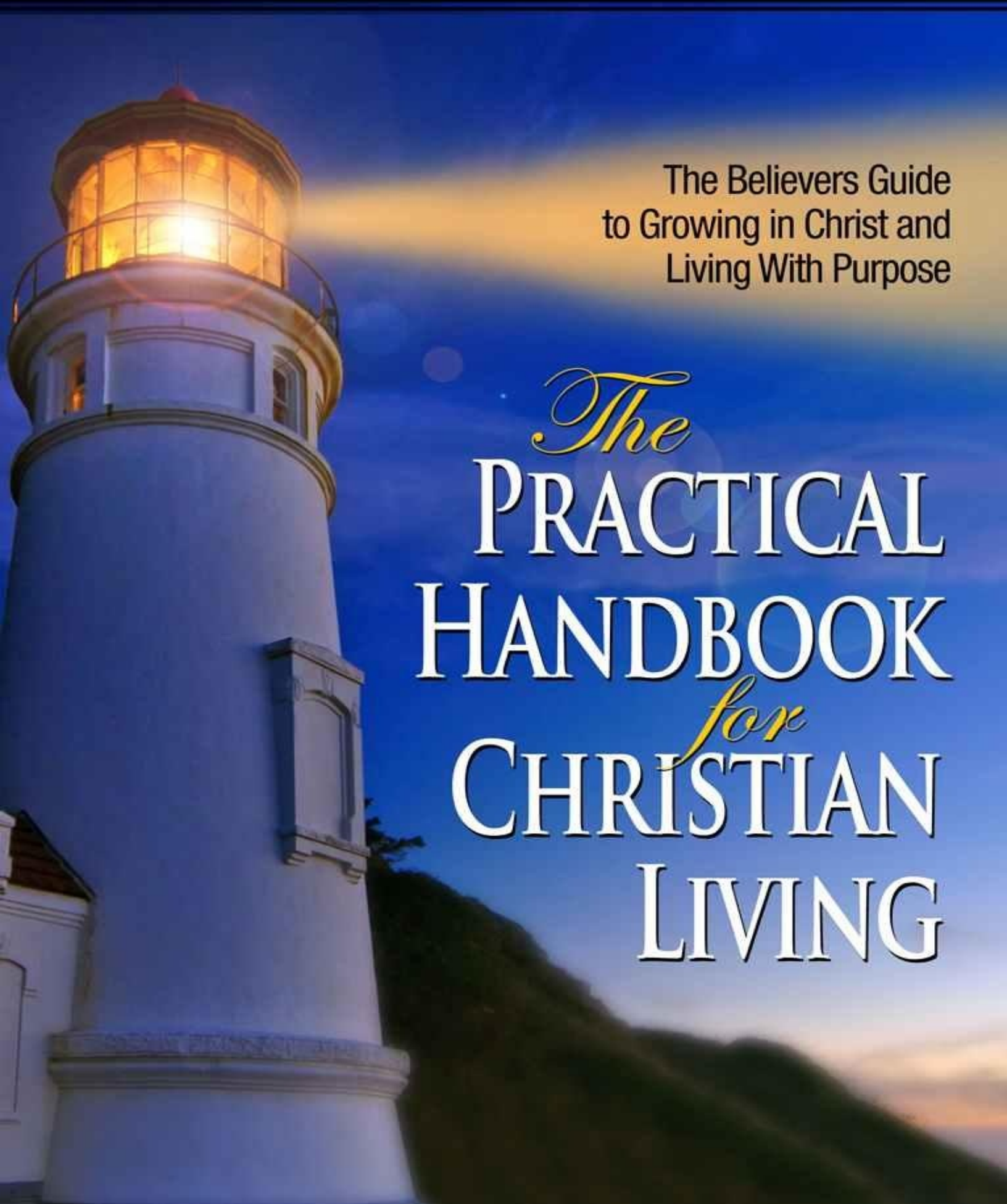
DR. LARRY OLLISON



The Believers Guide
to Growing in Christ and
Living With Purpose

# The PRACTICAL HANDBOOK for CHRISTIAN LIVING

# PRACTICAL HANDBOOK FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING

**Biblical and Spiritual Answers to Life's Problems**

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Harrison House
Tulsa, OK

# Foreword

I have known both Larry Ollison and his wife, Loretta, since they arrived as timid freshmen at Southwest Baptist College (now University), where I was chairman of the theology department. As her academic advisor, I asked Loretta why she wanted to major in Bible, and I distinctly remember her answer. She said, “This may seem strange to you, but I feel that God has called me to be a pastor’s wife.” I responded that I didn’t think it was strange at all, because God’s call extended to both. She has certainly fulfilled her call.

My best observation of Larry in those days is that he began a pilgrimage that resulted in what he is and where he is today. No doubt, he has surprised a lot of people who were skeptical about him at that beginning, but then no one should be surprised at what God can do with and through any individual who will submit to His lordship in simple faith and obedience. I praise God for the mighty ministry that He has entrusted to Larry and Loretta, and I am grateful that He used me in some way to contribute to the foundation of that ministry.

This Practical Handbook for Christian Living is a discipleship manual that is practical, realistic, and intensely personal, in addition to being doctrinally sound. Larry knows how to communicate plainly and personally to the common person, and this book is not a cold academic commentary written in a research library. Rather, it is a friendly across-the-desk conversation, written from a pastor’s heart and personal experience. The author simply shares what he hears the Lord speaking to him in his spirit.

This is not a book to be read through once, but one that is to be consulted daily for inspiration, guidance, encouragement, comfort, assurance, or whatever else is needed for that day. Each devotional article in this book reveals the relevancy of the Bible to contemporary life. God’s Word addresses every conceivable human situation and emotion, and this volume applies sound biblical principles appropriate for whatever the situation or emotion may be. The contents are arranged in an alphabetical format that assures ease in finding the applicable teaching.

Each alphabetical article packs a spiritual punch. The articles are short enough that a busy reader will have time to meditate upon the lesson taught and nurture his spirit, and they are long enough to get a sound message to take into everyday life. One of the most valuable features of the book is the use of true-to-life illustrations that demonstrate convincingly the authority of God’s Word and the

power of simple faith in God.

A Christian who masters the basic truths held in this book and applies them in his daily life will be a stronger and more mature disciple. Furthermore, he will enjoy a closer communion with Christ and he will be a terror for the devil. If you desire to have a deeper relationship with the Lord, a greater understanding of the Word of God and the ways of God, and a consequent growth in overcoming faith, then this book is for you. Put it in a convenient place, because you will be habitually reaching for it.

– Jerry Horner

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# INTRODUCTION

This book has a threefold purpose. First, it is a book that you can read through from beginning to end that will guide you in understanding the life principles of God's Word. Secondly, it can be used as a daily devotional. This book is divided into detailed bites of information that can be taken daily and systematically digested to bring a higher level of spiritual health. Lastly, it can be used as a reference guide. Through the topical table of contents, you can find the subject quickly that addresses the area of your interest or study.

A handbook on any subject is simply a manual that amplifies, details, and explains a product, situation, or issue. The Holy Bible is the Word of God written by the hand of man, but inspired by the Spirit of God. God's Word clearly speaks the heart of God. This handbook is not intended to alter the message in any way, but simply to be a reference guide for the Christian who wants deeper understanding and clarification on the issues of daily living.

As you read this handbook, take special note of the scriptures. Meditate on them and allow the Spirit of God to reveal His truth to you.

Please note that the promises contained in the Word of God are for the born-again believer. God has given us benefits that the world does not have. There are promises and formulas about life that when applied by the world, will not work. But when they are applied by the born-again believer, they work flawlessly.

If you want to live your life to the fullest and make certain that you will spend eternity in the presence of God, it is very simple to do so. To be saved you must believe in your heart that Jesus is the Son of God and that He was raised from the dead and then you must confess that with your mouth. At the end of this book is an article entitled, "How Do I Become a Christian?" Read it for help in becoming born again.

# ABUNDANCE

## God Will Prosper You

Recently a man wrote me a letter and he was very distressed. It seems that his problem was in the area of money. I know that many Christians don't like to talk about money. They have heard it preached that money is the root of all evil and because of this, they have a subtle fear of money.

Well, the truth is this. First Timothy 6:10 says, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

It's not money that is a root of evil, it's the love of money. An interesting note here is you don't have to have money to love money. Greed and envy are not determined by how much money you have or by how little. Strange as it may seem, you can be very poor and have a great love of money.

The man who wrote me was very upset because he did not have enough money to pay the bills. His electricity was about to be disconnected and his wife was getting calls daily from bill collectors. He said, "Things do not look good financially for me. With the economy bad and things going bad in my industry, is it possible for God to prosper me where I am? Or should I try to move where the jobs are? Really, I don't have the money to move anyway. Is it possible that God can help me where I am?"

The answer to that is definitely YES! God can prosper you where you are.

The Bible tells a story about a young man named Daniel. Daniel was taken as a slave into a foreign land. He was in completely new surroundings and was told that he could not follow any of the traditions of his homeland. Things looked bad.

But God prospered Daniel anyway. The Bible tells us in Daniel 6:28, "So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian."

Daniel prospered in spite of his surroundings. In fact, he prospered through two kings. One of the kings, King Darius, was so impressed with Daniel that he commanded that the entire kingdom of Babylon must worship the God of Daniel. (vv. 26–27.) God prospered Daniel where he was.

Now, don't take me wrong. I'm not saying that a person shouldn't move to get a better job, but what I am saying is this: Don't limit God. He can prosper you

where you are, and according to His Word, He will.

In Matthew 5 and 6, Jesus preached His famous Sermon on the Mount. At one point, He talked about how we shouldn't worry about food, clothing, and housing. Then He summed everything up by saying, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33).

In other words, Jesus said if we would seek the things of God first, then the financial things would fall into place. Jesus didn't tell us that a person had to live in Chicago, London, or Hong Kong for this to work. God's Word works wherever we are.

I'm not saying that we can sit back and have money drop out of the sky without having to work. What I am saying is that God will prosper whatever we put our hands to if we seek His kingdom and His righteousness, first.

## Pressing Past the Need into Possession

> *When Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."*
>
> Mark 2:17

Jesus made a very profound statement in this verse. He said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician." That may sound simple, but actually it has great spiritual depth. Many people I have met over the years are in great need. They need finances, they need friendship, they need healing, and they need love. They always seem to need something.

However, it's never been God's plan for His children to live in need of anything. If we need money, then we are not prosperous. If we need healing, then we are not walking in health. If we need hope, then we are not in faith. And if we need love, we are admitting that we do not have love.

God wants us to move from wanting and needing into having and possessing. God is complete in all things. He has no lack and He has no need. Ephesians 5:1 says that we are to be like God. We are to be complete and without need. Even though the Scriptures tell us that God knows our needs before we ask (Matt. 6:8), after the asking, the need should be gone. Here's why.

Revelation 21:23 tells us that the New Jerusalem has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it because the glory of God illuminates it. Then that verse goes on to say that the Lamb is its light. This statement may sound elementary, but it is true—where there is light and illumination, there is no need for an object that

gives light.

In the same way, if we are like God we will be walking in completeness. Our lives will be shalom—everything will be whole, peaceful, healthy, safe, sound, tranquil, prosperous, perfect, full, restful, and in harmony.[1] There will be no agitation or discord. God's plan is for us to walk past our needs and to be complete in Him.

# ABUSE—Mental

## Navigating Emotional Mine Fields

Have you ever been around someone who was so touchy that your conversation had to be tempered with words that would not upset him or her, to the degree that it became difficult to communicate? These kinds of people have such deep, imbedded anger issues that a normal conversation is impossible. Sometimes you feel like you are walking through an emotional mine field and one wrong step (word) can set off an explosion of anger that requires psychological hospitalization to recover.

When approaching some people, you have to wait for the right timing, the right mood, the right temperature, because they are so temperamental, the slightest word spoken incorrectly can set them off.

Usually these individuals are full of hurts and unfulfilled expectations and rather than correcting their communication skills or resolving the hurts of life, they avoid the truth through an explosion of words.

Once I was in a meeting and I told one of my employees to ask another employee to do a certain project. Their response was, "I will, but I will wait for the right time, because you know how they are."

What my employee was actually telling me was that the other person was so moody and irritable that you had to monitor their attitude and judge your words before you ever asked a question. The right question spoken the wrong way could create hours of discussion and turmoil. Actually, the right question presented correctly can do the same thing because an offended person will perceive it as incorrect. My employee eventually said to me, "Why don't you get someone else to talk to them?"

The temptation is to avoid people who are temperamental and to avoid direct confrontation, which further complicates the problem and creates a vicious cycle

of continued uneasiness. Offensive people like to talk and rule conversations with their negativity and that causes others to avoid interaction with these people whenever possible.

This is why some people have no friends and when they walk into a room or step into a conversation, everyone finds an excuse to leave. However, when an offensive person finds someone who will listen, they will actually alter their personality and treat that person differently, developing a type of codependency.

Sadly, it is impossible to get away from some of these people without completely breaking a relationship.

A few years ago, a couple asked if I would talk with them. As soon as they sat down, the wife said, “He never quits talking. He constantly talks and will never give me any time of peace and quiet.” I looked at the man and asked him if it was true. For over an hour, he explained how he was not a talker. Neither his wife nor I could get a word in edgewise. Yet, he was convinced that he did not have a talking problem.

So how do you counsel with someone and solve a problem when the person who has the problem feels they have none?

The first thing to do is to seek God’s Word for comfort and allow His Word and His Holy Spirit to minister to you. Secondly, you must come to the realization that you cannot manipulate and control other people. If they will not listen to reason and are determined to continue being abrasive and explosive, then you must find a way to shield yourself from the piercing arrows (words) of the offending person.

> *Hear my voice, O God, in my meditation; preserve my life from fear of the enemy. Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked, from the rebellion of the workers of iniquity, who sharpen their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows—bitter words, that they may shoot in secret at the blameless.*
>
> Psalm 64:1–4

We are living in the last days. (2 Tim. 3:1–17.) Jesus said that in the last days offenses will come. (Matt. 18:7.) You will never be able to stop offensive people from being offensive unless they align themselves with the Word and repent. That doesn’t mean they just say that they are sorry. Being sorry is an emotion. Repentance is a change. Without repentance, being sorry means nothing.

If an offensive person does not repent, then you must position yourself so that your shield of faith (Eph. 6:16) is placed between you and them.

Of course, you can separate yourself from offensive people. The Bible says that

it is perfectly okay to separate yourself from ungodly people who are abusive. (Rom. 16:17.) However, if they are a spouse or other family member, this may not be completely possible and your shield of faith, personal strength in the Word, and prayer become your protection.

So the next time someone blows up unexpectedly and pounds you relentlessly with their words, remember this: God's plan for your life is peace and contentment. He wants you to walk in faith and let everything you do be tempered with love. He did not create man to live with abuse and stress, but to walk in the freedom of the Word and the joy of the Spirit, and to enjoy the fullness of life in peace.

Scripture References:

Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes! (Matthew 18:7)

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. (Romans 16:17)

# ABUSE—Physical

## Don't Subject Yourself to Abuse

I want to dispel a very common misconception about abuse and offense. Contrary to what most people think, removing yourself from an abusive situation doesn't necessarily mean you are offended or unforgiving.

For example, if your husband beats you, God does not expect you or your children to remain in such an environment. And leaving such a horrendous situation does not necessarily mean that you are offended. It is actually possible to leave an abusive situation and not harbor offense toward the abuser.

However, if you leave that situation with hatred or bitterness toward your abuser, then you are in direct disobedience to God's Word. Jesus did not harbor hatred or bitterness toward those who betrayed Him or nailed Him to the cross. Instead He said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Jesus demonstrated His love for the Father by obeying His commandments.

> *By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.*
>
> 1 John 5:2,3

Do you love God? How do you demonstrate your love for God? According to this verse, crying, praying, or even tithing doesn't prove your love. Instead, your love is proven only when you keep His commandments.

When the Lord said in Matthew 19:19, "Love your neighbor," He didn't mean to love only those who love you in return. His commandment to love is without exception.

Choose to prove your love for God by obeying His Word. He has given you the anointing, the grace, and the power to love and live free from offense.

# ABUSE—Verbal

## How to Survive Verbal Abuse

Your words contain power. According to the Bible, the words you speak can produce life or bring death. (Prov. 18:21.) Our words can create and they can destroy. What we say is vitally important.

Unfortunately, during times of disagreement words are used as the weapon to cut the opponent's heart. Psalm 64:3 talks about those who sharpen their tongues like a sword. It goes on to say that they shoot their words like arrows and their arrows are bitter words. They shoot in secret at the blameless without any fear.

Once I counseled someone who had been verbally abused by their spouse for years. With every disagreement in the home, she used her tongue to cut, pierce, and stab his heart. After a period of years of receiving this verbal abuse, he had withdrawn from their relationship and would rarely have intimate conversation. Why? He knew that with any disagreement of any kind, his spouse would draw her sword and begin to cut. And with her cutting, he would withdraw into his shell of protection. He said that each time the abuse began he would feel paralyzed and unable to respond verbally, knowing that however he responded it would be wrong.

No one should have to live with verbal abuse. Throughout the years I have spoken to abusers through my books and articles and I have told them to stop. However, most of the time verbally abusive people have no concept of what they are doing, but the abused person understands very clearly. What about the one who is the abused and living with someone who will not stop? What is the answer? How do you deal with a verbally abusing person living in your house?

There are spouses who do not hit, beat, push, or physically abuse and can be

very nice people. But under certain circumstances, something seems to snap inside of them and they become hurtful, mean, selfish, angry, and destructive with their mouths. The abuser needs help and must repent, but what about the ones being abused? How can they shield their hearts from the arrows coming from within their own household?

The Bible gives us the plan for victory and regardless of what is going on in somebody else, we have authority over our own soul. Here are some biblically-based steps to take.

1) Base your identity in Christ and not someone else.

Know who you are in Christ. As a Christian, you are the blessed, the redeemed, loved, complete, restored, and a joint heir with Christ.

2) Speak out loud the words that God says about you.

Words of cursing must be replaced with words of blessing, even if you have to do it yourself. The words you speak over yourself are more powerful than the words someone else speaks over you. Do not receive the abusive words as truth. Remember, anything spoken against you that opposes what God says about you is not true. Every word you hear creates an image in your thought realm. The Bible says to cast down any imagination that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. (2 Cor. 10:5.)

3) Do not hate the abuser.

The person speaking the evil words against you is only the conduit that the enemy is using to get to you. Once when Peter spoke to Jesus, Jesus did not rebuke Peter, but He rebuked the source, Satan. “He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men’” (Matt. 16:23). Jesus saw the value in Peter and gave him opportunity to repent.

4) Don’t carry the lying words with you and meditate on them.

If you do, your heart will never heal and you will continually be opening a wound and playing into the enemy’s hands. Medicate the wound with the oil of forgiveness, bandage (cover) it with the Word, and quit scratching it. Don’t remove the bandage to examine the wound. Let it heal.

> *You shall be hidden from the scourge of the tongue, and you shall not be afraid of destruction when it comes.*
>
> Job 5:21

5) Do not return abuse for abuse.

It’s easy to become defensive and throw stones at the one throwing stones at

you. This only escalates the problem and is never a solution. “Repay no one evil for evil” (Rom. 12:17). Understand this. Verbally abusive people are usually people who have been verbally abused themselves. Hurting people hurt people and they usually hurt the ones closest to them. Sometimes they do it because they know you love them so much that you will take the abuse and never leave. You become their release valve. That may be a reason for the abuse, but it’s no excuse for abuse.

If the abuse doesn’t stop, you must not allow the lying words of the enemy to destroy you. Grace is God’s willingness and His ability to empower you to overcome anything that comes against you. And God’s grace is available for every Christian. If abuse comes at you as a Category 5 storm, God will empower you with Category 6 grace. Because the truth is under all circumstances, greater is He that is in you than the attack that comes from the world, or from the mouth of a friend. (1 John 4:4.)

So what I am saying is this—you may not be able to get away from the abusive person, but through love, forgiveness, and grace you can keep the abuse from getting inside of you. You can walk tall with joy in your heart, living your life in peace and victory in spite of the storm that may be going on around you.

God has a plan for your life and His plan does not include abuse or defeat. His plan is victory and peace. God does not want you to simply survive verbal abuse, but to have victory over it. Don’t allow the words of someone else to dictate the joy and happiness within your own heart. Don’t allow the words of someone else to take you to a place of withdrawal or depression. Stand firm, stand up, and hold your shield of faith. It will quench all the fiery darts from the enemy. Your belief in what God says will override what anyone else says, and the strength of God’s words will add strength to you.

# AGREEMENT (The Power of)

## The Spiritual Law of Agreement

One of the greatest tools that a Christian has is the Law of Agreement. In Matthew 18:19 Jesus said, “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.”

If you speak and agree with somebody, then you agree and speak that agreement into the spirit realm. And if what you say agrees with God’s Word, the Father, in

the spirit realm, will do what you speak.

You may say, “What if I am asking for something that is not God’s will?” This is why we have to pray God’s will (which is His Word), because it also works in the negative. These spiritual principles are just like gravity. They work in the positive and they work in the negative. What you say can help you or hurt you.

Let me give you a biblical example of how this agreement works in the negative. In Genesis 11:6, the people were building the tower of Babel in what is today the country of Iraq. Look at what the Lord said about them building this tower: “And the LORD said, ‘Indeed the people are one and they all have one language.’” These people were not Christians, they were not Hebrews, and they were not people who loved God. They were people who worshiped false gods. They were unrighteous.

The reason He said they had one language is that they communicated and were in agreement by speech, “‘and this [building the tower] is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.’” In other words, the power of agreement was working for the heathens in the spirit realm the same way that it works for Christians in the spirit realm.

How did God deal with this? Did He go down and wipe them all out? No. God said in verse 7, “‘Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language [disrupt their communication] that they may not understand one another’s speech.’” In other words, if the communication could be broken, then they would be out of agreement. God got them out of agreement by confusing their language; then He scattered them abroad over all the earth. (v. 8.) That’s how He dealt with it because when people are in agreement, even if they are in agreement with the things of the devil, their words carry power.

When you speak the Word of God, all of the heavenly host will move on the command of God’s Word. That’s why it is important for us to know what God says, believe what God believes, and speak what God speaks. When Jesus was here on this earth, He didn’t do or say anything that was not previously spoken by the Father. (Luke 2:49; John 12:49–50.) That’s the way we need to be.

If you want the positive power of God working in your life, then all you say and all your conversation must agree with His Word. The power of agreement can build a great ministry and can destroy the kingdom of darkness. The power of God is in your mouth if your words agree with the Word of God. Agree with what God says about you. Agree with what God says about others. Agree with what God says about your ministry.

Find someone else who believes God’s Word. Agree together with the Word of

God and watch God manifest miracles in your life.

# ANGELS

## Satan Attempts to Confuse the Truth

A few years ago, while I was out of town speaking at several meetings in Iowa, I stopped in at a little Bible bookstore. While I was there, I met a man who was a minister and pastor of one of the local denominational churches. He told me of all the great things his church was doing and how he was teaching his people the whole truth about the Bible.

While we were talking, I reached down and picked up a book by Billy Graham on angels. The minister immediately stopped talking, looked intently at me, and said, "You don't believe in angels and demons do you?" At first I thought he was joking, and then I noticed that he wasn't smiling. He went on to tell me his philosophy. At his church, he had taught his people that demons and angels do not really exist. Instead of actually being spirit beings, they were merely a representative of good and evil in the Bible.

Well, let me say this: Angels and demons do exist. God's Word, the Holy Bible, is true. (John 17:17.) It's not partially true. It's not mostly true. It's all true. Everything it says, everything it promises, is true. If the Bible tells about demons and angels, then they do exist. Evidently, this minister was trying to tell me that he believed some parts of the Bible but not all of it.

