes immediately to a place Jesus called "Hades" (pronounced HAY-DEES), or hell, where they will await the judgment of God. Everyone who finds him or herself in hell will be there because they have rejected God's free gift of salvation.

>>Q: *I just wanted to know if Halloween is okay to celebrate?*

Some Christians don't believe it should be celebrated because its origins are in the occult. Halloween's origins are a confusing mix of pagan rituals and Christian celebrations. Some Christians try to find activities that are positive alternatives to traditional Halloween practices. These alternatives may include fall festival parties where kids are encouraged to dress as biblical characters or outstanding Christians of the past. Still other believers don't discourage the celebration of Halloween, but they may give out gospel tracts along with treats to children who come to their homes, trying to make Halloween an opportunity to tell others about Christ. It's important that we receive God's guidance and seek to honor Him in all we do. We must each act according to the faith God gives us (Romans 14:23).

>>Q: *I've always been confused about whether homosexuals are sinners or not. Many medical scientists believe that homosexuality is caused by genetics, heredity, and other non-decisive causes. If a homosexual is a sinner, is it his fault if he was a homosexual way before he even acknowledged himself*

as a homosexual?

The Bible contains God's blueprint for marriage and His gift of sex (Genesis 1-2). God designed sex to be enjoyed only in a marriage between a man and a woman. The Bible doesn't suggest any exceptions, like homosexual partnerships. From Genesis on, the Bible praises the marriage of a man and a woman, but only speaks negatively of homosexual behavior whenever it is mentioned. The Old Testament states, "Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable" (Leviticus 18:22). The New Testament agrees, listing "homosexual offenders" among a list of people who "will not inherit the kingdom of God" unless they are cleansed through Christ (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Other passages are Genesis 19; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Timothy 1:8-11; Jude, verse 7. However, it's important to note that the Bible speaks only of homosexual behavior (which would include lust – choosing to fantasize about behavior), not unchosen feelings. God will not judge a Christian guilty for his or her involuntary feelings. Many insist that if homosexuals are born that way then it must not be a sin. However, it must be emphasized that even if a biological predisposition to homosexuality exists, it wouldn't change God's opposition to the behavior. We all have areas where we are more vulnerable to sin, areas where you could say we are natural sinners. But being tempted is not sin. Also, in a world broken by sin the discovery of a genetic link would not prove that such a condition was God's intent before Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. We're responsible, along with Adam and Eve, for the brokenness in our world, and this brokenness extends even into genetics. Furthermore, freedom from sinful behavior is always available through the transforming power of Jesus Christ. For instance, there were homosexuals in the church in Corinth and they were transformed: "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, your were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11).

>>Q: Does the Bible say anything about smoking?

It's true the Bible doesn't say, "Thou shalt not smoke cigarettes." In fact, the Bible doesn't specifically mentions things like violent movies, exceeding the speed limit, gambling or littering, either. However, the Bible is loaded with spiritual principles that help us know God's mind and enable us to evaluate most anything in life. A principle that relates to smoking is found in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body." If we have turned our lives over to Jesus, God's Holy Spirit lives inside us – our bodies are actually – "temples" of His Spirit. Smoking certainly doesn't do much to honor the one who lives in us.

>>Q: It is OK to drink at all? Some of my friends think it is not OK at all, but my others drink a little. So does that mean that you can as long as you don't get drunk?

Although alcohol is not condemned in the Bible (Jesus' first miracle was turning water into wine: John 2:1-11), we are given some pretty clear instructions: "Do not get drunk on wine" (Ephesians 5:18). Alcohol can cause you to lose self-control, even to the point of addiction, and that's never good. Self-control is big in God's eyes (1 Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8; Galatians 5:22-23). As Christians, our bodies belong to God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). God sees our bodies as His temples, and getting drunk is a terrible way to take care of God's house. We also need to keep in mind that we are examples to those around us. Drinking alcohol, assuming you're old enough and don't get drunk, might still encourage others around you to drink, and those people may not have the same desire or ability to stay sober. 1 Corinthians 8:7-13, talks about how we need to be careful of the example we set, even if what we are doing is technically all right.

>>Q: Sometimes I just feel like I've not learned enough to do anything for God. What can I do?

We are never too young (or too sick or too old or anything else) to be of infinite value to God. The Apostle Paul encouraged Timothy about the very question you're asking: "Don't let anyone look down

on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). According to Paul, you’ve got plenty of opportunities to do great things. Work to be an example for others and you may not have time for much else! What an awesome challenge – consider the incredible influence you can have on others if you choose to serve others. Discovering your spiritual gift(s) is one key way to get started.