The bottom line is this: That kind of thinking is confused and wrong. We must believe the whole Word of God. There is no middle ground.

The Bible tells us in Titus 1:2 and Hebrews 6:18 that it is impossible for God to lie; He cannot do it. Every word that proceeds from His mouth is true. Everything that He says will happen, will happen. What He says He will do, He will do. Not only does God not lie, but God cannot lie. It's impossible.

Satan, on the other hand, is a liar. Jesus said in John 8:44 that Satan is a liar and the father of lies. There is no truth in him. Just before that, Jesus said that when Satan speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar.

So, here we have it clearly divided. On one hand, we have God who will not and cannot lie. On the other hand, we have Satan who will not and cannot tell the truth.

Now, if someone tells you that something in the Bible is not true, where do you

think that comes from? Satan, of course! Whenever God speaks, whether it's through His Word or whether it's to your heart by His Holy Spirit, as soon as the words leave His mouth, Satan is there to lie and confuse.

That's what happened in the Garden of Eden. God told Eve one thing and Satan implied that God didn't really mean what He said. He made Eve think that it was possible for God to lie and it destroyed her. (Gen. 3.) That's what Satan wants to do to you and me.

Faith is the key to everything in the Bible. Salvation, healing, peace, and victory all depend on faith. Believing that God does not lie is the key to faith. If Satan can get us to believe that it is remotely possible for God to lie, then our faith will be small or nonexistent, and that gives Satan an advantage in our lives.

God loves faith and Satan hates it. Faith will destroy Satan's kingdom.

So, remember this and you will take the first step toward victory. God cannot lie and Satan cannot tell the truth.

## In Your Dreams

> *While he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."*
>
> Matthew 1:20

The Word of God carries great revelation in every verse. The Bible is full of spiritual truths. Such is the case with the story of Jesus.

Have you ever thought about the reality of what happened to Joseph? Joseph was going to secretly put Mary away when he found out she was pregnant, rather than allow her to be stoned to death as was the custom for pregnancy out of wedlock back then. He was going to do this because he was a good man and because he loved her. Because of his goodness and love, he did not want to bring embarrassment and shame to her family. However, an angel appeared to him in a dream.

All through the Old Testament, angels appeared to men of God and gave them direction and understanding from God. Many times they appeared as angelic beings in the sky and many times they appeared walking on the ground as men. In fact, you may remember that Lot had an encounter with angelic beings in the city of Sodom and these angels looked so much like men that the people who lived in Sodom thought they were men. (Gen. 19.)

But the angel that appeared to Joseph did not appear as a creature in the sky or as

a man on the earth. Somehow, the angel entered into Joseph's dream and inside of his dream, this angel explained to Joseph that he should not put Mary away, but that he should marry her and take her as his wife. The angel told Joseph that the seed inside of Mary was not from an earthly man but from the Spirit of God.

Let me ask you something. Why is it that an angel of the Lord entered into the dream of Joseph and spoke to him 2,000 years ago but rarely does it happen today? God has not changed and neither has His plan. Angels still exist and they are still messengers from God. But the message throughout God's Word is this: We only receive what we believe.

If you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that God raised Him from the dead and you receive Him as your personal Savior, you are saved or born again. If you do not believe He is Lord, you do not receive Him. We are told that we receive miracles and the Holy Spirit and prophecy through faith. Believing is the key component to faith.

But always remember this: We should seek Him and not a manifestation. (James 4:8.)

> *Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.*
>
> Hebrews 13:2

> *Behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow.*
>
> Matthew 28:2,3

> *Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."*
>
> Mark 9:23

# ATTITUDE

## God Looks at the Heart

Over the years, I've discovered that most people have a good image. When they go to church, they dress up, smile, treat everyone politely, and give respect to their teachers and pastors. But what you see on the outside isn't always what is on the inside.

I don't mean to imply that people are good on the outside and bad on the inside, but rather that sometimes they mask and hide the hurts and problems of life. Just

because someone smiles and greets you politely does not mean that they are not contemplating suicide or desertion.

The Bible says that while man looks at the outside appearance, God looks at the heart. (1 Sam. 16:7.) God sees beyond the outward image. Ephesians 5:1 tells us that we are to imitate God. He wants us to be like Him. We must see beyond the outward appearance and minister to the heart.

In doing this, we must be led by the Spirit. (Rom. 8:14.) Unless we are led by the Spirit, we can actually create more problems and do greater damage by trying to pry "the truth" out of someone.

Recently, I was at a ministers' conference and someone I hadn't seen for a few months approached me and asked me how I was doing. I said, "Everything is going very well." With a concerned look, they responded, "Yes, I know it is by faith, but how are things really going?" I again responded, "Things are going very well." They said, "But what about financially?" I responded, "Fine." They said, "Well, how are you feeling physically? How is the family doing? Are you having any problems at the church?" After each question, my response was, "Fine." But he was wearing me down. He was determined to find a problem in my life. I almost made up a problem just to make him quit!

It made me realize something. Some people don't really care how things are going with you. They just want to find something that is not going right that they can agree with and compare to the tragedy in their lives. I guess that is where the phrase "misery loves company" comes from.

While we should be concerned about others, some people are just nosy. Instead of prying into someone's life verbally, we must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. The Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit will give us the words to say and the timing in which to speak them.

So the next time you meet someone, don't judge their life by what you see, but be sensitive to the Spirit of God and be prepared and "pre-prayered" to minister.

Scripture References:

*Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged. (Matthew 7:1–2)*

*The Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. (1 Samuel 16:7)*

*Do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. (Matthew 10:19–20)*

*I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.*

*(Galatians 5:16)*

# AUTHORITY

## Knowing the Limits of Your Authority

In Luke 10, Jesus sent out seventy men to tell the people about the Gospel, the good news. He sent them out in twos, gave them special instructions before going, and told them that the harvest is great, but the laborers are few. He said that He was sending them out as lambs among wolves and told them to pack light. His next directive was, "Don't take a money bag, a sack, or sandals." (v. 4.) He gave them other specific instructions and then He told them to heal the sick.

Well, the seventy men went out in pairs and followed the instructions given by Jesus. The result was they had great success. In fact, they had such great success that when they returned to Jesus, the Bible says that they returned with joy and excitement and bragged to Him that even the demons were subject to them. (v. 17.)

Jesus' response to them was:

> *"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."*
>
> Luke 10:18–20

In this passage, Jesus gave authority to the seventy and then later in Mark 16, Jesus gave authority over the forces of darkness to all who believe in Him. (v. 17.) Today, many Christians are living lives less than what they should because they do not know their authority in Christ. They allow the prince of darkness (Satan) to torment them and distract them. This should not be. We as Christians have been given authority over the forces of darkness.

On the other hand, there are Christians who have sought a closer walk with God. They have studied the Word and have come to the knowledge of the truth. They realize that Jesus destroyed the works of the devil and gave us authority over Satan and all his demonic forces (1 John 3:8), and these Christians take this God-given authority and are set free from the traps Satan sets for us.

But we must be careful with our authority. We must know the limits and not get goofy. When a Christian operates out of his or her mind instead of the Word of God, it can create some real strange doctrines—and strange doctrines do not attract people to Jesus. Instead, they turn them away.

For example, the other day I heard a Christian praying. In the middle of his prayer, he began taking authority over the works of the devil. He said, "Satan, I bind you in the name of Jesus and I cast you back to hell from whence you came." Well, all the people standing around looked impressed. After all, this man had just sent Satan back to hell—but that isn't taught in Scripture.

We have not been given the authority to cast Satan into hell at this time. When we try to, we are overstepping the limits of our authority and our words are of no effect. Sure, saying things like "I cast you back to hell from whence you came" sounds real religious, but it's not biblical. We are not given authority to cast Satan into hell today. God will do that when it's time. (Rev. 20:10.)

As Christians, we must know the fine line between taking authority over Satan and overstepping that authority. Jesus gave believers authority over the forces of darkness. Let's use it properly.

## Authority Over Fear

A few years ago, a lady called me from the basement of her home. She was afraid and under great fear. When I asked her what was wrong, she began to tell me stories of strange things that were happening and of the voices she kept hearing. Although the lady claimed to be a Christian, she said she knew the voices were demons because she had once dabbled in the occult. I felt she was right. After all, Jesus said His sheep would know His voice (John 10:4,27) so it shouldn't seem strange that the followers of Satan would recognize his.

I prayed with the lady and connected her with a Bible-believing pastor in her area. The last I heard, she had been set free from the demonic attacks and was active in her local church.

Now, first of all let me say this: Demons do exist. Demons are not a concept or a mental representation of evil. They are created beings that live in the spirit realm and follow the orders of their master, Satan. The Bible talks about them and several scripture passages tell of Jesus casting them out of people.

After speaking at a Christian convention one time where I touched on the reality of Satan and his demons, I was standing outside the auditorium on a balcony. One of the leaders in that church organization came over to me and complimented me on my message. He then proceeded to inform me of his true

beliefs. He said he knew the Bible talked about Satan, demons, and angels, but in reality they were just stories to be used to help the less educated understand the personality of God. His monologue reminded me of Romans 1:22, which says, "Professing to be wise, they became fools." This man thought himself to be highly educated, but in the knowledge of the Word of God, he was foolish.

The lady who called me was in great fear. Many Christians fear the works of the devil, but this should not be. As Christians, we should never fear something or someone who has already been defeated.

Satan has been defeated. When Jesus died on the cross, Satan thought he had won. He and all his demons probably rejoiced, but when Jesus conquered death and came back to life, Satan's future was decided. He was defeated. Jesus took authority over Satan and was victorious. (1 John 3:8.)

Here is the good news. Jesus gave that authority over Satan and all his demons to us. We who are Christians have the ability to walk through the kingdom of darkness without fear. We not only can resist the evil of this world, but we can overcome it.

When the seventy who were sent out by Jesus to witness returned, Jesus told them in Luke 10:19, "Behold, I give you authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you."

Later, Jesus gave that same authority over the devil to all who believe.

> *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."*
>
> Mark 16:16–18

So, Jesus gave us authority over the works of the devil and He commanded us to use that authority. He said, "These signs will follow those who believe." Do you believe? Well, if you do, this applies to you. All you have to do is walk it out.

## There Are Two Plans for Your Life

God has a plan for you, which is abundant life, and Satan has a plan, which includes defeat. These two plans are diametrically opposed to each other.

Notice the contrast in John 10:10 where Jesus said, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

We must recognize this: God's plan is prosperity, health, abundance, peace, love, and life. Satan's plan is poverty, sickness, lack, stress, hatred, and death. And as strange as it may seem, the choice is ours. Both plans are set before us and we must choose. (Deut. 30:19.) Do we want life or do we want death? It seems like a "no brainer" of a choice, but many are choosing death. How can this be?

Even though they are choosing death, many think they are choosing life. They are deceived.

Jesus said in John 8 when He was talking to the Pharisees,

> *"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him…he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me."*
>
> John 8:44,45

Satan is a liar and the master of deception. He can take darkness and make it look like light. Second Corinthians 11:14–15 says, "Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works."

Do not allow yourself to be deceived. Satan wants to destroy you. If you are not a Christian, he wants to keep you from accepting Jesus and becoming one. If you are a Christian, He wants to derail you, to distract you, to destroy your life and your witness any way he can. He is relentless and he does not give up.

The good news is we do not have to accept Satan's plan for our lives. We have a choice, but more than that, we have been given authority over the devil. Jesus has paid the price and defeated Satan. He took back the authority that man gave up in the Garden of Eden. (Gen. 3.) Jesus then gave that authority to everyone who would accept Him as Lord and Savior. Every Christian has been given authority over the forces of evil and can live a life of victory.

But there is one catch. You must not only know you have the authority, but you must take authority.

In Luke 9:1 Jesus, "called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases." A person can be given authority but unless that authority is exercised, it is useless.

Again, Satan is a liar and he does his best to convince Christians that they do not have authority over him. He uses fear and intimidation to cause Christians to step back and do nothing—but this should not be. Jesus defeated Satan and made a public display of him. (Col. 2:15.) As a Christian, you are a part of the body of

Christ. You have nothing to fear. Victory is yours if you believe the truth and discard the lie.

Remember, “Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4 kjv).

## Under Your Feet

> *Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.*
>
> Luke 10:19

When I walk through my house late at night, I usually don’t turn on the lights. I have dim walking lights scattered throughout that put out enough light to guide me on the stairs and the hallways. One night while walking on the lower level, I stepped on something that felt like a needle between my toes. I immediately reached over and turned on the overhead lights just in time to see a scorpion scurrying away from my foot.

I immediately said in a quiet voice, “I rebuke you scorpion in the name of Jesus Christ. No weapon formed against me shall prosper. My foot will not swell up. I will not experience pain. I command the poison to be null and void and I thank You, Jesus, that there will be no harmful effects from this scorpion sting. I have been given authority to trample upon scorpions. I have been delivered.”

I saw the scorpion next to the baseboard at the edge of the wall and calmly crushed it with a nearby newspaper and continued on my journey down the hall to my office. I googled “scorpions” and found a picture of the one that had stung me. Even though it was listed as dangerous and sometimes deadly, I had no fear.

About an hour later I told my wife, Loretta, what had happened and showed her the scorpion sting on my foot. There was a small red spot that looked like a needle prick between my toes. But other than that, there was nothing. I never experienced a moment of pain, swelling, or discomfort.

We know that in the Bible, serpents and scorpions are symbolic names for demonic spirits that attempt to destroy our lives. Jesus said in John 10:10 that the agenda of the enemy is to steal, kill, and to destroy.

Although God is omnipresent by way of His Holy Spirit, the devil is not. God can be listening to the prayers of a million Christians around the world at the same time and giving each of them His undivided attention. How can this be? God is the Creator and has that ability. Satan, on the other hand, is created. He can only be at one place at a time. When the Bible tells us that Satan entered into Judas, at that moment, Satan was nowhere else in the universe. (John 13:27.) He

was restricted. He is not omnipresent.

Because Satan is restricted in his movement and can only be at one place at a time, he must enlist the aid of his fallen angels. These demonic spirits perform his work. Again the desire of the prince of demons is to steal, kill, and destroy. There is a spiritual assignment against every Christian on this earth. If you are a Christian and don't believe that spiritual warfare is taking place, you are naive. You are a target.

For this reason, you must believe and receive the words of Jesus. You must not only know that Jesus paid the price to give you authority over the enemy, you must take and act on that authority.

Over the centuries, there have been those who handle poisonous snakes and scorpions in order to somehow prove their spirituality. This is total foolishness. However, we cannot allow the foolishness of some to cause us to back away from the reality of the authority we have been given.

The enemy attacks in the spiritual and it manifests in the physical. Sickness and disease is a spiritual attack, but it destroys physically. How much authority do we have? According to Jesus, we've been given authority over all the power of the enemy.

The word authority in this verse in Luke comes from the Greek word exousia[2] and the word power comes from the word dunamis.[3] Quite literally it means we have been given the authority (the permission or liberty to do as we please) over the power (all the ability and might) of the enemy. Then Jesus goes on to say that when we exercise this authority, nothing shall by any means harm us.

So the next time you are walking through life and you feel the sting of a demonic attack, have no fear. Seize the authority you've been given, put it into effect through your words and actions, and the enemy will have to submit. Your position is the seat of authority, and his position is under your feet! (Rom. 16:20.)

## Take Authority Over the Power of the Enemy

Here's an interesting letter I received. I enjoy receiving these letters.

Dear Brother Ollison,

> *This may seem like a strange letter, but I must tell someone who I feel will listen. Last month I decided to get closer to God. I have been reading my Bible more and I have started listening to preachers on the radio. When*

*nothing is good on the radio, I listen to CDs that people in my church give me. I read my Bible every day. I mean I really read it. It's more interesting to me than television or movies. And it is all paying off spiritually. I have a closeness with Jesus I have never had before, but there is one problem.*

*In the last month, everything I own seems to be breaking down. Just yesterday I had two flats getting to church. I could understand it if my tires were old, but they're not. I really think the devil is trying to distract me from the Bible and church. Is that possible? And if it is, what can I do about it?*

*I brought this up in Sunday School and I was just told to "hang in there" because there will always be trials and there is nothing I can do about it. Isn't there something I can do while I "hang in there"?*

—Springfield, Missouri USA

I want to share my response with you, too, because it describes the authority over the enemy that we have as believers.

Dear Friend,

What you have described is exactly something Jesus talked about in Mark 4. Here Jesus told His disciples a parable, or story, about a sower who sowed seed. Some of the seed fell on the wayside and the birds of the air came and devoured it.

Later when the disciples said they didn't understand what Jesus was talking about, Jesus explained the parable to them. He said that the seed that was sown was the Word. And then He said that as soon as the seed is sown, immediately, Satan comes along to steal the seed.

My friend, that is what is happening to you. You have been reading and hearing the Word. The Word is being sown into your heart and Satan doesn't like that. He knows that faith comes by the hearing of the Word and he hates faith. His nature is to distract and steal and that is what he is trying to do to you.

You asked if there is anything you can do while you're hanging on. Yes, there is. You can take authority over the one who is causing the distractions. You do not have to let the seed be stolen. Jesus himself gave you this authority, but you are the one who has to take it.

In Ephesians 1 and 2, it says that we as Christians are the body of Christ and we are seated with Him far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named. (vv. 1:21; 2:6.) That is not just in the future, but in the here and now.

Jesus said "Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means

hurt you" (Luke 10:19).

So, don't just "hang in there." Take authority over the power of the enemy. Jesus gave it to you. He expects you to use it.

## When You Find Yourself in Times of Trouble

Several years ago, the Beatles wrote a song that talks about what to do when we find ourselves in times of trouble—just let it be. This may be a good philosophy in the world, but for the Christian, it can be the kiss of death.

As Christians, if we ignore problems and put our heads in the sand, that means we are not using the authority that was given to us by Jesus. Unless we take authority and speak to the problems of life, they will overpower us. We cannot just "let it be."

Once Jesus and His disciples were on a boat together. Jesus was asleep and resting when a violent storm came. The boat was being tossed by the wind and waves to the extent that the disciples thought they were going to die. In their panic, they woke up Jesus. He could easily see that they did not have the situation under control. Jesus got up, turned toward the storm, and rebuked it. He said, "Peace, be still" (Mark 4:39). Immediately the storm stopped and there was calm.

When we look at this incident that took place with Jesus and His disciples on the boat, we know, of course, that Jesus did not ignore the situation. He spoke to the problem and the problem went away. But why is it that the disciples were unable to solve the problem? The answer is quite simple. They did nothing. They simply "let it be."

Yes, the disciples expended a lot of energy. They panicked. They cried out in fear. They summoned Jesus. They were in despair. They did a lot of things, but they didn't do the right thing. And when you don't do the right thing, it's the same as doing nothing. You cannot overcome the problems in life unless you take proper action using the authority given by Jesus.

Years ago, I worked in an office with a person who was always busy. Every moment of their time was spent doing something. However, this person was extremely unproductive and never really accomplished anything. Why? The reason is that he was always doing something irrelevant that was not a part of his job description. He was active, but it didn't count for anything.

As Christians, we cannot be this way. We must make our actions count. We must act on the Word and we must take authority. We cannot ignore the problems of life, nor can we allow them to put us into panic mode. We must take authority in

the name of Jesus and command the storms of life to cease. Only then will there be calm.

> *Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm.*
>
> Mark 4:39

## Tools for Victory

Satan is relentless. He doesn't give up. He knows that one Spirit-filled Christian, walking in faith, can deal a severe blow to his kingdom. Even though Satan has been defeated and his destiny has been sealed, he doesn't believe it.

Jesus said in John 8:44 that Satan "does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it." Jesus exposed Satan for what he really is—a liar. However, Satan must believe his own lies because he still attempts to win.

The Bible tells that we are to not be ignorant of the devices of the devil. He is a relentless enemy. But even though he is relentless, he still uses the same old methods. His methods haven't changed in 2,000 years. We know from the Word of God that he doesn't give up just because someone is seeking the truth, or just because someone is a Christian.

When Jesus was tempted by Satan, Jesus quoted the Word. Satan was defeated in this exchange of events, but the Bible tells us something very interesting about the nature of Satan. After Jesus spoke the Word and Satan left, Satan didn't leave without a plan. He just retreated for a little while and waited for another opportunity, a more opportune time, to attack. Now, here's the good news. We have been given authority over Satan and his entire kingdom of darkness. We as Christians have been given, by Jesus, the authority to remove the forces of darkness from our path anytime, anywhere. Of course, there are limits and conditions to our authority, but nevertheless we have been given authority and as Christians, we are a major threat to Satan's kingdom.

Satan does not want you to know you have authority over him. Remember, he is a liar, and many times he uses religion to bind Christians.

What I mean is, the only thing that will repel the forces of evil is the name of Jesus. Jesus gave us, the Church, authority to use His name.

Jesus said in Mark 16:17, "These signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues." Jesus said here that those who believe would have authority over the evil forces of the spirit world. In fact, Jesus said that those who believed in Him would cast out demons.

Are you a believer? If you are a Christian, then you have this authority and Jesus expects you to use it.

Satan may want to destroy you, but he doesn't always get what he wants. The only way he can get to you, the only way he can distract you, the only way he can neutralize you is if you let him. In this spiritual battle, as Christians, we have no excuses.

Jesus has given us all the weapons we need. He has given us the authority. He has given us the Word. He has given us His blood. He has given us His name, and He has given us faith. With these tools, nothing can defeat us and we can walk in victory.

## The Keys of the Kingdom

There are laws that you live by. For instance, there are laws that say you can only go 55 mph on certain roads. These laws are good and can save your life if you obey them. However, if you are driving 80 mph in a 55 mph zone, a patrolman will expose your sin and you will have to pay a fine! No fine is required for those obeying the law.

God has put into motion natural laws and spiritual laws. One of the natural laws is the law of gravity. When I drop a book, it falls to the floor. Why? Because of gravity. Gravity is a good thing. If you were on an Apollo space mission and circling around the moon, the last thing in the world you want to happen is for gravity to quit working. If gravity quit working, you would no longer be circling around the moon. You would be shooting off into outer space.

Gravity is the thing that keeps me on the floor and enables me to walk. Without gravity, I would float around like a helium balloon. I would not be able to get traction. Gravity is a good thing. It's a law of God. God instituted all the natural laws and all the spiritual laws. These laws can work for you or they can work against you.

For a guy working on a construction crew on the 42nd floor of a building who loses his footing and falls, gravity is not a good thing. However, when that man hits the ground and dies, his wife cannot say, "I am so mad at gravity. Gravity killed my husband." No, gravity didn't do it. Gravity is a law and it works the same for sinners as it works for people who are saved. Laws can work for you or they can work against you.

In the spirit realm, there also are laws. These laws can work for you or they can work against you. In Hosea 4:6 the Word of God says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." God's people, not the heathen people, are destroyed for

lack of knowledge. But for lack of knowledge of what? For lack of knowing the spiritual laws and how to move within those laws correctly.

Jesus said in John 8:31–32, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." The truth that you will know is the truth about how God's kingdom operates—how His laws operate. In the spirit realm, these laws can work for you or they can work against you. If you operate properly in the spirit realm, they will work for you. If you operate improperly in the spirit realm, they will work against you.

In Matthew 16:18–19, Jesus was talking with Peter, His close friend. Here's what Jesus said to him: "I also say to you that you are Peter." In the Greek language, the word for "Peter" is petros, which means a small rock, a pebble.[4] So Jesus actually was saying to him, "You are a small rock."

I can picture Jesus then pointing toward Himself and saying, "On this Rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades [that means the power of death] shall not prevail against it."

The word Jesus used for "Rock" there was petra, which means a large boulder; a solid, unshakable, foundation type rock.[5]

Jesus was using "rock" to teach Peter one of the spiritual laws. Actually this is the key ring that all spiritual laws are hung on.

"And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

Many times in the New Testament when Jesus was talking about heaven, He did not necessarily mean heaven as a place. He was referring to the spirit realm. So what He said to Peter was, "I am going to give you the keys to the spirit realm."

> *Whatever you bind [which can be translated forbid] on earth [the physical realm] will be bound [or forbidden] in heaven [the spiritual realm], and whatever you loose [whatever you permit because you have the keys] on earth [in the physical realm] will be loosed [or permitted] in heaven [the spiritual realm].*
>
> Matthew 16:19 explanation mine

In other words, whatever you forbid in the physical realm will be forbidden in the spiritual realm, and whatever you permit (because you have the keys) in the physical realm will be permitted in the spiritual realm.

Sometimes we try to complicate this, but the Word of God is so simple. Many people have been confused on this for years because of the lack of good teaching and the abundance of bad teaching. Here's what Jesus said to Peter, "Peter, I am going to build this church upon Me, the Rock. And because I am leaving, I'm

going to leave you with the keys of the kingdom. Whatever you lock in the physical realm will be locked in the spiritual realm. Whatever you unlock in the physical realm will be unlocked in the spiritual realm."

When you give somebody the keys to your car, you are giving them temporary authority over your car. For example, suppose that I gave my son the keys to my car. While he has the keys, I am giving him authority to lock that car, to unlock that car, to start that car, to stop that car. With the keys, my son has a choice. He can either get in it and drive the car and use the power, or he can lock it up and let it sit. He has a choice because he has the keys.

Jesus said, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of the spirit realm. Whatever you bind, whatever you forbid, whatever you lock up in the physical, it will be locked up, it will be forbidden in the spiritual." What that means is you can lock up the enemy or you can lock up yourself. Again, it comes down to the choice is yours.

If you want to unlock something in the spirit realm, you have to have access to the spirit realm. We are told over and over again in the Word of God that there is one way that we access the spirit realm and that is with our words.(2 Cor. 4:13, for instance.) The Scriptures tell us that life and death are in the power of the tongue. (Prov. 18:21.) The words of your mouth, spoken from the heart, with corresponding actions, are the keys you use. If we say we have been delivered but act like we haven't, we cancel our positive confession by actions of doubt. (James 2:20.)

# BELIEF

## Ministering Like Jesus

> *"Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you."*
>
> Matthew 17:27

I have always wanted to minister the way Jesus ministered. He ministered in great power. His ministry was effective and He changed the world.

When Peter approached Jesus about money, Jesus gave him the solution to his problem. Jesus told Peter (who was a fisherman) to take a hook (nothing was said about bait!), throw it in the Sea of Galilee, pull out a fish, look in its mouth, and take out the money that would be there. Jesus told him to take that money

and pay his taxes with it and there would be enough left over to pay the taxes for Jesus too.

Recently, a man from my church approached me with a financial problem. What would this man have thought if I had ministered to him the same way Jesus ministered to Peter? First of all, Peter was a fisherman and this man was a farmer. What if I had told him to take his rifle, go to his farm and shoot the first chicken he saw? After shooting the chicken, he should look in its beak, and there he would find several diamonds that would be more than enough to pay his taxes and supply all the needs of his family.

As the man would be standing there with both arms stretched toward heaven with his eyes closed and his head bowed, with my hand on his head, I'm sure that halfway through my instructions, one eye would open slightly and his head would raise slowly with a perplexed wrinkle on his brow.

In John 14:12, Jesus said that those who believed in Him would do the same works that He did and not only would we do the same works, but that we as believers would do greater (or more) works. If the Holy Spirit spoke to most ministers and told them to do what Jesus did, many ministers of our generation would rebuke the devil for that thought. If we will truly listen to God and be led by His Holy Spirit and not allow pride and intimidation to overpower us, we could possibly begin to minister like our Savior.

Why do we not minister the way Jesus ministered? For many of us, the reason is that we do not believe we will see the results that Jesus saw. Why do we not see the same results? We are not walking in the same level of belief.

As Jesus said to the father of the boy being tormented by a "mute" spirit, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23).

# BELIEVING AND SPEAKING

## Getting Faith in Our Mouths

The Scriptures tell us that what we say in the natural realm, what we say with our mouths, has great impact in the spiritual realm.

Once I heard a man say that it really didn't matter what he said or did. He said that God knew his heart and that was all that mattered. He even quoted scripture to me to support his belief. He opened his Bible and read from 1 Samuel 16:7 where it says, "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the

heart." Isn't it amazing how some people will twist the Word of God in order to justify the sin in their lives? The man reminded me of a scripture also. He reminded me of Romans 1:22 that says, "Professing to be wise, they became fools."

Yes, it is true that man looks at the outward appearance and God looks at the heart, but what that verse means is that God doesn't judge us because we are tall or short, because we have red hair or blond. He doesn't judge us on the color of our skin or by the language we speak. That's what people do.

God looks deeper inside us and looks upon our hearts, which is what 1 Samuel 16:7 is talking about. God may not judge us by our outward appearance, but He cares very much what we do and say. He places great value on doing His Word and speaking His Word.

In order to speak the promises of God, we must believe the promises of God. Second Corinthians 4:13 says, "'I believed therefore I spoke,' we also believe and therefore speak." What we believe in our hearts will eventually come out of our mouths.

If it is true that we will generally speak what we believe, and according to the verse we just read, it is true, then how can we make sure we believe the right things so we will speak the right things?

Here's the answer: Believing the Word of God in your heart and speaking the Word of God with your mouth is a powerful combination. In reference to salvation, the Bible says,

> *If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*
>
> Romans 10:9,10

Here we are told that we must not only have a right heart, but we must have a mouth that speaks what our heart believes.

Before we speak, we must believe. And how do we believe? Well, it starts by hearing the Word of God.

In that same chapter of Romans in verse 14 it says,

> *How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?*

Then in verse 17 we are told how belief and faith are born. It says, "So then faith

comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." That's right. As simple as it sounds, we get faith by hearing the Word of God.

So, when your words aren't sounding like positive faith words, but are beginning to sound like doubt and unbelief, check your faith level. And if it's low, saturate yourself with the Word of God.

# BETRAYAL

## Betrayed by a Friend

A few years ago, one of my longtime friends was moved to a position of great authority in Washington, D.C. In fact, after the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, he was regularly on national news. He personally met with the President of the United States every morning that the President was in town. My friend was and is a great man of God. After each of his morning meetings with the President, he would have a Bible study with his immediate staff.

Once, while Loretta and I were at a prayer conference at the Hyatt Hotel in Washington, my friend called and asked if we could come to his office and participate in the morning Bible study with his staff. What an honor it was to sit with a national leader and hear him as he required his entire staff to memorize and quote a complete Psalm. They shared testimonies and it was a precious time. Truly God has placed godly men and women in high places and we must remember to pray for them.

His staff left after the Bible lesson and we had a few moments of personal time. He gave Loretta and me some prayer requests for his family. Then he made an interesting statement. He said he knew when he moved to Washington there would be enemies and that there would be those who would attempt to destroy him and push him out of office. He knew that there would be opposition because he knew that we have an enemy (Satan) who seeks to steal, kill, and destroy. (John 10:10.) But he said that the thing that surprised him the most was when people betrayed him who he thought were his friends and allies.

I am sure that you can relate to this. One thing that has become common these days is betrayal and desertion. Yes, there have been many attacks from the enemy and these attacks from the kingdom of darkness come as no surprise. Of course, we expect those kinds of attacks. However, we are rarely prepared and are often caught off guard by the attacks that come from within our own group of friends, family, and co-workers.

Today I want to remind you that for every attack that the enemy brings, whether it be from the outside or inside, God has already empowered you with sufficient grace (2 Cor. 12:9) to outlast and overcome the enemy. Not only has He equipped us with sufficient weapons (Eph. 6:10–18), but He has published the final outcome for all of earth and the heavenly hosts to see.

Jesus had a close group of twelve friends. They were hand-picked and trained by Him. Throughout all of Galilee, they traveled together assisting Him as He ministered. As thousands of people pressed in to touch Jesus, His twelve friends were His protection and shielded Him from the massive crowds.

Yet, when the soldiers showed up with their torches and swords to arrest Jesus, they were led by one of His inner circle. And to insure that the soldiers arrested the right person, Judas walked up and sealed the fate of Jesus with a kiss of friendship. (Luke 22:47–48.)

By definition, betrayal must be exercised by someone who is close and trusted. I've heard it said that you should keep your friends close and your enemies closer. The truth is that not everyone who calls you friend, actually is your friend.

Recently, at a ministers' conference, one of the speakers said, "Beware of people who say, 'I'm standing with you and I will never leave you,' because they are probably the next family to leave your church." Although the speaker was trying to be humorous, I noticed the room full of pastors smiling, nodding, and looking at each other. Obviously, they understood what the speaker was saying very well.

Loyalty and character are two characteristics that must be taught and observed in the church. People may have betrayed you, but it must stop there. You cannot continue this cycle by allowing the hurts and anger inside of you.

The Bible clearly tells us that we are to put away hurts, offenses, and thoughts of revenge. (Eph. 4:31.) Jesus is our Avenger—meaning He carries out justice for us and rights the wrongs done to us [6]—and we must let Him do His work. We are commanded to walk in forgiveness, to walk in faith, and to walk in love. This cannot be done if we are offended and continually rehearsing the betrayals we have experienced.

Walking away from hurts and offenses does not acknowledge that the person who has betrayed you is right, or that you condone anything that they have done. It simply cleans your heart so that you can clearly hear from God and accomplish what He is calling you to do.

So the next time you experience a betrayal, don't attempt to negotiate and appease the enemy. Walk in love and forgiveness. Of course, we should attempt

to restore relationships through love and forgiveness. However, you cannot control and manipulate other people. If restoration is unattainable, stop wasting your time. Do not allow the enemy to emotionally destroy you. Continue to walk in love, forgiveness, and joy and consider saying goodbye!

Scripture References:

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. (Romans 16:17–18)

No one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. (1 Thessalonians 4:6)

He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed. (Proverbs 13:20)

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. (Ephesians 5:1–2)

# BLOOD (The)

## Don't Touch Me

After the crucifixion of Jesus, He descended into the grave and was resurrected. One place in the Bible tells us that He was resurrected by the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 8:11.) Another tells us He was resurrected by the glory. (Rom. 6:4.) And yet another place in the Scripture says He was resurrected by God the Father. (Acts 2:22,24.) Of course, all of these are true. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the glory is the manifested presence of God, so there is, of course, no contradiction.

It is interesting, however, that after Jesus came out of the grave, He saw Mary, and He instructed her to not touch Him, then told her why: "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father" (John 20:17).

Soon after, as Jesus was talking to His friends, He said, "Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have" (Luke 24:39). Many have wondered why Jesus told Mary not to touch Him and then later told His friends to touch Him.

Once while traveling in my car, I heard a minister say that Jesus didn't want to be touched by a woman. It's funny how sometimes people can misinterpret Scripture in order to validate their own prejudice.

The true answer is obvious and can be found in the Word. In John 20:17, Jesus told Mary she couldn't touch Him because He had not yet ascended to the Father. Later that day, Jesus appeared to His disciples, but Thomas wasn't there. (vv. 19,24.) Then, eight days later Jesus appeared again to His disciples, including Thomas, and this time He told Thomas to touch Him, saying, "Put your hand in My side" (v. 26)—all of that indicates that Jesus had ascended to heaven and returned.

In another Scripture passage, we're told that Christ did not enter the holy places on earth (that are only copies), but entered into heaven itself in the presence of God for us. (Heb. 9:24.) Jesus, the sinless Priest, did what the Levitical priests could never do. (Lev. 16:14–15.) He carried His blood into the heavenly holy of holies where it was accepted as the sacrificial blood, once and for all. (vv.12,24.)

He placed His blood on the mercy seat as the perfect sacrifice and became the firstborn among many brethren, the head of the Church. (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:18.) By doing this, He made a way for us to be born again into His body—the Church, the body of Christ. (John 3:5; Rom. 10:13; 12:5.) After that He returned to the earth fully glorified and taught His disciples for forty days. (Acts 1:3.) Then He ascended to the right hand of the Father and the Holy Spirit was poured out upon those who would receive. (Acts 1:9; 2:2–4.)

Because Jesus ascended into heaven and placed His blood on the mercy seat as the once and for all sacrifice for sin, we can now touch Him (spiritually-speaking) and be with Him for all eternity.

Scripture References:

Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'" (John 20:17)

Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. (Luke 24:39–40)

For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. (Hebrews 9:24)

# BOLDNESS

## In the Face of Fear

I would like to ask you a question. What motivates you—fear or faith?

There are two groups of people in the church today. Those who are accomplishing what God has for them to do and those who are not. Sadly, this ministry receives mail regularly from people who are distressed because they don't feel they have accomplished the calling God has placed on their lives. Well, I have this answer. Just do it! If God has actually told you to do something, then just do it!

It sounds simple doesn't it? Just do what God said to do, and all the guilt and self-imposed condemnation will go away. All we have to do to be set free is just listen to God's Word, see what He has for us to do, and just do it!

Once I counseled with a man who felt God had called him to be a teacher in the church. For years he had done nothing and had even avoided any situation that might bring up an opportunity to teach. He had natural abilities and really loved Jesus, but he had a fear of teaching. He was so afraid to teach that every time he even thought he would be asked, he would break out into a sweat. He let this fear keep him from doing what God wanted him to do.

What is the answer for someone like this? It's simple. Just do it in the face of fear. Fear is not an entity that is bigger and stronger than the Holy Spirit in you. Even if you have to stand up in the face of fear and tell the fear that you and the Spirit of God inside of you are in charge, do it. Tell fear to get out of your way. You will see what looked like an impenetrable wall crumble right before you and you'll be able to just step through the rubble into the place God told you to go.

Fear is not of God. The only reason you would be fearful of doing something that God wants you to do is because Satan doesn't want you doing God's will. Fear is not a natural response for the Christian. Satan is the master of creating fear. He knows that fear is a spirit that stops the work of God in the lives of many Christians. He knows he cannot stop God, but he attempts to stop God's work through believers any way he can. His greatest weapon is fear. When God calls a Christian to do a work for Him, Satan immediately uses fear to try to stop it.

If God has called you to do something for Him, don't let fear stop you. Don't try to figure everything out. Don't fear what people may say or what your friends may think. Don't worry about finances or fret about what you see. Just

remember when God gives you a task to do, He also provides the tools to accomplish it.

God does not want us being held back because of fear. He wants us to do what He has called us to do. You may say, “I’m sorry, I just can’t seem to get rid of the fear of failure.” Well, let me say this once again. If you know God has given you something to do and it burns deep in your heart and you know this beyond any doubt, just do it in the face of fear. Where did we ever get this idea that we can’t do something if we are in fear? From Satan! Do what God wants you to do in spite of fear. Fear is just an illusion. Act in faith and fear will leave.

The apostle Paul said in 2 Timothy 1:7, “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”

Faith is of God. Fear is of Satan. Walk in faith.

# BORN AGAIN

## The Greatest Decision

The greatest decision a person will make in their entire life is whether or not to become a Christian. This one decision will determine your destiny for all eternity. If you choose to become a Christian (saved, born again), you will live forever with Jesus in heaven. If you reject Jesus and decide not to become a Christian, you will be separated from the presence of God and doomed to live in hell for all eternity.

In the Bible, God said, “I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life” (Deut. 30:19). It seems strange that God would have to tell us to choose life, but there are many who, when faced with a choice, choose death.

In the beginning God created man. Adam was created in the image and likeness of God. God and Adam fellowshipped together until the day Adam sinned. (Gen. 1:26; 3:8.) At that point, there became a separation between God and mankind.

The Bible tells us in John 3:16 that God loved the world so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, to live on this earth and eventually suffer and die for us so we could be reconciled back to God. Jesus is and was the Son of God (Eph. 4:13), but lived on this earth as the Son of Man. (John 12:23.) He gave His life and took on the sin of the world. When God raised Jesus from the dead, He made a way for us to have everlasting life and fellowship with Him again.

Jesus was the once and for all perfect sacrifice for the sin of mankind. By His

blood we have cleansing available for all sin. The price has been paid that we could not pay. To receive everlasting life, all we have to do is believe in our heart that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior and make our confession align itself with that belief.

> *If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*
>
> Romans 10:9,10

It may sound simple to become a Christian, but that's because it is. God has already done the work and He made it so it would be easy for us to move into His kingdom. Remember, He has done the work. Our part is to believe and receive.

> *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.*
>
> Ephesians 2:8

# BREAD OF LIFE (The)

## Jesus Is the Bread of Life

> *Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost."*
>
> John 6:11,12

When you break and distribute the Bread of Life—the Word—the same thing will happen that happened when Jesus did it.

1) There will be increase. Jesus had the loaves, He had the bread, and there was increase. He fed the 5,000 from the bread. When you break the bread, there will be increase.

2) You'll gather everything up and nothing will be lost. Nothing will be lost in your life if what you are breaking and distributing is the Bread of Life.

Breaking bread is symbolized in communion, but the daily breaking of bread is the daily breaking of the Word of God (by reading and meditating on it) and taking it into your heart. Distributing the bread is speaking the Word of God out of the abundance of your heart. Bread cannot be distributed from an empty

basket. When the Word is spoken and sent forth, it will always accomplish what it was sent for. The Word will not return void. (Isa. 55:11.) Your time in study and distribution will not be wasted.

If a friend starts speaking words of doubt and unbelief into your thought realm and then you start acting like a parrot and say the exact same things that you heard him or her say, that's not speaking the Word. That's not breaking the Bread of Life. Breaking bread is when you speak the Word of God. If there is power, life, light, and spirit in the words of God (John 6:63), then undoubtedly there is exactly the opposite in the words of the devil. There's death, poverty, disease, and destruction.

Jesus went on in that passage to explain some things about the bread.

> *"Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Then they said to Him, "Lord, give us this bread always." And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."*
>
> *The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven."*
>
> John 6:32–35,41

Why did the Jews complain? Because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." That upset them.

Jesus told them to stop murmuring among themselves and went on to say, "I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die" (John 6:43, 48–50).

There are two kinds of bread. One is physical bread. You can eat physical bread only and you will die. But there is also spiritual bread. When you eat spiritual bread, you will live forever. Jesus was saying in this passage that He is the spiritual bread. John 1:1–3 says that He was the Word and He was in the beginning and everything that was created was created by Him.

To help them understand, Jesus said it again, but they still didn't get it.

> *" I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?"*
>
> John 6:51,52

All the Jews understood was that it was unlawful for them to eat the flesh of any living creature, much less of a man. They couldn't grasp that Jesus was talking in the spiritual sense of eating it by faith, which is what He meant.[7] So Jesus continued:

> *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.*
>
> *"As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven —not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever."*
>
> John 6:53–58

Jesus is the Word of God and He is the Bread of Life. The only way to have increase on earth and eternal life is to eat the Bread of Life and speak the Word of God. Jesus is not just the answer. Jesus is the only answer.

# CALLING THOSE THINGS THAT BE NOT

## I'll See It When I Believe It

> *Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.*
>
> Hebrews 11:1–3

Many people are confused about the things of God. They worry and fret about creation, death, eternal life, heaven, and hell. And it's not uncommon for me to get letters asking these two questions: "How can I understand God and the Bible? How can I know what to believe?"

The answer I always give is "Just believe what God says, by faith." In other words, accept the Holy Bible as the Word of God, read it and believe it. Then, base all your decisions and all your trust on what God's Word says. That's called "walking by faith" (2 Cor. 5:7).

Walking by faith is not always easy. The reason is that many people have become accustomed to walking by sight. Here's what I mean. When we pray and ask God to meet a need in our lives that is clearly promised in His Word, we must believe that God has already met that need. We must believe that God's Word is true and that He has actually done what He said He would do.

Jesus said in Mark 11:24, "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."

Jesus did not say that we are to believe that we have received when we see results. He said that we are to believe that we have received what we have petitioned when we pray. That's praying in faith. We pray, then we believe God so much, we trust His promises so strongly, that we trust that He has already accomplished our request. From that point on, once we have prayed in faith, we thank Him for meeting our need.

One time, a man told me he couldn't thank God for meeting his needs because his needs had not been met. I asked him if he had prayed and asked God to meet his needs. He said "Yes, I know that God will meet my needs, but I won't really believe it until I see it."

Waiting to believe when you receive is not faith. Faith believes God regardless of the way things look. As Christians, we are to walk by faith and not by sight. If the circumstances say one thing and God's Word says another, we must believe God. God does not lie. You can always depend on Him. He will never let you down. He will always do what He said He would do. And according to His own words, we will receive from Him when we believe Him.

In James 1, the Bible tells us that when we pray, we must believe that God will answer our petitions.

> *Let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.*
>
> James 1:6,7

According to this passage, when we pray, if we don't believe, we won't receive.

The world says, "I'll believe it when I see it."

The Word says, "I'll see it when I believe it."

Remember, Jesus told us in Mark 11:24, "Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."

## Call It Sold!

After church one Sunday, a gentleman grasped my hand as he was leaving and said, “Pastor, I really need for you to agree with me in prayer. My wife and I have a piece of property we have to sell as soon as possible.” He went on to tell me that he had the property listed for sale for over a year and that very few people had even looked at it. I believe that what he told me next was the reason for his dilemma: “All my life I’ve never been able to sell anything I need to sell. And when I do finally sell it, it’s always for a loss.” Then he added, “Don’t forget, we’re in agreement.”

As he tried to let go of my hand and walk away, I held on until I made eye contact. I told him, “Listen, if I agree with you, it never will sell. What we need to do is agree, but not with what you just said.”

As Christians, we have been given authority and power on this earth. Jesus said in Mark 11:23 that we could speak and if we believed in our heart that what we said would come to pass, we would have whatever we say.

Perhaps you have something you need to sell. Maybe it’s a car, a home, a farm, a motorcycle, a business, or you are in the business of selling a certain product. Isaiah 48:17 says that God teaches us to profit. His Word also tells us that we get what we say. So we must quit speaking words of defeat and loss and start saying what we want (as long as it lines up with God’s Word).

If you have a house or an automobile or something else that you need to sell, quit saying, “I wonder if it will ever sell.” Don’t say, “I can’t sell anything.” And definitely don’t say, “Every time I try to sell a car, it just sits and eventually rusts away.”

When a family member or best friend says, “Your house [or your car or whatever else you need to sell] is never going to sell,” quit listening to the words of doubt and unbelief and call those things that be not as though they are. (Rom. 4:17.) You may be saying, “Well, I just call it as I see it.” If you keep calling it like you see it, then you will continue to see it like you’re calling it. Remember, we do not walk by sight, but we walk by faith. You must call it sold because if you continue to say what you see, then it will be “not sold.”

Listen to yourself and ask yourself this question: Do I really want what I am saying? Am I blessing the sale or cursing the sale? When you look out your living room window and see your car with a For Sale sign on it, say, “Car, listen to me. I’m talking to you. You will be a blessing to someone else and you will be a blessing to me. You will be sold at a fair price and I call you SOLD, in Jesus’ name!”

Now, you don’t have to gather a crowd in order to speak these things and prove a

point. This is just between you, the car, and the spirit realm, and the car must obey.

If it is true that God takes pleasure in our prosperity (and it is), and if it is true that God teaches us to profit (and He does), then we should seek to learn from God and to please Him. (Ps. 35:27; Isa. 48:17.)