>>Q: *I have a friend who says, “Just believing in Jesus will get you into heaven” and that she is saved by grace. But she is living dead in sin. How can I convince her that she cannot enter the Kingdom of God unless she dedicates her life to the Lord and turns away from sin? Can you go to heaven just by believing in Jesus and yet keep on living in sin? And if not, how can I show her she is wrong?*

It sounds like she is trying to hide her sinful desires behind the cover of a watered-down version of the gospel, which is really no gospel at all. Could your friend have any confidence she’ll go to heaven if her “faith” doesn’t make any difference in her life? When the Bible speaks of believing in one’s heart, it’s more than just head knowledge. It’s a commitment of one’s entire person to Jesus Christ. It’s a living, working faith, not a dead faith (see James 2:17). When we are born again, it involves our emotions as well as our intellect and our will. We now love many things we once rejected, and we reject the things we once loved. We hate sin, and we love righteousness. The apostle Paul clearly answered those who twisted his gospel to mean that faith in Christ was just a cheap ticket to heaven. He writes, “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? (Romans 6:1-2). When we “believe in Jesus”, God joins us to Christ so that, in some unexplainable way, we share in His death to sin and resurrection to a new life. We can’t remain the same person! 1 John 2:29 carries the same idea: “If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of Him.” Believing that God has given you this concern for your friend, and knowing that He will work in her life through your prayers, we can trust in the hope that the Lord is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Perhaps the best thing you can do for her at this time is to pray. The Holy Spirit works to convict of sin, to show the possibility of being made right in God’s sight, and to warn of the danger of neglecting salvation (see John 16: 7-11). We can be faithful to share the truth with those we care about, but only God can open their eyes to see the beauty of that truth and give them the power to submit their lives to it. Let’s not forget that everything is possible with God!

>>Q: *I have always wondered what Christ meant when He disowned people and called them wicked and said that He did not know them (at the gates of heaven), even when they claimed to have driven demons out in His name and all that, indicating a relationship with Christ! Would that mean that even if I am born again, there is a possibility that I would not enter the gates of heaven? I’m a little confused.*

You expressed concern about the words of Christ found in Matthew 7:21-23 in which Christ appears to disown people that seem to have a real relationship with Him. Does this passage mean that you may also be rejected from entering heaven, even though you are a believer? You don’t need to worry about being rejected from entering heaven if you have put your trust in Jesus Christ, but this passage may challenge you in the way that you’re following after Christ. In light of the surrounding verses in this passage, Christ is not talking about a true believer in Him but about false followers. The difference here is between “doing” and “being”. Jesus spoke about people who talked the Christian talk (called him “Lord”) and did things that were spiritually miraculous (prophesying, casting out demons, and performing miracles), but in spite of all this, they did not do what pleased God the Father (verse 21). Perhaps these followers thought that religious practices, such as saying the right words or doing the right acts, were enough to be saved. However, our personal relationship with God is not earned by our works of righteousness, nor is it based on

our church membership; neither does living a clean, moral life merit salvation; not even doing miraculous acts. When death comes, the born-again Christian will go to heaven because he is trusting in the finished work of Jesus Christ; the person who is trusting in the saving power of his own goodness will be lost. The Bible clearly teaches these truths: (1) “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9); (2) “He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy” (Titus 3:5). The Bible also says, (3) “To the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Romans 4:5). We must accept salvation as a gift; it cannot be earned.

>>Q: *Does God consider sex before marriage a sin?*

Sex is a gift that God has provided, but it's a gift that only a couple who is married can open. Why? God knows that if two people with no commitment share sex, there can be so much heartache. Think about it: Unwanted pregnancies, sexually-transmitted diseases and emotional pain can all come as a result of a couple who open up the gift of sex prematurely. God designed sex to be shared in the context of a committed marriage. This protects and enhances the couple physically, spiritually and mentally. Remember that sex is so much more than two people sharing their bodies and receiving pleasure, it involves the couple's hearts and souls. But when a couple who are just dating are sexually active, what happens when they don't feel “in-love” anymore? All that intimacy that they have shared, and the deepest part of them has been given to the other, is just tossed out. This creates incredible heartache. Even if this pain is not clearly identified right away – it comes out in other areas of life down the line. People who have sex before marriage may struggle with their self-worth, trust, anger, hopelessness and other problems. God wants us to wait for marriage to open His good gift of sex because He loves us. We don't know if you have had sex or not. If you have, we want to encourage you that God still loves you. He asks you to save this special gift for marriage from here on out, and to commit yourself to being pure in your thoughts and actions. It will not be easy, but He will give you the strength to do this. When you live a pure life (which doesn't mean “perfect”), the rewards are peace, contentment, joy and fulfillment. If you have not had sex yet, we encourage you to get a solid understanding in your own mind of why you believe that waiting until marriage is not only right, but is the best. You don't need to have it all figured out, but you need to know why you believe what you believe. It may be helpful to talk with a trusted and more spiritually mature believer or a pastor about these things. Don't feel pressured to do something that you don't feel right about doing. We hope that you will consider what we've shared and really seek the Lord about all of this. He has only the very best in mind for you, and we challenge you to trust Him for that. Most of all, know that a love relationship with Him is better than any earthly relationship. He wants to meet the deepest needs of your heart. In fact, if you don't know about His desires for an intimate relationship with you, please get to know God.