Jesus spoke to the wind, mountains, the sea, and trees and they obeyed Him. In John 14:12, He said we can do the same works that He did. So don't be in fear and don't be embarrassed. Speak to that item that needs to be sold and call it SOLD!

Scripture Reference:

God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did. (Romans 4:17)

# CATALYST (The)

## The Word Without Faith Is Not Profitable

> *Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.*
>
> Philippians 4:11,12

The very next verse in this well-known passage says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (v. 13).

The fullness of this verse means: I can do all things through Christ, the Anointed One and His anointing, who strengthens me to do the things I can't get done on my own. Therefore, there is nothing He cannot strengthen us to do as long as what we want to do is in the will of God for our lives. Having faith is part of His will for us. Here are some benefits of faith.

> *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*
>
> Romans 5:1,2

Think about that. Having been justified by faith we have peace. And we have access into God's grace, which is His unmerited, divine favor—His goodness towards those who do not deserve it and cannot earn it. We all fit in that category; however, not everyone receives this free gift of God.

> *For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.*
>
> Hebrews 4:2

Two groups of people heard the gospel. One of them received it. One of them did not receive it. The gospel was profitable for the group that mixed it with faith. It was not profitable for the group that did not mix it with faith. The Word did not work for the second group of people because they would not receive it by faith.

There is a rest that remains for the people of God. (Heb. 4:9.) It is a supernatural rest and a supernatural peace that is available for all who believe. So Christians really have no excuse for not being at peace. You may say, "Oh, but Pastor Larry, you just don't know what I am going through. I have had disaster after disaster. Everything in my life has gone wrong — physically, financially, and emotionally. I am a mess." The truth is it doesn't matter what's gone wrong in your life. You can be at peace and at rest regardless of the circumstances. Remember, you can do all things through Christ. That means you can be at rest in the storm.

Jesus continually taught this concept of peace, but the disciples kept missing it. He never said He would remove the storms. He said He would give us peace in the storm. (John 16:33.) In the storm, we can rest in the boat. (Mark 4:37–38.) In the storm, we can walk on the water. (Matt. 14:24,29.) The storm still goes by our house and all around it, but when it's over, our house remains. (Matt. 7:24–25.) In the storm, we can have faith. In the storm, we can have rest. In the storm, we can have peace. We can survive the storm, because we are at rest and in faith —all the way through it.

A lot of people say, "This faith thing doesn't work. I tried it once and it just doesn't work." We don't just try God. We receive His Spirit (the Holy Spirit) within us. We don't test and try. We don't just try faith. We're either in faith or we're not in faith. We either believe God or we don't believe God.

One scripture concerning tithing says to test God, prove Him and try Him in it and see if He won't do as He promises. (Mal. 3:10.) God wants us to take advantage of the many "if you do this, then I'll do that" blessings He's made available for us in His Word. However, we cannot try the foundational truths of God. We're either saved or we're lost. We're either in faith or in fear. We either accept the grace or refuse it. There is no middle ground.

## Releasing the Power

God is the greatest power in the universe. By Him the universe was created.

Through His spoken Word, He created time in the midst of eternity. (Gen. 1.)

First John 4:8 says that God is love. In school we learned if A equals B, then B equals A. In the same way, if God is love, then love is God. That means that love is the greatest power in the universe. Through love, the enemy is defeated. Through love, sickness and disease must die. Through love, poverty and lack must bend its knee to the name of Love.

As a Christian, you are at war with the enemy. The enemy has a mission statement. His goal is to steal from you, to kill you, and to destroy your life, witness, and ministry. (John 10:10.) Many believers are praying, speaking, and rebuking the enemy and not seeing a breakthrough in life. If we are not living in the health and prosperity that God promised in His Word, then what is the problem?

Second Corinthians 10:4 says that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but they are mighty and they will pull down strongholds. If the strongholds aren't being pulled down, it must be that we are not using the proper weapon. We know that faith is the catalyst that activates God's Word. Through faith, we can move mountains and heal the sick. But Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13 that even though he had all faith, even mountain-moving faith, that if he did not have love, he was nothing, because without love, faith is ineffective. (Gal. 5:6.)

Here's the good news. When you received Jesus, God imparted His Spirit to live within your spirit. You have the fullness of God inside of you. If you have the fullness of God in you, you have the fullness of love in you. If we could understand the limitless power that God has already placed inside of us, then truly no weapon formed against us would ever prosper. (Isa. 54:17.)

I've heard it said, "The gospel is not complicated; it takes a preacher to confuse it." Actually, the gospel is simple. (2 Cor.11:3.) God's desire for each and every one of us is the same. He wants us to receive Jesus as our Savior and He desires for us to walk in love. Receiving Jesus gives us access to the power of God. Walking in love releases it.

## The Word Is Profitable when Mixed with Faith

People came to Jesus hungry and they left fed. People came to Jesus sick and deformed and they left healed. People came to Jesus deep in sin and bondage and they left totally set free.

We also know, however, that not everyone who lived in Israel at the time of Jesus was healed. There were sick people. There were still some lame and diseased beggars near the temple. Some people who met Jesus did not get their

needs met. Some remained still in the bondage of sin, poverty, and disease.

So, what's the difference in these people? Why were some healed and set free from the bondage of sin and others were not?

The difference is that some believed and some didn't. Without belief, there is no faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. (Heb. 11:6.) Without faith, God's promises do not apply. It takes faith to move God. He never responds positively to doubt and unbelief.

We just saw that the Bible tells about two groups of people—both groups of people heard the gospel, but the gospel only profited one group. It was unprofitable to the other group. Hebrews 4:2 says, "For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it." Do you understand what that verse says? It says that faith is required to make the gospel profitable.

You may ask, "How can this be? Isn't the gospel always profitable?"

In Mark 6, Jesus went to His hometown and He did the same thing there He did everywhere else. He preached the gospel, the good news. However, something unusual happened in Nazareth. In every other town and village Jesus preached in, He not only taught the good news, but He performed great miracles and all who were sick were healed. But no great miracles happened in Nazareth. Verse 5 says He could do no mighty works there. We see why in verse 6—Jesus marveled at their unbelief.

Without belief there is no faith. According to God's Word, without faith, the gospel will not profit us.

Hardly a week goes by without someone asking me, "What is faith?" Faith is simply believing that God has done what He said He would do and everything you say and do is based upon that belief. Even more simply, faith is believing, speaking, and acting on God's Word. Isn't that simple? Just read God's Word and believe Him—believe Him so much that you place all that you are on the line. There is no doubt. God is telling the truth.

When Jesus was in the town of Nazareth, the people did not believe that He was who He said He was. They only knew Him as the son of Mary. They knew His brothers and sisters. They had watched Him grow up and because of this, they did not believe what He said. Because they did not believe Him, according to the Bible, no great miracles took place there.

So, will the gospel profit you? According to Hebrews 4:2, yes it will, if you mix it with faith.

# CHARACTER

## An Excellent Spirit Produces Promotion

In the year 605 BC, a young man (actually a teenager) named Daniel was deported to Babylon. Daniel was not alone. Thousands of captives had been taken from Judah to Babylon. The treasures of Solomon's palace and the temple were also transported. The Babylonians had subdued all the provinces ruled by Assyria and had consolidated their empire into an area that covered much of the Middle East.

In order to govern this massive kingdom, slaves who had been educated or who possessed exceptional skills were used by the Babylonian government. Only the sharpest minds, only those with wisdom and understanding were placed in leadership roles. Daniel was one of those men. He was selected along with three of his friends for the leadership training program.

> *Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm.*
>
> Daniel 6:3

Here we are told that Daniel impressed the king of Babylon so much that the king even considered putting Daniel as the governor over the entire kingdom. Isn't that amazing? Remember, Daniel was a slave. Daniel was a captive from a conquered kingdom. But, even though he was a captive and the normal way of thinking would be that he couldn't be trusted, in Daniel's case, it was just the opposite. Daniel was extremely trusted.

What was it about Daniel that made him different from the other captives? What was it that gave him more favor with the king than all the other governors of Babylon?

The answer is in the verse we just read. The Bible says that Daniel distinguished himself above the governors "because an excellent spirit was in him." Daniel had an excellent spirit. What does this mean? Well, let me give you an example.

Because Daniel was favored over the other governors, they became jealous and devised a plan to trick the king into executing Daniel. King Darius fell for the plan and Daniel was scheduled for execution.

Now, the method of execution prescribed in this plan was for the convicted person to be thrown into a den full of lions. You can imagine this is not a pretty sight.

When the execution time came, the king gave the command for Daniel to be cast into the lions' den. A stone was placed at the mouth of the den and the king himself sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of the other governors.

The next day, the king went to the den of lions and he cried out with a loud voice to Daniel. He asked Daniel how he was doing. Keep in mind that the king had spent the night in the palace and Daniel had spent the night in a pit full of hungry lions. We would expect Daniel to curse the king, but he didn't. Daniel 6:21 says, "Then Daniel said to the king, 'O king, live forever!'" Can you believe that? Even after all that he had gone through, Daniel still had an excellent spirit. He had a good attitude. He was not affected by the things around him.

That's the way we are to be. We must have an excellent spirit. As Christians, we must have a positive attitude. Once a man asked me, "Do you believe in positive thinking?" Well, I definitely don't believe in negative thinking! Positive thinking is better than negative thinking. However, positive believing is even better.

Remember, Daniel was distinguished above everyone in the kingdom because an excellent spirit was in him. Distinguish yourself today.

# CHILDREN

## Do Not Be Deceived

There can be many types of problems within a family. In fact, examples of possible family problems that can arise would almost be too numerous to list. But the Word addresses them all. Whatever the problem or need, no matter how great the stress or distress, God has the solution in His Word. His Word is complete. All we as Christians have to do is believe what God's Word says and act on it in faith.

For example, if you have a child who has turned away from a godly life, then believe God's Word that says that the children of the righteous will be delivered. (Prov. 11:21.) Take that scripture, read it, meditate on it, and act on it in faith without fear. It is true; the children of the righteous will be delivered.

From the beginning, Satan has deceived mankind. Second Corinthians 11:3 says that in the Garden of Eden, Eve was deceived by the serpent because of Satan's craftiness. In other words, he was cunning, deceptive, and a liar.

Jesus said in John 8:44 that Satan is a liar and that there is no truth in him. Satan has not changed and his methods are still the same today. When we take the Scriptures and stand on them in faith, Satan immediately tries to twist and distort the Word in such a way that it will become ineffective in our lives.

When we say, "The Word says the children of the righteous will be delivered, and I believe it and stand on it in faith," Satan immediately says, "That's right.

The Word is true. The children of the righteous will be delivered. But you're not righteous. Remember when you...." And so Satan sows his lie. What he says sounds logical, but it is still a lie.

The truth is, we who have accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior are righteous. (Rom. 3:22.) We are not righteous because of anything we have done but because of what He has done. (Eph. 2:8–10.) The blood of Jesus removes our sins and we are clean. (1 John 1:7.) It's grace. It's unmerited favor. It's a gift of God.

Galatians 2:21 says, "If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." We cannot do anything to become righteous other than just simply accept Jesus into our hearts. Works will never be good enough.

If Satan can get us to believe we are not righteous, then when we take the Word that says, "The children of the righteous will be delivered," we will not believe it applies to us. Without belief there is no faith. Without faith we will not expect results, and we will get what we expect. Nothing! We must believe the truth and act in faith. Then we will be delivered.

Another verse that talks about our children is Proverbs 20:7, which says that the children of the righteous will be blessed. So, not only will our children be delivered, but they will be blessed.

As Christian parents, we must believe what God's Word says about our children. So, when Satan whispers into your thought realm and says your children will be destroyed, don't repeat his words. Remember, he's a liar. You must do as Jesus did when Satan spoke to him. (Luke 4:1–13.) Say, "It is written," and then declare, "The children of the righteous will be delivered."

Remember, God does not lie. (Num. 23:19.) What He says He will do, He will do. What He says will happen, will happen. If His Word says the children of the righteous will be delivered and blessed, then they will. God is not a liar.

## There Is Hope for Your Child

God has a plan for your child. God's desire is for your child to grow into a mature man or woman of God. The early years of your child's life are years of development and forming of patterns that will continue throughout his or her lifetime.

Parents have compassion and hurt when their children hurt. However, a parent cannot react to the hurt, nor can a parent be a friend with their child. Yes, there are friendships, but a parent/child relationship is deeper than a friendship, and a parent must always be the parent. A parent loves, guides, directs, teaches, and

helps form a lifestyle of godliness.

Through decades of ministry, I have encountered almost every conceivable situation concerning parent/children relationships and there is no clear formula for solving every problem or for raising every child. However, I have discovered that there are seven things that will greatly improve your relationship with your child and your child's relationship with God.

1) You must pray for your child.

You have authority over the children in your household. Children are important. Jesus specifically prayed for children in Matthew 19:13–15.

2) You must speak the Word over your child.

As you think about your children, speak the Word concerning them.

> *"'As for Me,' says the Lord, 'this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants,' says the Lord, 'from this time and forevermore.'"*
>
> Isaiah 59:21

3) Speak the promise, not the problem.

A temptation is to keep speaking what you see in your child. When you continue to say what you see, you will continue to see what you say and nothing will ever change until your words change.

4) Encourage your child with the Word.

Let them know that you put your faith in the Word of God and that you believe it unconditionally. If they try to argue or speculate, stay firm. They must know you stand on the Word unconditionally in faith. Stand firm, but don't argue.

> *All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children.*
>
> Isaiah 54:13

5) Call those things that be not as though they were.

> *(As it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations") in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.*
>
> Romans 4:17

Say…"You are intelligent because you have the mind of Christ." (1 Cor. 2:16.)

"You are blessed because you are my child." (Is. 61:9.)

“You are strong because the joy of the Lord is your strength.” (Neh. 8:10.)

“You can do all things through Christ.” (Phil. 4:13.)

Remember, your child will hear what you do more than they hear what you say. You cannot tell them they are intelligent and act like they are stupid.

6) Let them see faith in you.

Faith can be transmitted to your children. As you live your natural life at work and at home, they will see your character and your honesty with God’s Word in your life. They will imitate you, just as Christians are supposed to imitate God. (Eph. 5:1.)

> *When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.*
>
> 2 Timothy 1:5

7) Don’t give up on your children.

You may feel like years have gone by and you haven’t seen any change in your child. That’s irrelevant. Faith is not based on what you see and faith never gives up. To give up only shows there was no faith.

Find scriptures that promise blessings and a future for your child. Read and meditate daily on these scriptures. Romans 10:17 says that faith comes by hearing the Word. When you speak the Word, you hear the Word spoken from your own mouth. We have no excuse for not having faith. God gave us His Word and He gave us lips to speak His Word.

If you are in a desperate situation with your child, there is no price too great to pay for their deliverance. If parents with a troubled child would give up the time of one television show per week and spend that same time in prayer and meditation of God’s Word concerning their child, that one thing alone would bring visible results.

Are you willing to pay the price for your child’s future?

Scripture References:

I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground; I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring. (Isaiah 44:3)

Though they join forces, the wicked will not go unpunished; but the posterity of the righteous will be delivered. (Proverbs 11:21)

But thus says the Lord: “Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible be delivered; for I will contend with him who contends with you, and I will save your children.” (Isaiah 49:25)

The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children. (Psalm 103:17)

Praise the Lord! Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who delights greatly in His commandments. His descendants will be mighty on earth; the generation of the upright will be blessed. (Psalm 112:1–2)

For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call. (Acts 2:39)

All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children. (Isaiah 54:13)

## The Children of the Righteous

The righteous man walks in his integrity; His children are blessed after him.

Proverbs 20:7

Over the years, I have counseled with many parents who have had problems in their home concerning their children. One thing I have found in common with them all is this—they all want their children blessed and prosperous.

According to the Word of God, this is not just a possibility for us as Christians, but it is a promise. God has promised in His Word that as a righteous person, your children will be blessed.

If you are a born-again believer in Jesus, then according to the Bible, you are righteous. You were made righteous in the moment of time that you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior. With this in mind, remember, God does not lie. He says in Proverbs 20:7 that the children of the righteous will be blessed, and if He said it, then they will.

We must believe what God says about our children and we must say what God says about our children. Then we must follow with actions that correspond with what we say. This is how we receive what God says.

Too often as Christians, we see God's promises as automatic. They are not. We must act on them in faith. Jesus died for the entire world; however, not everyone is a Christian. The reason is that not everyone has accepted Him as their Lord and Savior. Only those who accept Him by grace and through faith are saved. Yes, He died for everyone, but only those who receive salvation actually have it.

Likewise we must believe, receive, and act on God's promises for our children. Remember this promise:

> *Assuredly, the evil man will not go unpunished, but the descendants of the righteous will be delivered.*

Proverbs 11:21 nasb

## Fairy Tales or the Truth

When I was seven years old, I loved Vacation Bible School. It was a time of making baskets out of ice-cream sticks and ceramic bowls for Mom. We would hear stories about Noah and the Ark, Daniel in the lions' den, and Moses and the Egyptians. It was fun.

However, one time the pastor of the church said he wanted to speak to the children before we went home. So, they took us all into a classroom and he began to teach. Well, actually he began to preach. He preached a blistering message about hell. In fact, he preached as though he had just gotten back. The average child was under ten years old. We sat in shock as he vividly described screaming and gnashing of teeth.

That night while lying in bed, I started thinking about the sermon I had heard that day at Vacation Bible School. Needless to say, I got scared. I jumped out of bed, turned on the light, and ran into my mother's room.

I remember jumping on the bed and asking Mom this question. I said, "Mom, I've been read all these nursery rhymes and fairy tales, and later I was told they were not true. Isn't that right?" "That's right," Mom said. "Well then," I asked, "what about the devil? Is he real?"

I wanted her to tell me he was just like the monsters in the fairy tales. But my mother said, "Yes son, he is real, but you don't have to fear him if you believe in Jesus." Then she sat me down and told me about Jesus in a way I could understand. I accepted Jesus into my heart that night. It was, of course, the greatest decision of my life.

It's wonderful to know there are Christian adults who teach children the truth. Why should we teach our children about fairy tales? I don't want to get into a deep theological discussion about their origins, but what I am saying is this: With the same breath it takes to tell about the Easter Bunny, we could be talking about the resurrection of Jesus. Also, when we continually tell our children earthly myths and later have to tell them they were untrue, it plants the seeds of doubt in their minds about the true stories they are told in the Bible.

Isaiah 38:19 says, "The father [referring to earthly fathers] shall make known Your truth to the children."

We need to make known the truths of God to our children. Many youngsters are confused. They hear one thing at church and then something different at home. This should not be. We must not be in conflict with the Word of God. Let's get

real. Knowing the Word will set us free. Knowing everything in the world there is to know about fairy tales won't help us at all.

Jesus said in John 8:31–32, "If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

We cannot be lukewarm when it comes to our children. We must determine to give them God's truth from the beginning. It doesn't take any more breath. It doesn't take any more time. It doesn't cost any more. When you're dealing with children, wouldn't it be better to just tell them the truth? In the long run it will pay off in their lives—and in yours.

# CHRISTIAN LIVING

## Living Above the Circumstances

A common greeting among people is, "Hello. How are you doing?" And a common response is, "Not too bad under the circumstances." This should never be the response of the Christian.

A Christian should not be "under the circumstances." Being under the circumstances means that the things of life rule over you. What are your circumstances in life? Are they financial? Are they physical? Are they family-related? Whatever the circumstances, we should rule over them.

Once we become Christians, we are not to be ruled by what is around us. As Christians, we are not to make our decisions in life based on what we see. Our decisions must be based on the commands from God in the invisible world and we must act on them in this visible world we reside in.

If we allow ourselves to react to the circumstances around us, then all the devil has to do to nudge us into the place where he wants us to be is to change our circumstances. As believers, we are commanded to not be moved by what we see, but instead, to walk by faith. (2 Cor. 5:7)

Remember, Paul talked about that in the book of Acts:

> *"Now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me."*
>
> Acts 20:22–24

We need to be like Paul. We must not allow ourselves to be moved by anything that the devil delivers to us. We must only be moved by the Spirit of God and by

what God speaks to us through His Word.

We were created to rule and reign on this earth. Under the New Covenant, we have been given authority over all the power of the evil one. There is no excuse for a Christian to be “under the circumstances.”

So the next time someone greets you and asks how you are doing, try telling that person the truth—that you are a child of the King, the enemy is under your feet, and you are always above the circumstances.

# CHRISTMAS

## Why Christmas?

Last week I heard a disgruntled shopper complaining to a cashier in a department store. His comment was, “Why do we have this Christmas thing anyway? Whose idea was it to have this holiday?” Well, the answer to that question is easy. The commercialized holiday was man’s idea, but the event we celebrate was God’s idea.

When it comes down to it, some people don’t have any comprehension why Jesus came to earth. Why was He born here and why did He live a physical life of thirty-three years? What was the purpose anyway?

To give a complete answer in this book is impossible, but I will give you a brief overview. With a little study, you will see that Christmas is not just celebrating the birth of an ordinary child, but the celebration of a great God with a great plan for you and me.

First and foremost, God sent Jesus to restore His relationship with mankind and make a way for man to have everlasting life. (Luke 19:10 msg; John 3:16.) Because man sinned and had separated himself from God (with the help of the devil), God developed a plan to restore the relationship. (Gen. 3.)

Without God, man was destined for death. God’s plan was to bring life and to destroy death and destruction forever.

According to the Bible, 1 John 3:8 says “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.”

Jesus did not come to condemn the world. He explains why He came in John 3:17: “God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”

Jesus was not born just to give us a holiday. Jesus was born as the first part of

God's plan to deliver man out of the bondage of sin. When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we help to complete God's plan.

Jesus is not a holiday icon. God had a purpose in sending His Son to us.

> *[The Father] has delivered and drawn us to Himself out of the control and the dominion of darkness and has transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have our redemption.*
>
> Colossians 1:13–14 amp

Jesus is truly the Savior of the world. Celebrating His birth is a time of great love, peace, joy, and compassion. The reality is, however, that Christmas is just the symbolic time we celebrate the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. We know that Jesus was not born on December 25, but we use this date as our annual time to celebrate His birth.

As Christians, we know that Jesus is the Son of God. (Mark 1:1.) We know that God loved mankind so much that He sent Jesus to this earth. (John 3:16.) Yet many people don't know these truths and wonder why God sent Jesus. So here are six reasons briefly describing why Jesus was born.

1) He was born to redeem us from the curse of the law of sin and death. (Titus 2:14; Gal. 4:3–7.)

2) He was born to restore authority to its rightful place. (Matt. 28:18–20.)

3) He was born to reconcile man to God. (Eph. 2:14–18; 2 Cor. 5:18–21.)

4) He was born to destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8.)

5) He was born to make a way for everlasting life. (1 John 5:1–13.)

6) He was born because of love. (John 3:16.)

Remember, Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world but to save it. (John 3:17.) And because He loves us so much, He is coming again for us. (John 14:1–18; 1 Thess. 4:13–18.) That's worth celebrating any time of the year!

## Christmas and the New Birth

Before Joseph and Mary were married, it was discovered that Mary was pregnant. Joseph was a good man and he did not want to make a public example of Mary so he decided to send her away secretly. (Matt. 1:18–19.)

While he was considering this, however, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. The angel told him that he should not be afraid to take Mary as his wife because the seed that was in her was the seed of the Holy Spirit. (vv. 20–21.)

As we read the Christmas story in the Bible, many times we don't comprehend the fullness of what the angel said. Later in life when Jesus was talking to His

disciples and friends, He repeatedly referred to God as His Father. In fact, in John 17 when Jesus spent considerable time talking to the Father just before His arrest and crucifixion, He continually referred to God as His Father, and He referred to Himself as the Father's Son.

You may wonder, how can this be? How can God be His Father when He was conceived by the Holy Spirit? The answer is both complex and simple. The Spirit of God is God. (John 4:24; 1 John 5:7–8.)

Likewise, when we become Christians, we become children of God and we become born of the Spirit. (John 3:5.) First John 3:9 says that as Christians we are born of God and God's nature, His "divine sperm," remains permanently in us because we are born of God:

> *No one born (begotten) of God [deliberately, knowingly, and habitually] practices sin, for God's nature abides in him [His principle of life, the divine sperm, remains permanently within him]; and he cannot practice sinning because he is born (begotten) of God.*
>
> 1 John 3:9 amp

When the angel told Joseph that Jesus was born of the Spirit, he was prophesying that we who receive Jesus would be born of the Spirit also. We actually are His body (spiritually speaking) and born of the same Spirit.

> *If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.*
>
> Romans 8:11

The Christmas story is a powerful true story that changed the world forever.

## It's Always the Season for the Christmas Story

The birth of Jesus, the wise men, the shepherds, the manger, and all the other events of Christmas are glorious. However, the Christmas season is not just a seasonal holiday. It is the commemoration of the birth of our Lord Jesus.

Remember, most Christians and theologians agree that Jesus was not born on the 25th of December; it is simply the day that we set aside once a year to publicly acknowledge to the world that Jesus Christ was born. The point is the date is not important. The event is. The date is only a 24-hour time period. The event changed the world and the universe for all eternity.

The birth of Jesus was the beginning of the earthly manifestation of God's plan to reconcile man back to Himself. Several years after the resurrection of Jesus, the apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, talked about how those who

believed in Jesus were reconciled to God through the death of Jesus.

> *For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*
>
> Romans 5:10

Actually the birth of Jesus is not just the Christmas story, but the beginning of the salvation story—and all of the story should be told all of the time.

Several years ago I was talking to a fellow minister about some of the miraculous things that took place at the birth of Jesus. We got very excited in our conversation. Then he looked at me and said, "I can hardly wait until Christmas so I can teach this at church." His statement struck a nerve inside of me. That day I realized that too many ministers and Christians only talk about the birth of Jesus one Sunday a year.

The Christmas story is a wonderful story, but Jesus should never be reduced to a holiday icon. He is the Savior of the world who was born of a virgin, fathered by the Spirit of God, ministered on the earth, and laid down His life as the once and for all sacrifice. He did all this as He pressed toward the goal of fulfilling the Father's plan.

Each year as we celebrate Christmas let's keep the knowledge, understanding, and spirit of Christmas fresh every day throughout the year.

## Christmas Is About Jesus

Regardless of what the modern news media may tell you, Christmas is about Jesus. Of course it is the season of love and joy. Of course it is the season of giving. But all of the love, joy, and giving is because of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Without Jesus there would be no Christmas season. Let me explain.

It may come as a shock to some people, but before Jesus was born there was no Christmas. It is a known fact that the birth of Jesus 2,000 years ago is the date the Julian and Gregorian calendars use as the anchor for all dates. For example, the United States was founded in the year 1776 AD (Anno Domini) or "1776 in the Year of Our Lord." The birth of Jesus is the basis for the AD system of dating.

However, the value and purpose of Christmas is much deeper than just a dating system of time. The birth of Jesus marks the beginning of a new phase of God's plan for mankind. It has been said that when Jesus came to earth, it was the greatest chapter in the story of the glory. Here is what that means.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (Gen. 1.) He created

man in His own image and likeness and placed him in a garden east of Eden. (v. 26; Gen. 2:15.) Man was covered with the glory of God.[8] The relationship between God and man was very intimate. God gave man authority over the garden. Like today, there were things he was to do and there were some things he was not supposed to do. (Gen. 2:16–17.)

Because man was disobedient, he lost the ability to fellowship with his Creator. (Gen. 3.) The glory of God was taken away and man realized he was naked. It looked like he was doomed to an eternal existence alone without the closeness of the presence of God (the glory)—but God had a plan.

God loved His creation so much that after 4,000 years He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus, to the earth in the form of a man. He was a part of the wonderful plan to break down the wall that separated man from God. Jesus lived a perfect life as a man. (2 Cor. 5:21.) He was the Son of God, but He set all that aside and lived for 33 years as a sinless man. He laid down His life on the cross and became a perfect sacrifice.

After three days, Jesus came back to life. He taught His disciples for forty days and then was taken into heaven to be with His Father, God. (Acts 1:1–9.) And today, He is waiting to return to the earth to collect the Church. (1 Thess. 4:16–17.) Everyone who believes and confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, that God raised Him from the dead, and does not deny Jesus, is a part of the Church and has eternal life. Life is always better than death.

Christmas is the celebration of a birth in Bethlehem. Christmas is the celebration of the birth of a Savior who laid down His life so we could have life. Christmas is the celebration of the Light entering the world so that we do not have to live in darkness. (John 8:12.)

Christmas is the celebration of Jesus. Without Jesus, there is no reason to celebrate. We show our love for Him by loving, forgiving, and giving to others. Jesus said they (non-Christians) will know we are Christians by the way we love each other. (1 John 3:16.)

# CHURCH (The)

## We Are Becoming the Church Without Spot or Blemish

Satan fights against the teachings about the Holy Spirit in the earth today. The reason why is that the Holy Spirit is the part of the Godhead that is here now

ministering to the saints. When Jesus went to be with the Father, He told His disciples, “When I go to be with the Father, He will send His Spirit in My name to be here on the earth.” (John 14:26.)

You can read in John 14 where Jesus said He was coming back again. We know that the return of Jesus is imminent, but the reality of the situation is this: He has gone to be with the Father, but He has not come back yet. He has not appeared in the clouds as it says that He will in 1 Thessalonians 4:16. That still hasn’t happened.

According to the Word of God, we know that between the time Jesus left and the time He comes back, He is sitting at the right hand of the Father. (Mark 16:19.) We have evidence of this through the biblical account of when Stephen was stoned and he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father. (Acts 7:51–60.)

You may say, “I thought God was here on the earth. I thought He was everywhere. I thought He was omnipresent.” Well, God is, in the form of His Holy Spirit. When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we receive Christ’s anointing within us by way of the Holy Spirit.

We know that the devil goes about seeking to attack the saints every chance he can get, but we have the Holy Spirit and His power on the inside of us to help us defeat that adversary. (1 Peter 5:8.) The Holy Spirit is our Comforter. (John 16:7.) He is our Counselor. He is our Helper. (John 14:26 amp.) We pray to the Father in the name of Jesus, but it is the Holy Spirit who is here on the earth doing the work and commanding the things of God, and it is the Holy Spirit who resides within us when we become born again.

If the Holy Spirit lives within us as Christians, and He does, then what kind of temple do we keep for Him? God wants us to be holy before Him. (1 Cor. 3:16–17,19.) According to Scripture, the temple—our body and soul— should be holy. For instance, 1 Peter 1:16 tells us, “Be holy, for I am holy,” and Hebrews 12:14 says, “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.”

There is a little nugget that is stuck in that last verse that is so often overlooked. We are to pursue peace. Will you be at peace with all people all of the time? Maybe you will be and you should be, but there will be people who will not be at peace with you. Nevertheless, you are to pursue peace with all people. You are to also pursue holiness.

The interesting thing about holiness is you can attain it, because you are the one who is in control of your body. You may not think you are. You may think you are out of control, but the reality is you are in control of you. God has given you

authority over yourself.

When we talk about the fruit of the Spirit in the Word of God, the Scripture says love, joy, peace, gentleness…these are the things that are a by-product of being a Christian. (Gal. 5:22.) This is the seed that is placed within you when you become a born-again believer. The result of having the Spirit of God living in you is love, joy, peace, gentleness, but at the end of that list is self-control. (v. 23.) That means you have been given the ability to control yourself.

For years, ministers have been preaching about how Jesus would be coming back for a Church that would be spotless and without blemish. (Eph. 5:27.) It's pretty easy to preach that message when you are talking about someday the Church is going to be that way.

Let me tell you something. We Christians are that Church. The responsibility is on our shoulders. The time is here. We are to be that holy Church, without spot, without blemish. We are to be ready for the coming of the Lord.

We are made righteous when we accept Jesus, and we become holy as we walk in willing obedience to His Word. (Isa. 54:17; Heb. 12:14.)

## Where's the Power?

My wife and I were sitting in the balcony one Sunday morning and the meeting was about to dismiss. The deacon of the week walked onto the platform and took his place behind the pulpit. He was about to give the benediction when an older man, looking to be in his seventies, began walking down the long center aisle toward the front of the church. Even with the large crowd, the church was quiet. All eyes were on the older gentleman.

Upon reaching the front, he spoke to the congregation. In a deep cracking voice he said, "I've never gone to church much, but last week I did go to the doctor. He said that I had cancer and that there was no hope for me medically. The doctor said that my only hope was God. I thought that if God could be found, it must be in a church, so here I am."

The church was silent. The deacon of the week was visibly shaken. Nothing like this had ever happened before. It wasn't in the bulletin. What could he do? The pastor sat still and solemn on his red velvet padded chair. The deacon quietly quoted his closing prayer without even mentioning the old man. The service was over and people began to leave.

We went to the edge of the balcony and looked down at the scene. The old man was still standing in front of the church, alone. Everyone was moving away from him toward the exits. My heart sank. It seemed that no one had the ability or

desire to minister to him. By the time we could get down the stairs and through the crowd, he was gone. I asked myself, Where's the power in the church today? Could this be what the passage means in 2 Timothy 3:1–5 that says in the last days men will hold to a form of godliness but deny its power?

People in the world are hurting. There are many pressures in these last days. Financial stress, illness, and disease have pushed many to the edge. Sometimes they realize their only hope, their only way of escape is God. But it's so sad when the lost world reaches out toward the Christian community and only finds more of the same problems. Where is the power? Is there any hope?

Everything Jesus said was and is true. He never lied. He said, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). Peter, a disciple of Jesus, seemed to be strong in faith and power, but after the soldiers arrested Jesus and took him away, Peter became fearful and denied that he had ever even known Jesus. (Matt. 26:47–75.) Yet within weeks, Peter was preaching boldly in public and many signs and wonders were taking place at his hands. What happened? What changed this man from fearful to bold? The answer is he was filled with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2.)

We need this same power working in the lives of all Christians today. The promise of the Holy Spirit was not just for first century Christians. Peter said on the day of Pentecost:

> *"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off."*
>
> Acts 2:38–39

Where's the power in the church today? It's in those of us who have been born again and received the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:8.) The question is, what are we going to do with it?

## The Glorious Church

> *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her…that He might present her [the church] to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*
>
> Ephesians 5:25,27

It is time for every member of the church to stand up and be the Church. The time that once was future is now here. We are truly living in the last moments of the last days. We are the generation that will usher in the return of the Messiah.

The waiting is over and the time is at hand for the Church to stand up and operate in the power and authority that was prophesied by Jesus.

It is time for the Church to become “Holy Spirit-friendly.” When the world looks at Christians, they should see the light shining in such a way that they are drawn to a loving God. The Church should never be embarrassed by the Holy Spirit or His gifts. A church that is Holy Spirit-led will be a church that is drawing people to Jesus. (John 6:44;12:32.)

In order for the Church to be the glorious Church, Christians must be obedient to every word we hear in our hearts from God and read or hear from His Word—not just to the words we want to receive. We must go where He tells us to go, or stay where He tells us to stay without regard to fame or fortune. The blessing will chase us down and catch us (Ps. 133:3), but the blessing only travels on the street named obedience.

I recently heard someone say that they were not going to church prayer because they didn’t get a lot out of prayer meetings. It reminded me of the time that a couple met me in my office to inform me that they were no longer going to work with children in Children’s Church because no one appreciated what they were doing.

When did appreciation become the motivation for ministry? When did we start judging prayer by how much we got out of it? Much of the focus has been wrong and needs to be corrected.

We were created to worship God. When we pray, we pray to the Father. If talking to the Father does not bring satisfaction, then an adjustment needs to be made and it’s not the Father who needs to be adjusted. The glorious Church receives correction.

The church has been commanded to “go ye therefore and make disciples” (Matt. 28:19 kjv). Whether or not we feel appreciated while doing it is irrelevant. It’s a command. Imagine how an army would function during a time of war if soldiers decided themselves whether or not they were going to obey the commands of the general on the basis of how appreciated they felt. The war would be lost. That is one of the basic problems that has developed in the church. We must obey God’s commands without hesitation.

Psalm 119:165 says, “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them” (kjv). The Church must quit talking about what the world has done to them and start talking about what God has done for them. This is the time for the Church to stand up and be the glorious Church.

A lady told me one time she could not teach the children because she needed to

be sitting in adult church where the pastor put the food on the table. While this is a good concept, the reality is this: If everybody is sitting at the table and nobody is in the kitchen, everyone starves. In order to eat, we must all take our turn in the kitchen. Every part of the body must do its part.

The Church needs to have the right perspective and have its priorities in order. Although we receive when we come to God's house, our hearts should be the heart of a servant and we should come to give worship to God and minister to others.

The glorious Church is supposed to stand in honesty, character, and integrity. In today's society, however, there seems to be a disturbing trend. People are accustomed to being tantalized, mesmerized, and sensationalized and this has been brought into the church. Of course, worship services should promote excellence in music and teaching, and musicians should practice and rehearse in order to promote excellence in worship. Yet some church services are such choreographed, theatrical, made-for-television performances that there is little difference between church and the half-time show at the Super Bowl.

Sometimes I feel like the Church has been lulled into a deep sleep. Twenty years ago there were things Christians would not allow in our homes that today we are using to babysit our children. This is the time for the sleeping giant (the Church) to awake.

It has been estimated that there are over 75 million evangelical Christians in America alone. When we unite as one body in agreement with the Word of God as our guide, nothing can stop us.

While the world may wax worse and become more deceived, the Church should become brighter and brighter until we shine the Gospel into all the world. (Isa. 60:1–3; Matt. 5:14–16.)

## Anointed and Walking in Authority

Several decades ago, deep in the Ozarks, my great-grandfather taught school and preached the Word. He was a circuit rider. Much of his education came from a series of books called The Biblical Educator. It is such a blessing for me to now have these books in my possession.

At the turn of the century, the Word was being taught and people were being born into the Church. Yet the popular view of prophecy by the theologians of the day was full of opinions and speculation. The Biblical Educator was very strong in its belief that Israel would never physically become a nation. In that book, the author questioned how a nation that had not been a nation for over 2,000 years

could ever become a nation again, especially when they had no national currency, language, constitution, or homeland.

The author then gave his opinion about what the Bible meant when it said Israel would become a nation again. He implied that spiritually, every Jew would become united in their hearts as one nation. However, it would be totally impossible for them to become a nation in their Promised Land, especially when their land was owned by their enemy, the Ottoman Turks.

As history has shown, The Biblical Educator was wrong. On May 15, 1948, the nation of Israel was reborn with its own language, currency, constitution, and land. Within 50 years, the thing that seemed totally impossible with man became a reality.

When my grandmother was a teenager, she saw her first automobile. During all of her youth she traveled by way of horse and wagon. Before she passed away, she saw astronauts go into outer space and men walk on the moon. From the creation of man through 6,000 years, man traveled with the assistance of animals. In one generation that changed. The Scriptures tell us that in the last days, knowledge will increase. (Dan. 12:4.) We are truly in the last days.

My great-grandfather and grandmother did not live to see the return of Jesus. But we are 100 years closer now and much prophecy has been fulfilled. God is speaking a lot more to us in these last moments of the last days.

The Church has a great work to do. We are carrying the baton on the final leg of the race. What previous generations have looked toward is coming to pass. The prophetic times spoken of by our Lord and Savior, Jesus, are upon us. The time of waiting is behind and the time of action is at hand. It’s time for the Church to stand up and be all that Jesus prophesied the Church would be—the glorious Church, anointed and walking in authority.

As we prepare for His return, the Church needs to be doing all that Jesus commanded. We are approaching the days when every believer must walk in total victory with the love of God pouring out in such a way that people are drawn to a loving God. (John 6:44;12:32.) The time is short, a large crop is in the fields, and the Lord wants every laborer to go out there and bring in the harvest. (Luke 10:2)

# CIVIC DUTY

## Pray for Leaders and Vote

## FOR RIGHTEOUS LEADERSHIP

Part of God's plan for Christians is that we pray for the leaders of our country, regardless of where we live in this world. (1 Tim. 2:1–4.) Those who live in non-democratic nations may not be able to vote, but they can and must pray for the leadership and for reformation of their government's structure.

For those of us who live in a democratic country where the people elect their government officials, we must not only pray for our leaders, but we have the awesome blessing and responsibility of being able to choose them as well. We have the method in place whereby we can install godly men and women into office, and we can remove evil men and women from their office—by our vote.

Unfortunately, there is a default setting when it comes to voting. When we choose good leaders, our leadership is good. When we choose evil leaders, our leadership is evil. However, if we become lazy, complacent, or apathetic, and for any reason fail to choose, our vote is not neutral. Our vote goes to the default setting. By not choosing good, we choose evil by default. Prayer for our governments has this default setting too. Let me explain.

In the kingdom of God, choices are critical. Our salvation is based upon a choice that we have made. If we choose Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we will be saved. If we choose to reject Jesus, we will not be saved. If for any reason we decide to delay our choice or have the "everything-will-work-itself-out" mentality, we will not be saved either. To be saved, we must choose to be saved. By not choosing, we actually choose the default setting, which is lost.

When the apostle Paul was talking to King Agrippa, the king told Paul that he was almost persuaded to become a Christian. (Acts 26:28.) Almost persuaded or almost decided doesn't work in God's kingdom. As Christians we are in this world, but we are not of this world. (John 17:14–18.) We must act on God's principles and not man's. We must pray for our leaders, and those of us who live where elections are held also must choose righteous leaders. Otherwise, evil leaders will be elected to office or take over an office and remain there.

You have the responsibility and the ability. Decide to choose. Do not allow complacency, laziness, or busyness to derail you. Remember, by not choosing to pray for leaders (whether they are godly or ungodly) or to vote for godly leaders, by default you are choosing abortion, homosexuality, and every evil work that the enemy desires. Ungodly behavior and ethics must be dealt with through prayer and voting.

According to Scripture we are to"submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from [us]" (James 4:7). By praying for our government officials and voting for

godly leaders, we are submitting to God's plan. By submitting to God's plan, the enemy will flee.

Prayer can dramatically change things; so can taking positive action. (See 2 Kings 20; James 2:26; 4:2.) The result is this: we can pray the enemy out of our governments, and by voting for godly leaders, we can automatically vote the enemy out.

> *Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.*
>
> Proverbs 14:34

# COMPARISON

## The Dangers of Comparison

Real offense can arise in people when they compare themselves to others, so it would be profitable to study the dangers of comparison.

> *We dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 10:12

The apostle Paul warned us here that comparing ourselves with others would always get us into trouble. Have you ever wondered why Paul said that comparison was unwise? The reason is that comparison is a type of pride. When you compare yourself to someone else, in essence, you are trying to find flaws or imperfections in the other person in order to feel superior to them—that is pride. Proverbs 16:18 warns, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

When people make statements like, "Our church is the best church in town," it is nothing more than comparison and competition. What makes people think one church has to be better than another anyway? Why do people claim that one preacher is any better than another preacher? The apostle Peter said in Acts 10:34, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality." One person is not better than another—they simply have different callings and when they fulfill their individual calling, it is expressed differently from anyone else.

The Word explicitly warns us not to compare ourselves with others, yet the body of Christ is full of comparison and competition. Why would any Christian compete with another when God has offered the same promise to "whosoever"? Most often it's due to the fact that the one comparing and competing doesn't

really believe that God will fulfill His promises for them. Perhaps they feel that God has abundantly blessed other people because He loves them more. But the truth is that God has more than enough to fulfill His promises for everyone!

You can have everything that God has promised in His Word. He has plenty, and just because He blesses another person with what you need, or desire, doesn't mean there isn't plenty more for you! He is El Shaddai, God Almighty, the source of all blessing.[9]

You can drive out comparison and competition by becoming happy with what God has already given you. According to James 1:17, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." Who does God reserve these good and perfect gifts for? The gifts that James describes are for anyone who will believe and receive them—including you and me!

John 10:10 says, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." This verse is directed to believers. Accept what God has for you because everything He offers is good—He provides health, prosperity, favor, protection, and greater things than you can even imagine.

Paul expresses it this way: "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us" (Eph. 3:20). God has things planned for you that are greater than you can ask or think. Begin to stretch your imagination today and don't allow anything, such as offense or unforgiveness, to hold you back!

# COMPLACENCY

## Never Underestimate God's Power

Man has always underestimated the power of God. Even when Jesus was here on earth and even after He had performed miracle after miracle, His power was still doubted. And when He taught and told of the greatness of His Father, even those who believed and those who followed Him continually underestimated His power.

In the Bible in John 11, we are told about a very unique series of events. Lazarus, Mary, and Martha lived in the town of Bethany about two miles from Jerusalem, and they were close friends of Jesus.

Lazarus became very sick and so his sisters, Mary and Martha, sent a message to Jesus. It said, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick" (v. 3). It was at this

point that Jesus did something that, at the time, seemed to everyone around Him to be totally out of character. When Jesus received this message that Lazarus was extremely sick, He stayed where He was for two more days before leaving.

The world assumed that Jesus just shrugged off the message and then waited two days before He departed to the house of Mary and Martha. If this had happened today, people would have called Jesus insensitive.

When Jesus arrived at Mary and Martha's house, He was greeted on the road by Martha, who had heard that He was coming and went out to meet Him. She said, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died" (v. 20).

Then in verse 23, Jesus told Martha, "Your brother will rise again." Martha's response was very religious. She said, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at that last day" (v. 24).

It was at this point that Martha drew a line with God. What I mean is that Martha put limits on the power of Jesus. She admitted that Jesus could have healed Lazarus if He had been there, but she believed that the current situation was even beyond the help of Jesus.

Later in verse 33, Mary came to where Jesus was and fell at His feet. Then she said the same thing Martha had said. It was almost like a guilt trip. Mary said, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Then Jesus groaned in the spirit and said, "Where have you laid him?" (v. 34).

Jesus went to the tomb and cried. His tears were over their lack of faith, but some of the people who were there saw Him crying and thought it was due to His grief over losing His friend. Others criticized Jesus for seemingly having done nothing to prevent Lazarus' death. Even the friends of the family believed Jesus could have kept Lazarus from dying, but when he died, they drew the line. They lost their faith and put limits on the power of God.

Look at what Jesus said to them next: "Take away the stone" (v. 35), but that's not all He said.

> *Looking up [Jesus] said, '"Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." Then he raised His voice and said, "Lazarus, come forth!"*
>
> John 11:41–43

Immediately Lazarus came out of the tomb. I'm sure everyone was shocked. Why? Because they had underestimated the power of God.

So, the point is, when it seems like all is lost, when it seems like there is nothing

that can be done, don't limit God. Don't underestimate God's power to turn things around.

# COMPLAINING

## Complaining Will Get You Nowhere

A passage in the book of Matthew provides us with an excellent example of people who assume they will receive something other than what they were told. It says,

> *The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner, who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them to his vineyard.*
>
> *And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace. And he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right, I will give you." So they went.*
>
> *Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, "Why have you been standing here idle all day?" They said to him, "Because no one hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right, you will receive."*
>
> *So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, "Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first."And when those came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more, and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received it, they complained against the landowner.*
>
> Matthew 20:1–11

At the beginning of this passage, those who were hired early in the morning agreed with the landowner to work for one denarius a day. But when the landowner hired more laborers that afternoon, they wrongly assumed they would receive more money than the newcomers. When they weren't paid any more for working longer hours, they were angry and complained to the landowner.