>>Q: *Can you give some biblical perspective about speaking in tongues?*

Speaking in tongues is mentioned in two New Testament books – Acts and 1 Corinthians. Acts 2 describes the coming of the Holy Spirit on the gathering of believers. This account says that “all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (Acts 2: 4). The many foreigners who were gathered in Jerusalem were amazed to hear these believers talking about the wonders of God in their own languages. Bible scholars differ in their opinion as to whether the speakers were given a special ability to speak or the hearers were given a special ability to understand. In 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, speaking in tongues are also addressed. In this book, the apostle Paul is actually writing in order to teach the church in the city of Corinth. In reading these chapters we can learn several things: 1) there is a definite gift of tongues, possibly different from the one described in the book of Acts; 2) the gift of tongues is only one of the many gifts that the Holy Spirit may choose to give; 3) the gift of

tongues is given by the Holy Spirit as He decides to do so; 4) the gift of tongues is not a gift that every believer receives, nor is it the most important gift; and 5) the tone of the writing indicates that the gift of tongues, as is still true today, may easily be abused. Many believers testify to the private devotional use of tongues as a means of praising God and enjoying His fellowship. This seems to be most consistent with Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 14:18-19. We encourage you to continue to dig into God's Word. Like Him, it never stops giving. He will "show you great and mighty things, which you do not know" (Jeremiah 33:3).

>>Q: *In the Bible it says, "when you fast" how do you know when to fast?*

Fasting – going without food in order to spend time in prayer - is noble and difficult. It gives us time to pray, teaches self-discipline, reminds us that we can live with a lot less, and helps us appreciate God's gifts. Fasting was mandatory for the Jewish people once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:32). Jesus commended acts of self-sacrifice done quietly and sincerely. He wanted people to adopt spiritual disciplines for the right reasons, not from selfish desire for praise. Perhaps the first time someone fasted in the Bible was when Moses communicated with God on Mount Sinai. Deuteronomy 9:9 and Deuteronomy 9:18 talk about two fasts Moses completed. First, he fasted 40 days when he received God's law on stone tablets. The second fast of 40 days was done when Moses interceded for his people Israel. God wanted to destroy them for their rebellion, but Moses successfully pleaded, with fasting, for mercy on their behalf. Many different people groups and religions have used the practice of fasting for thousands of years as a spiritual discipline. Biblical fasting often involves turning away from sin, and it helps to curb our bodies' natural and sinful desires. Fasting also helps us to be more receptive to spiritual realities and to deepen our faith and sense of God's presence.

>>Q: *How can I know God's love for me?*

One of the best ways to identify with God's love is the same way you love your children and want only the best for them. Though there certainly are exceptions, most parents do really love their children and all of us have had parents. They gave their lives unconditionally for us, sacrificing their desires to help us grow. Likewise, comparing the natural father-son or mother-daughter relationship (home life) can give you guidance and direction in understanding many Biblical issues and especially your relationship with God.

>>Q: *How can someone who has never even heard of God be judged by God?*

Good question and the answer is found in Romans Chapter 1. God's existence, His moral demands, and the created world provide ample evidence of God's existence and all people know in their hearts that God exists.

>>Q: *What does it mean to be "unequally yoked?"*

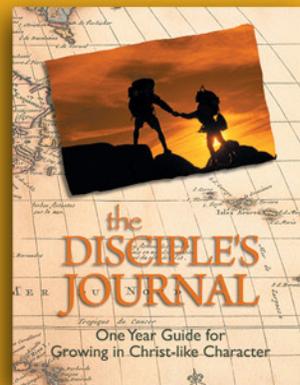
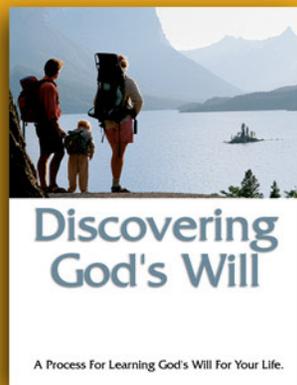
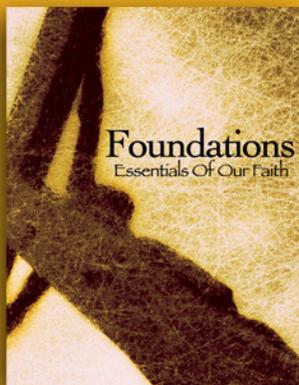
The Bible tells us, "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14). Believers are not to form binding relationships with nonbelievers, because this might weaken their Christian commitment, integrity, or standards. It would be a mismatch. This does not mean isolating yourself from nonbelievers (see 1 Corinthians 5:9, 10) for the Apostle Paul also tells Christians to stay with their non-believing spouses (1 Corinthians 7:12, 13). We are to be active in our witness for Christ to nonbelievers, but we should not lock ourselves into personal or business relationships that could cause us to compromise the faith. We should do everything in our power to avoid situations that could force us to divide our loyalties.

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