Notice verse 12 says that they complained against the landowner, "saying…." Complaining always involves saying something. Do you remember what the Word says about the Hebrew children when they wandered in the wilderness? Whenever they felt the least amount of discomfort, they grumbled and

complained. And when God heard their words, He was angry with them. (See Ex. 16.)

It may come as a shock to you, but God hears everything we say. There is nothing hidden from Him. You may successfully hide something from your spouse or your children. Perhaps you have even hidden something from the law, but nothing is hidden from God. Hebrews 4:13 says, "There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account."

The Bible mentions our words and complaining in several Scripture passages, but we're going to continue with this parable in Matthew 20. Verses 11 and 12 say:

> *When they had received it, they complained against the landowner, saying, "These last men have worked only one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the heat of the day."*

Now, each man was hired to work a different number of hours, but all were paid the same. As a result, the laborers who worked all day complained even though they received exactly what they had agreed upon prior to working. A spirit of division and contention built among the workers.

The real problem arose when the laborers who were hired early in the day compared themselves to the others. If those who were hired late in the day had received a lesser wage, those who had worked all day would not have had a reason to complain. But when they realized everyone received the same wage, regardless of the number of hours worked, they grumbled and complained. The equal treatment they were given made them angry. How did the landowner respond to their complaints?

> *He answered one of them and said, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?"*
>
> Matthew 20:13–15

In New Testament times, the phrase "evil eye" was a colloquialism, or idiom, of the day. Back then when someone said you had an evil eye, they meant you were tight or stingy. Therefore, Jesus was speaking about the greed and stinginess of the workers who complained. What Jesus said carried this implication: "Are you angry because I'm generous?" Then He concluded with this astounding statement: "The last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few

chosen” (v. 16).

The real offense that arose among the laborers was caused by comparing themselves to one another. They complained to the landowner, but it got them nowhere.

# CONFIDENCE

## How to Build Confidence

Hebrews 10:35 says, “Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.”

Confidence is a part of faith. If we have faith, we will have confidence.

First John 2:28 says, “And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.”

Some Christians act ashamed to be a Christian by attempting to be “politically correct” in public. When in a restaurant, some timidly bless their food, if they bless it at all. Sometimes the cute three-year-old is asked to pray, simply so the adult won’t have to. This shouldn’t be.

Now, everybody isn’t going to be like Smith Wigglesworth, a powerful healing evangelist from England in the early to mid-1900s who was known to stand up in a restaurant and yell, “May I have your attention, please. I’m getting ready to petition God to bless my food.” It doesn’t mean you have to do it that way, either. We should never imitate someone else’s boldness just in order to prove our own spirituality. But, likewise, we should not be ashamed. We must have confidence and we must have boldness.

If we have confidence that God is who He says He is, and if we believe that He will do what He says He will do, then we won’t be trying to prove anything at the restaurant. We’ll just reverently say thanks to Him in prayer.

True confidence and boldness come as a by-product of walking by faith. Increase in faith and confidence will never be a problem when we have faith in God and a relationship with Him.

# CONFLICT

## Living in Constant Conflict

Some people live in constant conflict. They move from emotional crisis to emotional crisis and from conflict with one person to another throughout their lives. They are in constant conflict with themselves and continually try to pull others into the conflict. They say they desire peace, but because of the years of continual strife and confusion, they have become fearful of peace and a type of codependency develops with the conflict. Friends and family who are drawn into these conflicts unknowingly become enablers and with each conflict, the pattern of destruction becomes more entrenched.

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 14:33 that God is not the author of confusion, but of peace. God's plan is for all Christians to live their lives peaceably without conflict. That does not mean that we will never be in conflict with the devil. The enemy will always look for opportunities to attack God's people physically, financially, and emotionally. We are to fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12), which is simply to believe God's Word is true and act on what God says.

However, there should never be conflict and fighting between the children of God. God's family should always dwell in harmony, contentment, and peace. Of course, this does not mean that we should ignore discipline and allow others to abuse us. We must stand up for what is right, but there are those within the body of Christ who seem to be in constant turmoil and who appear to not want to change.

The question is, how do we deal with those fellow Christians who live in constant conflict with others— people who continually stir up strife in their own lives and in the lives of others?

The first thing a person must do in answering any question is go to the Word of God and see what He says to do. First and foremost, God's Word teaches that we must love and forgive. Love is not an emotion, but a fruit of the Spirit and the way we love each other is the way that the world will know we are Christians. (John 13:35.) Love establishes who we are and forgiveness establishes our relationship with God. In Mark 11:25–26, we are told that if we have anything against anyone, we are to forgive them. If we don't, God will not forgive us and our relationship with Him will be broken.

Now, with this foundation of love and forgiveness firmly established, we find Romans 16:17 says, "I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them." The next verse tells us that these people who cause divisions and offenses can have flattering words and appear to be righteous.

Naturally, as Christians, we are to love and forgive. But there are those who

seem to never change, even though they have been loved and forgiven over and over again. They never repent but continue to cause division and strife everywhere they go. Interestingly, this division and strife is not centralized. Like a cancer, it spreads through their families, the workplace, and the church. Because they won't repent, nothing ever changes and life becomes miserable for them and everyone around them.

Over the years, I have known many critical and offensive people. Some of them have repented and gone on to live lives that were full of joy and peace. Others refuse correction. Because of their pride, and their belief that they were not the problem, they have continued to live sad lives in constant conflict. They are full of misery and hurt, believing that everyone else has caused them to not fulfill their own potential and dreams in life.

So we are brought back to our original question. How do you deal with offended people living in constant conflict?

Of course, we love and minister to them as we are guided by the Holy Spirit. And for the ones who come to their senses and repent, who turn away from strife, conflict, bickering, and murmuring, we receive them into fellowship.

According to the Word, however, those who will not submit to the ministry of peace and continue to create turmoil should be avoided. There are many issues that will determine the degree to which you can do this. Working conditions or family associations all factor into it. Still, to the degree that you can, you should do your best to associate with wise people who walk in sound doctrine and love, and avoid those who don't.

How can you tell if a person in conflict has repented? The answer to that is quite simple. The conflict will cease. Jesus said that a tree would be known by its fruit. (Luke 6:44.)

Scripture References:

If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. (Romans 12:18)

A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:24–26)

He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed. (Proverbs 13:20)

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (1 Timothy 6:12)

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. (Galatians 5:22–23)

# CONTROL AND MANIPULATION

## Breaking the Spirit of Control

Control and manipulation are tools of the devil. Freedom and guidance are tools of the Spirit of God. Jesus said that if we would abide in His Word, we would know the truth and that the truth would set us free. (John 8:31–32.) God is the God of freedom and the devil is the god of bondage.

I've heard people try to manipulate God with their prayers and it may sound strange, but there are those who try to apply the world's methods to their communication with God.

Several years ago, I was talking with a man who knew that God had instructed him specifically on something he was to do in his life. Not only did this man know this in his heart, but it also was confirmed by the Holy Scriptures. However, he refused to do what he knew was right.

When I asked him why he was rebelling against God's command, he made a very astonishing statement. He said, "I'm believing that if I hold off long enough that eventually God will see that I don't want to do it and He will change His mind."God does not respond to picketing, protest marches, or sit down strikes. And we cannot manipulate God or control Him by these socially accepted, politically correct methods.

Another man told me that he did not agree with one of the current theological teachings. He went on to make a very ludicrous statement. He said, "If I can get enough people to believe the way I believe, then certainly God will agree with me." Wrong! As Christians, we live in a kingdom and not in a democracy. Only what the King of kings decides becomes our way of life. (Rev. 19:16.)

I knew of another gentleman who believed that if he could publicly prophecy something in church, then certainly God would cause it to come to pass because God would not allow Himself to be embarrassed. God doesn't get embarrassed. He knows the truth and you cannot control or manipulate Him.

Control and manipulation are spirits associated with the spirit of fear. (1 Tim.

1:7.) Yes, in the book of Galatians we are told that a part of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. (Gal. 5:23.) Self-discipline is of God, but attempting to manipulate or control God or any other person by your words or deeds is witchcraft and is not of God.

## Control and Manipulation

Depression, jealousy, and emotional outbursts have often been considered the result of frustration and stress in life. However, some people have used depression, jealousy, and emotional outbursts as a form of control.

It may seem difficult to believe that a depressed person isn't really depressed, or that a jealous person isn't really jealous, or that an emotional outburst is not fueled by anger. Yet many times this is true.

As Christians, we must never attempt to control people through manipulation. Control and manipulation are rebellion against God's plan for someone else. A person who relentlessly attempts to control another usually becomes so focused on the control that his or her mind cannot be changed. This is a type of stubbornness.

According to the Bible, rebellion and stubbornness are not of God: "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (1 Sam. 15:23).

We must break the spirit of control in our lives. We've seen that in Galatians 5:22, we're told that a part of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. Yes, we must take control of our own lives and not allow sin to enter. We must pray for and do good to others. We must love them and not think of ourselves as higher than them. However, we must never try to bring someone closer to God or closer to the way we think they should be by way of control.

Depression, jealousy, and emotional outbursts are all based in fear. Any time fear is used to restructure a situation, it's wrong. God never uses fear as a motivation, but God motivates through love. Love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8.) Love changes lives. Love reveals God's true nature and love is what will bring people into a right understanding of where they should be.

So the next time you catch yourself trying to manipulate someone through your emotions, stop it. Think about what you are doing and start operating in love instead of fear. Anything that you do that is associated with fear has its roots in the devil.

Remember this—God has not given you a spirit of fear, "but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7).

# CORRECTION

## Do You Know Someone Who Is Never Wrong?

Learning and correction are the two key ingredients in growing in knowledge and understanding. Without learning, there is no expansion of the truth and without correction, a truth can develop into an untruth over time. Correction is the rudder that keeps truth on course and without correction, many lives have been run aground.

Years ago, I worked with a man who was an expert in his field. He had knowledge, education, and abilities and was considered exceptional in what he did. In fact, others in his profession would seek his counsel because of the quality of his work. However, this man had one problem. He would not receive correction. In his mind, his ideas were the best, his solutions were the greatest, and he could do no wrong.

I specifically remember one afternoon when he had been working on a project that was not coming together the way it should. Another technician standing nearby meekly suggested a solution. The solution was ignored in rude fashion.

The expert tried one method and it failed. He tried another method and it failed also. In desperation, he threw a fit, slammed down his tools, cursed under his breath, yelled and walked away from the project, and the project was not completed.

Days later, he found the solution and fixed the problem. Sadly, the solution was the one suggested by the meek technician.

I don’t know if you have ever encountered anyone with this type of personality, but let me say this, in our walk with the Lord and with our daily tasks in the world, unless we can humbly receive correction, we will never attain the level of greatness that God has for us.

When someone will not receive correction on the job or in the church, it is a direct result of pride. God hates pride and God loves humility. Humility will always receive correction in love and pride believes it is never wrong and its way is best.

> *But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*
>
> James 4:6

# CREATION

## Glory Be!

Genesis 1:1 tells us, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” John 1:1 talks about the beginning too, saying, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Then we are told that everything that was made in the heavens and on the earth was made only by the Word of God. (v. 3.)

Jesus was in the beginning and He was the Word. All things were made through Him and in Him was life. (John 1:1-4.)

Genesis 1:3 tells us that light was brought into the universe because God spoke it into existence. He said, “‘Let there be light’; and there was light.” This is not referring to the light from the sun or the reflected light from the moon because the sun and the moon were not created until the fourth day. (vv. 14–17.) Before creation could take place, God prepared creation with His glory.

I have an aunt who lived on a farm in a small country town for several years. When the family would get together and somebody would tell a fascinating story, she would lean back and laugh and say, “Well, glory be!”

In Genesis 1:3 when God said, “Let there be light,” a more correct translation of the Hebrew would be, “Light be.” Since God was not referring to the sun or the moon, what light did He move into the earth? Genesis 1:2 says, “The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.” But when God said, “Light be,” the earth took form and confusion left. That’s what the glory of God did and that’s what His glory can do in our lives.

When your life is full of confusion and it seems as though darkness surrounds you, the only way to have peace and shalom is to be in the presence of the glory. Psalm 16:11 says, “In [God’s] presence is fullness of joy.” The glory of the Lord is the manifestation of His presence. So, glory be!

Scripture References:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. (Genesis 1:1–3)

Then God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and

years." (Genesis 1:14)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. (John 1:1–4)

## Created in the Likeness of God

No place in the Scriptures does it say believers are angels. Believers have never been angels, nor will they become angels when they die. When you die, you're not going to be like Jimmy Stewart in the movie It's a Wonderful Life, dealing with somebody who's trying to get their wings by doing something good. This is Hollywood theology. You are not an angel and you never will be an angel.

Likewise, God is not an angel. The Holy Spirit is not an angel. Jesus is not an angel. Jesus is not related to the devil. The devil is nothing more than a created angel who rose up and attempted to be like God and was cast out of heaven to earth just as the Scripture said. (Isa. 14:12; Ezek. 28:11–17; Luke 10:18; Rev. 12:9.)

Satan and his band of renegade angels will all be cast into hell. (Rev. 20:10.) Hell was not created for sinners, although lost people will go there. Hell was created for fallen angels, including the devil. Jesus talked about it to His disciples: "Then [God] will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels'" (Matt. 25:41).

We have something that angels don't have. We have blood. Not only do we have our blood, we have access to the blood of Jesus, which cleansed us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:7,9.) Angels cannot be where we are. The Scripture says they look on and want to be where we are.

> *To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.*
>
> 1 Peter 1:12

Angels have that desire, but they can't be where we are because we have been created in the likeness of God.

# DEBT

## Debt Is Deadly

Mark 11:24 says that in order to receive, we must first believe. As Christians, we know this is true. The principles of the kingdom tell us that we must call the things that be not as though they are. (Rom. 4:17.) In order to receive eternal life, we must first believe. Believing comes before receiving.

Debt is a crippling enemy of faith. God's plan for the believer does not include debt. Debt produces bondage. What is the result of bondage? It is the exact opposite of the result of freedom. Bondage produces stress. Freedom produces peace.

In Galatians 3:13, the Word tells us that Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law. The curse, as described in Deuteronomy 28, is death, sickness and disease, and poverty. Jesus is our propitiation (substitute). He died so that we wouldn't have to. He took on sickness and disease so we wouldn't have to. And He took on poverty so we wouldn't have to. To walk in debt is to walk absent from the fullness of redemption.

In Hosea 4:6, God said that His people perish for a lack of knowledge. Although this scripture is specifically referring to the Hebrew nation, the principle still applies to us. We must understand and come to the revelation knowledge that prosperity and freedom is God's plan and not poverty and debt.

The only thing that keeps a person from receiving eternal life is not believing that Jesus died for their sins. Unbelief kept the people of Nazareth from receiving great miracles. (Mark 6:1–6.) I believe the main reason people are walking in debt is because they do not believe it is possible to be debt-free. Instead, they believe debt is an unavoidable part of life.

Recently my wife, Loretta, and I watched a nationally known minister on worldwide TV teach an excellent message, but what he said about debt was not based on the Word of God. Not only did he say that everyone will always have a house payment and a car payment; he said that although God wants us debt-free, in our society, we know that it is relatively impossible.

There is no truth in that. Jesus said, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." (Mark 9:23). In many churches across the nation, good Christian people die prematurely because pastors teach their flocks that healing is not for today. Many years ago, I was one of those pastors. However, today I teach healing and physical deliverance from sickness and disease. My belief system changed because of the revelation of the Word of God.

We have a responsibility in these last days to walk in total redemption. That

means we are to be full gospel people—we believe the whole Bible. We believe in life, healing, and prosperity and stand against death, sickness, and debt. Life and the blessing, death and the curse have been placed before us, but God gave us the answer in His Word. Choose life! (Deut. 30:19.)

## Live Debt Free

Ninety-seven percent of all Americans (saved and lost) are in debt. The godly are suffering at the same rate as the ungodly. This should not be.

I believe that God is displeased with the interest and usury that the body of Christ is giving to the world. We must look to God and His Word as our source first. Jesus said in Matthew 6:33 that if we would seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness that the things that we needed would be supplied. However, many who need supply look to the world first.

If you always think borrow, you'll always go to the bank. But if you always think miracle, you'll always go to God. The bank requires interest. Miracles are interest free!

The apostle told us, "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8).

In order for us to break free from financial bondage, something must change. If we keep doing what we've always done, then we will have what we've always had and nothing is going to change until something changes!

We must renew our minds. Some people think they are debt free just because they are caught up on their payments, but that is deception. If you owe a thousand dollars, and your next payment isn't due for thirty days, you still owe a thousand dollars. A debt is a debt until it is paid in full.

American comedian and actor W. C. Fields was a household name a few decades ago. The story goes that one day he was found reading his Bible backstage and he was asked what he was doing. His response was, "I'm looking for loopholes." You can look for loopholes all you want, but there are no loopholes in the Word of God. Only when we hear, meditate, and act on God's Word will the favor and blessings of God come upon us.

We must believe what God says about finances. We must trust Him and understand that His will for us is prosperity and not poverty. We must seek His will for us. Poverty is not a sin, but it is far below God's best, and the Bible calls it a curse. (Deut. 28:15,19; Prov. 10:15.) Jesus paid the price so that we could be delivered from the curse of the law. (Gal. 3:13.) We must abide in His Word, know who we are, and break free.

# DECEPTION

## Self-Deception Can Be Deadly

From the beginning, Satan has been a deceiver. In the Garden of Eden, he deceived Eve and he has been deceiving mankind ever since. (Gen. 3.)

Now don't take me wrong for what I am about to say. I am not defending Satan. He is a liar and a deceiver. But what I am saying is this—sometimes we are deceived and it is not Satan who deceives us.

First Corinthians 3:18 says, "Let no one deceive himself." And in 1 John 1:8 it says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." We can see clearly from these two verses that it is possible to deceive ourselves.

How do we deceive ourselves anyway? Once again let's go to the Word.

> *Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.*
>
> James 1:22–25

According to the Bible, then, a man who hears the Word and does not do it deceives himself. Because he hears the Word of God, he has convinced himself that everything is okay. The reality, however, is that everything is not okay. He just thinks it is. Therefore, he has deceived himself.

In Matthew 7:24–27, Jesus tells the story of two men who built houses. One man, a wise man, built his house on the rock and when the storms came, his house withstood the storms.

The other man, a foolish man, built his house on the sand. When the storms came, his house was destroyed. Jesus said the man who built his house on the rock was like someone who hears His sayings and does them. He compared the foolish man who built his house on the sand to a man who hears His sayings and does not do them.

Both men built houses and probably both houses looked good. Both men heard the sayings of Jesus and that's good. But when the storms came, only the house that was built on the rock, only the man who acted on what he heard, survived.

Acting on the Word of God is what we call faith.

We must not deceive ourselves. Hearing the Word of God without acting on the Word can be deadly. God didn't give us His Word just so we would be highly educated. Education is good. It's a good thing to read and study God's Word, but without action, it profits us nothing. That's what the scribes and Pharisees did at the time of Jesus and Jesus rebuked them for their hypocrisy. (Matt. 23:13–15.)

So, we have a choice to make. Do we hear the Word and sit back and say, "That sounds pretty good" and do nothing? Or, do we hear the Word and then act on what we hear?

A doer of the Word is someone who prays for the sick. A doer of the Word is someone who forgives. A doer of the Word is someone who loves those who don't love in return. A doer of the Word is someone who casts out demons. A doer of the Word is someone who is not self-deceived.

## The Source of Self-Deception

The worst kind of deception is self-deception. When people have been deceived by someone else and that deception is discovered, most of us deal with it swiftly and decisively. However, self-deception is rarely dealt with because many people feel they are right and will never look inwardly.

The Bible describes it like this: "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise" (Prov. 12:15).

All through God's Word, we are warned about deception. Deception is the tool that the serpent used against Eve. (2 Cor. 11:3.) It is still a tool of the enemy. Self-deception, however, is a result of the flesh and ignorance. The term self-deception denotes that the deception comes from within, rather than from without. The enemy is a deceiver. In the same way God wants us to be holy like He is holy, Satan wants us to be like him and he is the father of deception. (John 8:44.)

Because of pride, Satan rebelled against God. When pride enters into the heart of a man, he is a candidate for self-deception. Obadiah 1:3 says, "The pride of your heart has deceived you." According to the Word, we have been warned against self-deception. The following are eight basic ways we deceive ourselves.

1) By hearing the Word but not doing it:

> *Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*
>
> James 1:22

2) By thinking too highly of ourself:

*If anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*

Galatians 6:3

3) By not acknowledging sin and repenting:

*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.*

1 John 1:8–10

*For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me.*

Romans 7:11

*Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.*

1 Corinthians 6:9,10

4) By placing faith in the world's wisdom:

*Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness."*

1 Corinthians 3:18,19

5) By not bridling our tongue:

*If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*

James 1:26,27

6) By not understanding sowing and reaping:

*Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.*

Galatians 6:6–8

7) By having worldly associations:

> *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?*
>
> 2 Corinthians 6:14

> *Do not be deceived: "Evil company corrupts good habits."*
>
> 1 Corinthians 15:33

> *Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.*
>
> 1 Timothy 2:14

8) By not understanding the source of good and evil:

> *Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.*
>
> James 1:16,17

> *The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*
>
> John 10:10

The bottom line to avoiding self-deception or deception by someone else is this: God's Word is true. If we walk in the truth of His Word instead of the opinions of worldly people, we will not be deceived.

## The Salesman of Lies

Have you ever met a con man or con woman? Well, I have. These unique individuals have the ability to make you buy something you don't want or need. Sometimes you don't even get it after you pay for it.

When Loretta and I were first married, we didn't have much money. We were in college and we had a good, late model car we had bought from Loretta's father. We didn't drive it though. It sat in our driveway with two flat tires. We couldn't afford used tires for the car. It's a little embarrassing to admit this, but once we looked through the couch and found nine cents. We walked two blocks to the grocery store and bought some instant biscuits. We ate biscuits that day. We already had some butter in the refrigerator, but that was all!

Now, I've told you this to illustrate how poor Loretta and I were during our early years of marriage. Yet as destitute as we were, a vacuum cleaner salesman still sold us a brand-new vacuum cleaner along with all the attachments—even though we didn't even have carpet at the time.

When that salesman first approached me about the vacuum cleaner, my initial reaction was, “We don’t need one.” But after much persistence on his part, I gave in to “just listen” to the pitch. After listening for a while and not being prepared for all his logic, I gave in and agreed to the purchase, partially because I just wanted to get rid of him and get it over with.

It may have been a good vacuum, but we didn’t need it and couldn’t afford it. The result was we had even less money and one more obligation we couldn’t meet.

Satan is the salesman of destruction in your life. He peddles his lies and tries to get us to buy them. We know we don’t need his lies. We know we can’t afford his lies, but he is a persistent salesman. He has done this before. He knows that if he can just get us to listen, he has a chance. Listening is the first step in being sold. If we as Christians wouldn’t listen to the lies of Satan, then we would not buy his lies. We need to guard our minds and our ears.

Satan is deceptive and he wants to destroy Christians. He wants us to be ineffective, powerless, and defeated. He knows that one Spirit-filled Christian, walking in faith, has the power to move mountains and deal a severe blow to his kingdom. He knows that faith is the key. He knows his only hope is to destroy faith. And here’s how he does it.

He knocks on the door of our minds with his briefcase full of lies and he tries to get us to buy them. He keeps talking until we listen and then he goes for the close. One of his lies is, “God does not heal today.” Or he’ll tell us his lie, “the gifts of the Holy Spirit passed away with the apostles.” Another lie he tries to sell is, “God has a purpose for you to be sick. He put this sickness on you to teach you something.”

If we buy Satan’s lies, it will destroy our faith. Without faith we will not please God. (Heb. 11:6.) Without faith we will be ineffective as Christians and powerless to withstand Satan. So resist the “salesman of lies” with the truths of God’s Word and he will flee. (James 4:7.) Remember, the Word says that it is our shield of faith that withstands the attacks of Satan. (Eph. 6:16.)

# DELIVERANCE

## Moving from Pressure to Peace

As a Christian, there is a strength that flows from our inner man that can overpower any enemy that comes against us. The source of that power is the

Holy Spirit and the power is activated by faith in the Father.

When I was a boy, I remember watching my mom cook with a pressure cooker. She would put it on the stove and heat it until a relief valve on the lid would open and relieve pressure. The world is a "pressure cooker." Pressures from bills, sickness, family, and life in general have pushed many to the edge. Sometimes it seems like we can't take the pressure, so we have to let off a little steam. Life should not be this way.

We were created in the image and likeness of God. (Gen. 1:26.) We are told in Ephesians 5:1 that we are to be imitators of God. No, we are not to be God, but we are to be like Him.

So, how is God? Is He stressed from bills? Is He worried about how He will get through the day? No, of course not.

Galatians 5:22–23 gives us a complete description of the nature of God and His personality. The nine characteristics of God are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Remember, the Bible calls this the fruit of the Spirit. As Christians, God expects us to walk in love and experience fullness of joy. He wants us to live a life of peace and to be in full control of the world around us. He has given us power and authority. (2 Tim. 1:7; Luke 10:19.) We don't need to beg God for relief. He has already given us the victory. (1 Cor. 15:57.)

When we receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior, the Bible says that the Holy Spirit literally moves inside of our spirit and we become what Jesus called born again. (Acts 2:38; John 3:3.) By having this born-again experience, we are empowered with the source of the power, the Holy Spirit, who can guide us out of the pressure cooker of life and teach us to walk in the peace we have been given.

How do we activate the power and the authority we have been given? How can we move from the pressures of life to peace? What is the secret? What is the key? Countless self-help books have been written on this subject, but the answer is so simple that most people miss it.

Jesus told His disciples that when a mountain (kingdom) needs to be moved, that we must speak to it. (Mark 11:23.) In other words, we must exercise our authority over the enemy. We must confidently speak the Word, knowing who we are in Christ. Jesus said it this way:

> *"Whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says."*

However, Jesus qualifies this powerful statement in the previous verse. He said, “Have faith in God” (v. 22). That means, we must believe what God says more than what we see. We must believe what His Word says more than what the world says.

The world says, “You can’t make it and you will fail,” but God’s Word says:

- No weapon formed against you will prosper. (Isa. 54:17.)
- Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world. (1 John 4:4 kjv.)
- You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. (Phil. 4:13.)
- Because you believe, all things are possible. (Mark 9:23.)
- My faith in Him has overcome the world. (1 John 5:4.)

So, when the pressures of life seem unbearable, have faith in God. He loves you. He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for you. He raised Him from the dead so you could have eternal life with Him. He will never leave you. (Heb. 13:5.) If it seems like God is not with you, remember this, God is not the One who moved.

Repent, submit, and obey. Have faith in God and prepare for your victory.

## No Fear—Even when the Storm Clouds Appear

> *Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.*
>
> Psalm 34:19

Once during a counseling session, I had a gentleman tell me that he couldn't understand why he was going through the trials that he was going through. He said that he had been attending church regularly with his family, that he had been walking in forgiveness, and that he had been tithing. As far as he could see, he had been doing everything right. So he was greatly confused about why those trials were happening to him. Then he made a surprising statement to me. He said, "I lived in the world for a lot of years and I had a lot of problems. I was under the impression that when I became a Christian, my problems would be over."

This man had the wrong impression. Becoming a Christian does not mean all our problems go away. Becoming a Christian does not mean there will be no more attacks from the enemy.

Jesus told the story in Luke 6 about two men who built houses. One man built his house on a solid foundation and the other man built his house on the sand. (vv. 47–49.) A commonly overlooked portion of this story is this—both houses went through the storm. When the Scripture tells us, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all," we usually focus on the deliverance.

Of course, it is wonderful news that we will be delivered. When we hear the

story of the two men who built the houses, we focus on the house that weathered the storm, because that man heard the sayings of Jesus and obeyed them. But we cannot ignore the fact that both houses went through the storm and that God's Word tells us, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous."

Often this fact is ignored because of a subtle fear that God will not deliver His people. However, if we truly walk in faith, and truly believe that God's Word is true, then there will be no fear whatsoever. And we will know that God delivers His people. With this one truth in our heart, we will have no fear of any storm that will come our way because we know that no matter what the storm, we will be delivered.

# DEMOCRACY

## Faith Is Not a Democracy

First Timothy 6:12 says, "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."

Fighting the good fight of faith is not always an easy fight. Why? It takes courage and boldness to fight the good fight of faith. All through the Bible, those in faith were few. When the Hebrews sent twelve spies into the Promised Land, for instance, the majority returned with a negative report that had no faith in it. Ten of the spies said, "We can't enter into that land. It's full of giants. We are like grasshoppers to them. If we go in we will die." (Num. 13:33.)

But Joshua and Caleb, two of the twelve, a clear minority, said, "Yes, we can make it. If we go into the Promised Land we can occupy it, in spite of the giants. God said He would fight our battles for us and we believe Him." (Num. 13:30; 14:6–9.)

Unfortunately, the people believed and acted on the anti-faith report of the majority and were ready to stone Joshua and Caleb to death, when God intervened and told Moses that the Israelites would not be allowed to enter into the Promised Land because of their lack of faith. Instead, they would have to wander in the desert for forty years—one year for each day the twelve spies had explored the Promised Land. (Num. 14:5–34.) After those forty years, the Israelites who were still alive went into the Promised Land, just as God had told Moses.

Now, interestingly, the giants were still there. Even after delaying for four

decades, the battle still had to be fought. But God was with them, because this time they had faith. When you have faith, God is with you and you always win.

When you believe what God says and you believe it enough to act on His Word in spite of how things look around you, that's faith and faith pleases God. God is always on the side of those with faith.

In God's Word and all through history, God has looked for men and women with faith. Hebrews 11, known as the faith chapter, tells about a man who did not die. His name was Enoch. Verse 5 says he was taken away and did not see death. It tells why he did not see death and was instead taken into heaven:

> *By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, "and was not found, because God had taken him"; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.*

Then verse 6 goes on to say that it is faith that pleases God and more precisely, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him."

Notice that Enoch had a good testimony. He gave a good report. He spoke the Word of God and whatever God said, he believed it. Not only did he believe God's words, he acted on them. We know this because the Bible says he had faith, and that is what faith is. Faith is believing that God has done everything He said He would do and believing it so completely that you place everything you say and everything you do in line with His Word.

So, I guess it all boils down to this: Do we please God by having faith, or do we go with the majority who speak doubt and unbelief? Going with the doubters does not please God and could leave us wandering in the desert. Being in faith pleases God and the miracles that can happen in our lives are unlimited.

Who do we please, God or man? The choice is ours. (Luke 16:13.)

# DEMONIC SPIRITS

## You Can't Negotiate with Giants

> *There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.*
>
> Genesis 6:4

Because of the sin of man, giants were on the earth. The giants were large and intimidating. Not only were they intimidating to the sight, but their mouths were intimidating also. There was a giant named Goliath, who intimidated the

Hebrews with his size and with his mouth. He shouted words of defeat to the army under Saul, the king. And Saul and all his men stood at a distance in fear.

It was only when David, a young shepherd boy who had no fear, stepped before the giant that the people of God had the possibility of victory. When fear reigns, there is no faith. In fear, there is no possibility of victory because fear is the assurance of defeat. However, when faith steps forward, victory is not only a possibility, but victory is assured.

First Samuel 17:49–51 describes David's victory:

> *Then David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone; and he slung it and struck the Philistine in his forehead, so that the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the earth. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him.*
>
> *But there was no sword in the hand of David. Therefore David ran and stood over the Philistine, took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and cut off his head with it. And when the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.*

Two things overpowered the giant—the rock and the sword. Today the same two things will overpower the giant in your life: Jesus is the cornerstone and His Word is the sword.

> *For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 10:3–5

The world has discovered that you cannot negotiate with terrorists. Likewise, you cannot negotiate with demonic spirits. So when that giant of financial problems, sickness and disease, or anything else that comes against you stands in your path, remember that the giant is only a physical representation of a spiritual source. Use the weapons supplied by the Father through His Son. (Eph. 6:10–18.)

# DEPRESSION

## Prescription for a Recovery

When you feel depressed and discouraged and the pressures make you feel like

giving up, take the following medicine daily and you will recover.

1) Return to God's camp. (I didn't say religion.)

Get into the Word. Get into fellowship. Get into worship (corporate and private). Get into sowing. Hang around with godly people. This problem will require time to heal, so you must not find a "fast-food" church. You must find one that will give you a five-course meal.

2) You must recognize where the attack is coming from.

Your enemy is not your relative or friend. It's not your neighbor, boss, or co-workers. It's the devil.

3) Speak the promise instead of the problem.

Find out what God's Word says about your situation. Cause the words to come out of your mouth to agree with God's promise. When you agree with God and speak His Word, fear will flee and faith will flare up.

4) Act on what you speak.

If you confess with your mouth and do not believe in your heart, it will profit you nothing immediately. But you must continue to confess anyway. Meditate on His Word and act on it.

5) Take authority.

Not only must you speak to the situation, but also you must speak to things in your own life. Command unforgiveness to go. Command hatred to go. Remember, you are more than a conqueror. (Rom. 8:37.) So, get up, take command, and move in authority and obedience.

6) Thank God in advance.

You must thank God for having received your solution before you see it. According to the Word, faith believes without seeing. By believing without seeing, we see the manifestation. (Heb. 11:1.)

7) Decide to move forward and not look back.

As you break free from the bondage of depression, make a conscious decision to stay free. Keep your godly associations. Stay in the Word. Keep your confessions right and be determined that nothing whatsoever will distract you from pressing toward your goal of freedom.

8) Choose to soar above the darkness.

Thunderstorms, wind, and darkness are below the clouds. Choose to soar above the problems of life and not allow yourself to descend into the darkness and be destroyed by the storm.

*Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*

John 8:31,32

## Building Yourself Up

Last week I counseled with a lady who was depressed. She had a best friend who was a good Christian and they always spent time together. When one of them would get down and depressed, the other one would build her up. It seemed that they were always there for each other—but then the friend moved away. The lady asked me this question: "How can I be built up now that my friend is gone? Who will lift my spirits now?"

This lady is not alone. Many of us, in fact, most of us, have a need to be built up. We need someone to put their arm on our shoulder and say, "I understand." Yet the reality of the situation is that someone is not always there to help us. There are times when we will be alone. So, what about those times? What do we do then?

In 1 Samuel 30, King David and his men came to Ziklag. When they got there, they discovered that the Amalekites had invaded the city and burned it to the ground. Not only was the city burned, but the Amalekites had taken everyone who lived in the city captive. They had taken them away as prisoners.

When David and his men saw that the city was destroyed, they were, of course, discouraged. But that wasn't the most discouraging news. All of their wives, their sons, and daughters had been taken captive.

Needless to say, David and all of his men were very upset. The Bible says in 1 Samuel 30:4 that they cried until they had no power left to cry.

Then, just when it looked like it couldn't get any worse, it did. The men became disenchanted with David. Even his trusted soldiers were so grieved that they planned to stone David to death.

At that all-time low, David did something that may have seemed out of place to everyone else, but it was exactly the right thing to do. Verse 6 says that King David—even though his wives and children had been kidnapped, all of his soldiers wanted to assassinate him, and it looked like all was lost—encouraged himself in the Lord.

That was the turning point. When David encouraged himself in the Lord, he gained supernatural wisdom and guidance. The results were that "David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away, and David rescued his two

wives" (v. 18).

Everything that had been taken was restored. All the hurt and despair, all the depression and grief, it was totally gone. Remember, the recovery started when David encouraged himself in the Lord.

You may say, "Well, that's a good story, but how can I encourage myself? When I'm down and alone, how do I encourage myself in the Lord?"

The answer is in the Word of God:

> *But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep [yourself] in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.*
>
> Jude 1:20,21

Here, we are not only told to build ourselves up, but we are told how to build ourselves up. We must pray in the Spirit.

In 1 Corinthians 14:15, Paul said that he prayed with understanding and he prayed in the Spirit. As Christians, we must take full advantage of praying in the Spirit. When we are down and need a friend, get alone with God. Pray in understanding and pray in the Spirit. According to God's Word, you will be built up because He is the life-giver, the one who quickens us, revitalizing our heart and soul (our mind, will, and emotions) and makes us feel alive again. (John 6:63.)

## What You Say Can Hurt You

If the devil can get you depressed, he can affect every area of your life. He can affect your physical body. He can affect your ability to be a witness to that neighbor or to that person on the job. He can even affect your ability to pray for somebody else's healing.

The devil wants to destroy you. He wants to destroy the church and he wants to destroy your ministry. He is the destroyer, but many times his destruction and total devastation of your life begins with the subtleness of disappointment.

Remember the time when the Hebrews sent the twelve spies out into the Promised Land? (Num. 13.) When the spies came back, two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, had a good report. They said, "Hey, we can do what God says. We can go into the Promised Land. We can conquer. Let's go." Ten of the spies came back with a bad report. They said, "The land looks pretty good, but there are giants in there. We are like grasshoppers to them. They are going to stomp us. There is no way we can go in and take that land." The people wanted a good report, but they didn't get one.

Have you ever gone to a doctor and you wanted a good report? Have you ever applied for a job and you wanted a good report from the company? Have you ever asked somebody out on a date and you wanted a good report? Were you waiting for a yes, and the report returned with a no? Everyone wants a good report.

How did the Hebrews react when they heard the bad report about the giants? Most likely at first, they were just a little disappointed. They wanted a good report. At that point they could have taken that small disappointment and turned it around and spoken faith and moved right on in to the Promised Land. They could have said, “That report disappoints me, but I am not going to listen to that report. I’m going to listen to what God said instead of what they said. I will not be disappointed.”

Look at what the Scripture says in Romans 5:5: “Hope does not disappoint.” So if the people had hope when they heard the disappointing report, they could have said, “Wait a minute. I have hope. Hope doesn’t disappoint. I am not disappointed. Yes, they gave a bad report and it took me back a little bit, but nevertheless, I’ve got hope. Let’s go into the Promised Land!” Then they could have gone in. However, they tried to handle the disappointment themselves.

How do you handle disappointment yourself? A lot of people sit down and talk it out. The Scripture says that’s what they did. They went back to their tents and they talked. Then, no longer was there just disappointment. It developed into discouragement. The more they talked, the more discouraged they became. The more they got discouraged, the more they grumbled. They grumbled and murmured and eventually God got angry because of their words. Every one of the people who grumbled and complained about the disappointing news they heard died in the wilderness. Not a single one of them went into the Promised Land.

If we allow disappointment to fester and develop into discouragement and then speak the discouragement, it displeases God because we are not in faith (remember Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it’s impossible to please Him). The reason it displeases God is that He loves us and wants to bless us, but the devil wants to destroy us. When we get into doubt and unbelief, it can block or hinder us from receiving all that God has for us and it opens us up to the enemy’s attacks and destruction. And that is just what Satan wants.

When a disappointment comes along, it may seem like a little thing, like not being able to find our keys. We think we can handle something like that. We need to take every single disappointment in life, no matter how small or how big

it is, and turn right around and put the Word of God on it.

Don’t let disappointment develop into discouragement. Instead, go to the throne of grace and receive grace from the Father to turn your disappointment into joy and victory. (Heb . 4:16.)

# DISAPPOINTMENT

## Dealing with Disappointment

Let’s find out what God says about one of the most dramatic problems in the church today—disappointment.

Disappointment is something that most people feel is not really a problem because they feel they can easily handle it. If the devil can convince you that a disappointment is not really a problem, then you will not deal with it. Or if he puts something in your life that you feel you can handle on your own, you probably won’t go to the Father with it, or you won’t get into the Word of God to find out what the Scripture says about it. You’ll try to handle it in the flesh. When you handle it in the flesh, the solution is only temporary, not permanent.

In the Word, God gives us the solution for solving our problems. But in the world, rarely do we hear about a problem being resolved. In the world, we hear about cover up. When people join alcoholic programs, many times they are told, “You need to understand this. You are an alcoholic. You will always be an alcoholic. You will have to deal with it the rest of your life.” That is the way the world handles it. But in Christ, you don’t have to be an alcoholic your whole life. You can be delivered from it.

Most people, and even many Christians, try to handle the disappointments of life themselves. It might be a birthday present you hoped for but didn’t get, not receiving recognition for something you did, hoping a certain cute boy or girl would notice you, but instead you felt ignored. How would you handle those disappointments in the flesh? You probably would say to yourself, “Snap out of it, Jack. Get over it! Get a life,” and that would be fine—except all of those disappointments pack down inside of you.

The apostle Paul said in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Jesus gave us access to the spiritual things that will solve our problems. Most Christians don’t realize the power that is available to them to solve even the smallest of problems.

That power is God’s grace.

The grace of God has been described as His ability in us that enables us to do what we can't do on our own. Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." When large or small disappointments come into your life, as a Christian you have the right to go boldly before the Father and ask for His grace. His grace, applied to your disappointment, will cause it to dissipate instead of building up inside of you.

## Living Above Regret

The world is full of people who live their lives wondering what might have been, what could have been, or what should have been had they only made different choices all those years ago.

Too often when people are young, they lack the wisdom to make the hard choices that can benefit their future. Many times the young make choices based on the feelings of the moment, or are forced into choices because of peer pressure or parents. Little do they know that decades later they will relive those moments of choice and wonder what could have been, what would have been, what should have been.

The Word of God tells us that we are not to look back, but to stay focused on what lies ahead. Athletes are trained to not look back, but to keep their eyes on the finish line. Why? Because looking back will slow you down and cause you to focus on where you've been instead of where you are going.

Sometimes the past actually does contain unresolved issues. The knowledge of broken lives and broken hearts as a result of our bad decisions can sometimes become overwhelming, and the temptation to go back in time can be very strong. But almost always, looking back results in even more broken hearts and the pain is multiplied.

So the answer is actually quite simple. We must somehow resolve the regret and get rid of the guilt. But we can't do this on our own. We need a strength beyond what is natural and that strength only comes from the power contained in the grace of God.

If you are experiencing regret, first, you must make the hard decision to not go back. You must recognize that things wouldn't be the same, even if you could go back, because the years have changed circumstances and the people involved. Secondly, you must come to the realization that you are not a teenager anymore, and makeup or motorcycles will not change that.

Now don't take me wrong. I am not saying that you can't have old friends and

that you can't resolve old issues. You can. But resolution involves love and forgiveness. Regret involves guilt and pain.

God's plan is simple. Forgive yourself, walk in love, and press forward for the good things that God has ahead for you.

Some people have lived with regret for so many years that it has become a part of them. Their personalities have developed and been shaped by the haunting memories of the past. But, as you look forward toward the freshness that God has for you and you understand the concept that God saves the best for last (John 2:1–11), then peace will come into your life and regret will be gone—at last.

> *I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*
>
> Philippians 3:12–14

> *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*
>
> Philippians 4:13

# DISCIPLINE

## You Can Control Your Thoughts

A man came into my office one day and told me of a problem he was having. He was married and had two children. He attended a local church and was, in fact, quite active in it. However, he had a problem that had plagued him for years. He said that every time he saw a woman, he would have lustful thoughts about her. Then he would feel guilty and repent.

This "repentance" would only last a short while and then the problem would reoccur and he would lust again. He would repent again and so the cycle continued. He asked what he should do and I gave him this deep theological answer: "Just don't think those thoughts."

That man stared at me with a blank look on his face as though he thought I didn't understand what he had said. He told me his problem again and I gave him the same answer—"Just don't think those thoughts." It may sound simplistic, but it's true. You don't have to think about anything you don't want to think about!

When I told the man this, he responded. "But you just don't understand. I can't control my thoughts. I can't help what I think."

This man was a Christian, but sadly he didn't know God's Word and because of that he was being destroyed. In Hosea 4:6 God said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." Sometimes people say, "What you don't know won't hurt you." In the natural physical world in which we live, that may sometimes be true, but in the spirit realm, what you don't know will hurt you. Ignorance is no excuse.

Well, ignorance was this man's problem. He did not know that he could control his mind. Since he didn't know he could control his mind, he didn't believe he could control it, so he didn't. If we will not control our own thoughts, we leave our minds open to the control of the spirit world and that can be deadly.

Satan is waiting for the opportunity to control your thoughts. If you relinquish control of your mind, he will, through his deception, gradually move you into wrong thinking. Wrong thinking leads to wrong actions. Believe the truth and not the lie. God's Word says you can control your thoughts.

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

God is a good God and not cruel. He does not command us to do something we do not have the ability to do. So, since He told us to take control of our thoughts, we must be able to control our thoughts. That's only logical.

In 2 Corinthians 10:5, we are told to "bring every thought into captivity." Once again, if it were impossible to control our thoughts, God wouldn't command us to do it.

So, when evil thoughts of lust, greed, envy, or strife come into your mind, the Bible says to take them captive—and the good news is you can! Don't dwell on evil. Stay far from it! But when temptation comes and corrupt thoughts try to enter your mind, take them captive and cast them down!

Remember, James 4:7 says, "Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

# DISCOURAGEMENT

## Defeating Discouragement

Have you ever been discouraged? I mean really discouraged. So discouraged that

you felt like giving up? Are you discouraged today? Do you feel like giving up right now? If you answered yes, I have good news for you. You do not have to be discouraged anymore, because God has a plan in His Word, the Holy Bible, that tells us how to defeat discouragement.

Discouragement is a combination of fear, depression, and a lack of hope. We could almost call it anti-faith. Discouragement is not from God and He does not want us to have it. When we are discouraged, we do not function in the spirit realm the way God wants us to. When we are discouraged, it becomes difficult to hear God and easier to listen to the discouraging words of the world.

The world is full of negative reports. It seems that everywhere we go there is someone telling us, “You won’t make it,” “You can’t win,” “God doesn’t want to heal you,” “Faith doesn’t work,” and so on. The world does not want us to make it, but here’s the good news—God does!

God’s words are positive. God’s words are full of faith. For instance, His Word says in Psalm 103:3 that He heals all our diseases and in Psalm 34:19 it says, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.” And in Romans 8:28, God’s Word says, “All things work together for good to those who love God.”

So, whose report will you believe? Will you go with the world and believe that all is lost? Or will you go with God and let Him fight your battles for you?

Be encouraged. God does not lie. Believe His Word and act on it. Then discouragement will flee.

# DISTRACTIONS

## Take Time for Jesus

One day I was cleaning the garage when I remembered I needed to put the hose away in the yard. While I was unhooking the hose from the faucet, I remembered a call I had received and I had told the lady I would get a book to her in the mail that day. So, I put down the hose and went in the house to get her address off of the computer when I noticed some books on the dining room table. I couldn’t just leave them lying there, so while the computer was booting up, I started to put away the books.

Before I finished with the books, the phone rang and I was distracted again. At the end of the day I still had a cluttered garage, letters to be answered, books on the floor, and a half rolled up hose in the yard. I was frustrated because nothing

was accomplished. It seemed that every time I started to focus on a job, I got distracted.

It was at that point that the Holy Spirit brought something to my remembrance. In Luke 10, Jesus went to visit Martha and Mary. The Bible says that Mary sat at the feet of Jesus while Martha was distracted by all the preparation and serving she had to do. When Martha complained to Jesus about her sister who was sitting at His feet and appeared to Martha to be doing nothing, Jesus said, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things" (v. 41).

It's sad to say, but a lot of Christians are like Martha. They are worried and troubled, distracted by the chores and cares of life—so distracted that they work all around Jesus doing all types of works. But sadly, many times they are distracted by the works to such a degree that Jesus goes unnoticed.

Distraction is a major tool used by Satan. If he can only distract us for a short period of time, he can destroy a Christian witness that it has taken years to build. If he can distract the minister for just a little while, he can destroy a ministry. Many great men and women of God have fallen into ruin because of a moment of distraction.

How does Satan distract the Christian? Well, actually it's usually pretty easy. He covers a lie with the appearance of truth and gets the distracted Christian to bite it. And when he sets the hook, he's relentless and merciless.

A minister I had known for many years recently took his life. In a moment of distraction he believed the enemy's lie. All it took was just a moment and then it was too late.

Why am I telling you this? So you will understand one of the methods of the evil one and realize the importance of staying focused daily on Jesus. If we place our focus on Jesus, we will not be distracted and destroyed. Now, I didn't say that we should be focused on our church, our ministry, our pastor, or our denomination. We must be focused on Jesus. Sometimes it's so easy to get caught up on church things that we leave out Jesus.

Martha was going about the duties of preparing a meal for Jesus. That's not bad. It was good for her to prepare a meal for Jesus. However, she became more focused on the making of the meal than on who the meal was for.

The point is this, as Christians we need to keep our eyes straight ahead. Don't get distracted from Jesus. Take the time to sit at His feet.[10]

## Spirit-Led Distractions

Last week, I was trying to write a radio program when the phone kept ringing.

After about the third disturbance, I began to get a little irritated. No, I didn't throw a fit or anything, but I did lean back in my chair, look away from my computer screen, and wonder what it would be like to have no distractions. Wouldn't it be wonderful, I thought, to do something without anyone bothering me or slowing me down? After all, I was doing the radio program for God, right?

Just a few minutes later, I was reading in the book of Luke where Jesus ran into the same situation. Then, I realized my mistake. I needed to deal with things the way Jesus did. In Luke 8, Jesus was approached by a ruler of the synagogue named Jairus. Jairus fell down in front of Jesus and begged Him to go to his house and heal his daughter. His little girl was 12 years old and according to Jairus, she was about to die.

Whenever Jesus was asked for healing, He always agreed, and this time was no different. Jesus headed toward the house of Jairus to help his young daughter. (v. 42.)

As Jesus and Jairus traveled, the crowds pressed in. Jesus was surrounded with people and from within the crowd, a woman reached out and touched the hem of His garment. When she did this, she was immediately healed of a blood condition she'd had for twelve years and Jesus said, "Who touched Me?" (v. 45).

Peter was amazed that Jesus would ask who touched Him because there were people pressing in from all directions. So he asked Jesus, "What do you mean, who touched You?"

Jesus said, "Somebody touched Me, for I perceived power going out from Me"(v. 46). Then He turned to the woman who touched Him and said, "Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace."

While He was still talking to her, someone came from the ruler of the synagogue's house and said. "Don't bother the teacher. He doesn't need to come. Your daughter is dead."

When Jesus heard these words, He said, "Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well" (v. 50). Then He continued on with Jairus to his house.

When they got there, Jesus spoke positive words of faith to the parents and the mourners. He said, "Do not weep; she is not dead, but sleeping" (v. 52). When He said this, the mourners ridiculed Him. They thought He was crazy. Of course, Jesus walked by faith and not by sight so He was not moved by the way things looked. (2 Cor. 5:7.)

Then Jesus put all the doubters and unbelievers outside and went back in alone. He took the girl by the hand and said, "Little girl, arise" (v. 54). She got up

immediately and Jesus asked her parents to give her something to eat. Needless to say, everyone was astonished.

Now, here's the point of this. When Jesus was traveling to the ruler's house, He didn't consider the things happening to Him along the way as distractions. He considered them opportunities to minister. The woman who was healed along the way was worth the time to Jesus.

We need to be like Jesus. When we have a project, even one that we feel God is calling us to do, and something slows us down, we must be led by the Holy Spirit. Every distraction may not be Satan. It may be an opportunity to minister.

# DIVISION

## Socialized Immaturity

> *Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 1:10

There should be no division within the church. As Christians, we should gather together and worship God in the house of God with purity and oneness of heart. Regardless of financial standing, vocation, race, or age, the church must be united.

Satan's goal is to divide the house of God. He will use any method he can. He will try to divide the rich from the poor, the men from the women, the youth from the adults, and people from different racial and cultural backgrounds. As Christians, we must take a stand. We must not allow the enemy to divide the church.

For example, in the Bible there were three social age groups—babies, children, and adults. The young boys did not become teenagers when they turned 13, they became men. Most of the disciples of Jesus were in their teens when Jesus called them. Timothy was the pastor of the church in Jerusalem at the age of 17. Although he was young, he was a man and he was mature. He was no longer a baby, nor was he a child, but he stood as a man of God and as an overseer of God's house.

The apostle Paul said it this way: "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away

childish things" (1 Cor. 13:11). Paul didn't say he became a teenager, he didn't say he became a youth. He became a man.

I regularly speak at ministers' conferences and it seems that one question keeps coming to the surface: "Why is it so difficult to get younger people involved in the church?" Or pastors ask, "How can we change our services to make them attractive to young people?"

Actually, we are dealing with two issues here. The first issue is what I call "socialized immaturity." Our modern society has made it socially acceptable to be immature for as long as you can get away with it. Remember, in the Bible there are babies, children, and adults. In modern society, however, we have created a fourth group. We now have babies, children, youth, and adults.

The youth culture extends into middle age! It's not uncommon for me to meet with men in their thirties, forties, and fifties who are still trying to figure out what they want to be when they grow up. Toys, games, pleasures of the world, and laziness have been infused into our young people and it has been carried over into the church.

The second issue is that today's church is desperately trying to appeal to this new group. The youth feel that they must be entertained, tantalized, and mesmerized by high tech visually enticing services. The church is trying to compete with the world for the souls of our young people. But the more the church tries to compete with and be like the world, the more irrelevant the church becomes.

The world is not looking for what it already has. The world is looking for a way of escape from the bondage of sin. Deep in their hearts they are hoping that the church is the answer. However, when they come to the church and find the church trying to imitate them, they lose hope. All the while, the church tries to become more extreme. It is a vicious cycle of one-upmanship. This is a battle the church can't win because they are using the tools of the world instead of the Word.

Of course, we are to be sensitive to the needs of people and the visitors should feel comfortable and at peace in the house of God. However, the church should be an assembly of those who believe. The church should be dramatically different than the world.

Some churches and denominations have gone to the other extreme and have become so liturgical and solemn that they actually exclude and intimidate and make Christianity seem like a form of elitism. There is a ditch on each side of the road. One ditch excludes everyone and makes the rules so stringent that it's almost impossible to enter in. The other ditch is so oversensitive that almost

everything is accepted in order to not offend anyone.

There must be balance in the church and that balance is the Word of God being taught by ministers of God in a reverent house where the Holy Spirit is drawing in people. In that atmosphere souls will be saved, lives will be changed, bodies will be healed, marriages restored, and families of all ages will enjoy worshiping God together.

The role of ministers should not be to take the problems of the people to God. Instead, their duty is to spend time seeking God and then take His Word to the people.

As the new church was being formed, the apostle Peter said there was a big decision that needed to be made: are we going to be pleasers of men, or are we going to be pleasers of God? (Gal. 1:10.) Don't take me wrong. I am not against contemporary worship services, but remember this—flashing lights, smoke machines, and 125 decibel music can get people excited for the moment, but only a manifestation of the glory of God and a move of the Holy Spirit will change people permanently.

# DOUBT

## Doubt Is More than Just Not Believing

What is doubt? The answer might surprise you. Doubt is not just not believing; doubt is not believing all the time.

In James 1:6, we are told that if we ask God for something, we must ask Him in faith without any doubt because the one "who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind." Verse 7 goes on to say that the man who doubts should not expect that he would receive anything from the Lord. Since doubting can keep us from receiving from God, it's imperative that we know exactly what the Bible is talking about when it refers to doubt in this passage. We know that the reference is to wavering11 and a divided way of thinking because James refers to waves being tossed by the wind and double-mindedness. But what does it mean to be double-minded?

In my years of ministry, I have seen people look as though they are standing in great faith while at church on Sunday. Yet when the first phone call arrives on Monday, they are not so sure about God's promise. Then again, Monday evening while shopping, they by chance run into a church member who encourages them in the Word and once again, they appear strong in faith. But that night as they

watch secular television, doubt creeps in and they go to bed worrying, only to wake up encouraged during their morning devotions. Then they lose all faith while having coffee with their unbelieving neighbor who tells them just how things look. This cycle continues until Sunday when they appear strong in faith again while at church.

The truth is they spent their week like the waves of the sea, tossed back and forth between believing and doubting. The Word calls this being double-minded and says that this person is unstable in all of his or her ways.

Sadly, these are the people who usually can't understand why God hasn't answered their prayers because they are "in faith" every time they go to church, they've had the elders lay hands on them and pray for them, and they make great faith statements. The problem is they are not consistent.

Faith is consistent. Faith does not waver. Faith does not give up. People of faith guard themselves against sources of doubt. If your faith is young and immature, and you want your faith to grow, the last thing you should do is associate with the New-Age person who lives in your neighborhood. You must guard your eye-gates and ear-gates when watching TV. You must monitor what you read. Remember, God always responds to faith and He never responds to doubt or unbelief—and participating in those kinds of things causes doubt and unbelief to grow in us.

> *He who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*
>
> James 1:6–8

While it is true that God does not respond to doubt, it is also true that the enemy constantly attacks all of us with doubting thoughts. We must remember that above all, God is a good God and He loves us. His goal is for us to be blessed and His grace is always with us to empower us and overcome the attacks of the enemy. As soon as a doubt arises, the enemy will add to it guilt and condemnation to make us feel unworthy. But here is the good news: The grace of God outperforms and overpowers the fears and doubts from the enemy. And when we turn to God, the assurance of His promise removes all doubt.

## Doubt and Faith Cannot Coexist

Have you ever prayed and stayed "in faith" for something and it seemed like nothing happened?

When Jesus spoke, things happened instantly. Why did Jesus' faith work

instantly, but sometimes it seems like ours doesn't?

Often we fail to take the time necessary to get the revelation knowledge needed to obtain a word from God. We must have the Word of God living in our hearts in order to accomplish our desires and needs.

Jesus put a great emphasis on words. Every time He did something, He spoke. So what's the big difference between Jesus and us? Granted, Jesus was, is, and always will be the Son of God. However, when Jesus was here on earth, He operated with the same power that you and I have access to—He operated under the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit. Jesus made it very clear: "Anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works" (John 14:12 nlt).

Jesus had the living rhema word inside of Him. He told us in Scripture that He never said or did anything unless the Father spoke it to Him first. (John 8:28; 14:24; 5:19). Jesus said, "The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

When we hear the Word of God, it must become established in our hearts. Logos is the written Word of God[12] and rhema is the living, spoken Word of God.[13] The Word changes from logos to rhema in our heart, not our mind.

To read and know about the Word is logos. But when that Scripture suddenly comes alive to us and we know it beyond any shadow of doubt, then it becomes rhema. When logos becomes rhema, then we have faith, and the words we speak will not be empty words; they will be words of faith and will accomplish the thing they are sent to do. (Isa. 55: 11.) Romans 10:17 tells us that faith comes from rhema word.

God does not respond to an echo. He does not respond to a parakeet. God and His angels respond to the spoken Word of God that's alive, coming out of our mouth. (Ps. 103: 20.) God responds to faith, not intellect.

One reason we have problems making the Word come alive in our mouth is familiarity. We become so familiar with a scripture that we assume we know it when actually we don't.

We must speak the rhema Word of God from our heart and act on it in faith in order to have the Word of God produce results.

Here's an example of the difference between believing and being in faith. Years ago there was a man who crossed over a great waterfall on a cable that was attached to the bank on each side. To make it interesting, he pushed a wheelbarrow ahead of him on the cable. Belief would say, "He can do it!" Faith would get in the wheelbarrow.

We may mentally believe the Word of God and speak the Word of God, but when it comes time to really rely on it, we must get in that wheelbarrow.

Doubt and faith cannot coexist. Doubt will keep you from putting action to your belief and hinder your faith.

Remember, when the Word of God becomes rhema word in your heart, then it will accomplish what you send it to do!

> *For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.*
>
> Hebrews 4:2

# EMOTIONS

## I'm So Hurt

A few days ago I was driving down the highway with the top down in the Blue Flame, which is the name I lovingly gave to my blue Corvette, and I was really feeling cool. I turned on the radio to the oldies station in order to hear a song that actually had a melody. A commercial was just ending and the first words of the song from the fifties were "I'm so hurt."

The song continued to explain why the person was hurt and kept returning to the theme and the chorus "I'm so hurt." Something came up inside of me and made me want to reach into the radio, grab the singer, and say, "Get over it!"

Then the Holy Spirit began to teach me. When we say, "I'm so hurt" and we rehearse the problem that caused us to be hurt and continue to state, "I'm so hurt," we will continue to be hurt. Jesus said in Mark 11:23 that we have what we say. Our confession should not be, "I'm so hurt." Our confession should be, "I have been delivered from hurt by the blood of Jesus."A major problem in the church today is people living their lives with hidden hurts inside. These hurts are sealed up in nice little bags that cause us to look okay in public. However, when we open this baggage to our friends, it stinks!

Have you ever stopped to think that most people don't want to hear about your hurts? Yes, there are problems in our lives that can hurt us, but they can only hurt us if we receive the hurt. John 10:10 says that the thief is a destroyer. He wants to destroy us. He is relentless and he shows no mercy. If he can't destroy us with attacks from the outside, then he will attempt to destroy us from the inside. He does this by bringing hurts and offenses our way and tempting us to bring them

inside. That's done when we continue to mentally and verbally rehearse them instead of rehearsing the truth of God's Word about them. We can stop this cycle by not receiving these hurts and offenses into ourselves.

The choice is yours. Will you rehearse the hurt or will you confess the victory? What you say is what you'll get. Instead of saying, "I'm so hurt," say "I'm set free!"

Although we may correct our confession immediately, the hurt itself many times lingers on. But if we stay faithful to speak the truth, then God is faithful to heal our heart. It may take some time, but through the power of His grace, it will be accomplished.

# EMPOWERMENT

## How to Stop

*Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.*

James 4:17 nlt

Years ago, a young high school boy sat in my office. He was hurting. He had just returned from the doctor and was told that he had cancer in his mouth. Even though he was young, he had been chewing tobacco for years. He knew he should quit chewing, he wanted to quit chewing, but he did not quit chewing and developed cancer. Now he needed deliverance from that terrible illness.

While it is true that God is our Deliverer, He also empowers us with His grace and the power of the Holy Spirit so that we can implement the preventive maintenance necessary to avert destruction. (James 4:6 nlt.) Simply put, God could have empowered this young man to quit his cancer-causing habit so that the deadly disease never would have developed.

Sadly, the young man could not stop chewing on his own and he did not understand that God's help was available. In the same way that God can miraculously heal us, He can also miraculously deliver us from the habits that cause destruction.

Remember, in Hosea 4:6 God says that His people perish because of a lack of knowledge. It is a lack of knowledge of the principles of God that causes destruction in the lives of many Christians.

When I asked this young man specifically why he didn't quit using tobacco, he said, "I have prayed and prayed and prayed and asked God to take the tobacco away, but He just didn't do it." He was blaming God, but it wasn't God's fault.

The apostle Paul had a “thorn in the flesh.” He said that the thorn was a messenger, or angel, sent from Satan to torment him. He went on to say that he asked God three times to remove this thorn, and God didn’t do it. (2 Cor. 12:7–8.) Instead, God told Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you” (v. 9).To remove the thorn from our lives, God tells us the same thing He told Paul—His grace is sufficient for us. God can empower us with His power and His ability so that we (not He) can defeat the addictions of life. Even though it may seem like drugs, tobacco, pornography, overeating, or some other destructive habit has us by the throat, it is possible to be set free.

Make the decision to rebuke the enemy with the authority Jesus gave you. Stand on the Word that says that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you and you can overcome the thorn in your life.

Everything we receive must be received by faith. God’s Word is pregnant with promises of deliverance. When you find them, believe in your heart they are personally for you, receive God’s empowerment (grace), and you will discover that the Word is true—you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.

Scripture References:

Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:7–9)

Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” (Mark 9:23)

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (Phil. 4:13)

# ENCOURAGEMENT

## Pray for Someone Else

Have you ever gone to church or to a friend, and you were so down that you felt like you just didn’t have much to give? And then when you left, you even had less? Well, this shouldn’t be. We are to encourage one another and build each other up. (1 Thess. 5:11; 1 Peter 4:8–10.) We are not to tear each other down with our words. Likewise, we are not to abandon brothers and sisters in the Lord who need help.

It has been said that the Christian army is the only army that kills its wounded.

This sounds harsh, but many times it is true. Often when a Christian falls into trouble or sin, we can't wait to get on the phone and start calling around to have others "pray." I wonder sometimes what we enjoy the most—the calling or the praying. Ask yourself this question: Do I pray first or call first and pray later?

A lady once told me that everyone in her church thought she was a great prayer warrior. They trusted her with their problems and secrets because they knew she would pray. She said the reality of the situation was that she stayed so busy talking to people about their problems and calling others to pray about the problems that she rarely prayed herself. One day she realized that instead of being a person of prayer, she had slowly turned into a person of gossip.

Satan is a deceiver and the king of deception. Sometimes he can get us so wrapped up in the process of doing good that the process becomes more important than the purpose.

Today I want to encourage you. You may have problems in your life. God's promise does not say there will be no mountains (problems) in our path. His promise gives us the authority to remove the mountains as we encounter them. (Mark 11:23.)

Just because things look like they are going wrong in your life, it doesn't mean you are not in the will of God or that you are a bad person and have done something drastically wrong. The Bible says, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers [us] out of them all" (Ps. 34:19). So don't accept the guilt that some people may try to put on you. Do not walk by what you see, but walk according to what God has promised. Remember, "We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7).

Let me also encourage you to build up someone else today. Pray for another person. If you know of someone who is having financial problems, pray for them. If you know of someone who is sick, pray for their healing. If you know of someone who needs their family to be healed, pray for them. Don't condemn them. Don't spread rumors. Pray for them. Be an encourager. Don't bring others down. Lift them up.

## God Never Lies

Jesus said in Matthew 5:37, "Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one." That's talking about not saying things we don't mean and manipulating our words to get our own way. (msg.) We must be definitive in what we say. However, we must be sure that what we say is truth. God takes positive words and connects them with positive statements of truth. For example, He said:

- I will never leave you nor forsake you (Heb. 13:5).
- Lo, I am with you always (Matt. 28:20).
- Thus we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:17).
- Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you (1 Peter 3:15).
- Love never fails (1 Cor. 13:8).
- He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst (John 6:35).

So, when the devil comes against you using the classic words of always and never and he says things like, "You will never make it. You always fail and you always will. You will never reach your goal," then look in God's Word at how He uses the words always and never and say what He says.

Remember, God never lies and always tells the truth. The devil always lies and never tells the truth.

## The Power of Encouraging Words

The other day I was watching a western movie on TV. In one scene, the general store in town had just burned to the ground and the lady who owned it had lost everything she owned. She was standing in the middle of the burned-out shell of a building when one of the townspeople walked by to give her a word of encouragement.

He said, "I knew a lady in Topeka, Kansas, who had the same thing happen to her. Her store burned down and she lost everything. She never recovered. Eventually, she went to the poor house and later killed herself. She just couldn't take it anymore. Well, we'll be prayin' for ya."

Needless to say, the encouraging words of the passerby did not help the lady in distress. Obviously, the encouraging words were not really encouraging. They were, in fact, filled with fear, doubt, and unbelief.

Even though this was just a movie, there's a point to be made. We as Christians need to keep our words full of faith and the promises of God. When a friend has a disaster happen in his or her life, we must speak the promises of God and not keep confessing the problem.

God is a faith God and He releases His faith in words. In the beginning, God spoke and the universes was formed. In Genesis 1:3, He spoke "Let there be

light," and there was light. And throughout the creation until now, God has spoken and whatever He spoke came to pass. Much later, Jesus spoke about the power of our words:

> *"For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says."*
>
> Mark 11:23

When Jesus was here on the earth, the Bible tells us that He spoke to the winds and sea and they obeyed Him. (Mark 4:39.)

He didn't act fearful. He didn't panic. He simply spoke to the wind and sea and said, "Be still!" He believed what He said would come to pass. He knew His authority and He spoke in faith. And what He said—happened.

We're told in Ephesians 5:1 to be imitators of God as little children imitate their parents. Let's make Jesus our example. We are to live as He lived. He walked in faith and we are to walk in faith.

Proverbs 18:21 tells us that death and life are in the power of the tongue. What does that mean anyway? Well, it's this way. Words, our words, are containers. They can contain faith or they can contain doubt. What we say today can affect the world for years to come. Our words are important.

As Christians, we are to make our words reflect what God said in His Word instead of what we see with our natural eyes. When we see disaster, when there is a problem in our life or in the life of a friend, we should do as the Scripture says. We must speak encouraging words of faith instead of doubt and despair. In other words, see things as they should be.

Proverbs 6:2 says, "We are snared by the words of our mouth and we are taken by the words of our mouth." So remember, as a Christian, our words must reflect the words of God, our Father. When God speaks, it is always faith. Doubt and unbelief are not in His vocabulary. They shouldn't be in ours either.

## Your Words Are Multidimensional

> *Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*
>
> Hebrews 3:12,13

On the surface this verse may seem complicated, but the theme is really quite simple. This is another scripture telling us that we who are believers need to

encourage each other daily in order to keep unbelief out of the church. It is our duty to encourage one another.

When I was in high school, several of my friends had a little game that we would play from time to time. We would randomly pick out some student and convince this student that he or she was sick. Here is how we did it. Each of us would, one by one, make comments to the chosen student in passing.

For example, as one of us would meet the chosen victim in the hall we made comments such as, “Are you feeling okay today? You look a little pale. Are you feeling good?” Usually within hours the victim had gone to the clinic and gone home, thoroughly convinced he or she was sick. We didn’t realize the spiritual principles behind what we were doing, but we knew it worked. (I later realized this was a very mean thing to do.)

We know there is power in the spoken word. Many scriptures tell us that what we say in the natural realm, what we say with our mouths, has great impact in the spiritual realm. But did you know your words also have great impact in the physical realm? That’s right! Not only do our words carry power into the spirit world, but they make a difference right here on earth.

The opening passage here, Hebrews 3:12–13, tells us that we must encourage one another in order that there will not be an “evil heart of unbelief” within us. We must lift each other up and encourage one another in order to combat doubt. What is the best way to combat doubt? The answer is through speaking the encouraging promises of God instead of the discouraging problems all around us.

We must be encouragers daily. When we see a Christian (or anyone else) who is down, we should give an encouraging word. Home on the range shouldn’t be the only place where there’s never heard a discouraging word.[14] Our churches and homes should be that way also.

One of the main reasons a person might have doubt is from a lack of knowledge of the Word of God. That’s why our encouraging words must be Bible based. When I say we should encourage one another, I am not saying we are to lie or try to deceive ourselves. I’m not talking about empty flattery. But what I am saying is we must speak God’s Word daily to each other. Whether we see the promise or not, we must speak the promise. Speaking the promise is a key ingredient in faith.

Doubt feeds on ignorance. When you don’t know God’s Word or His will, you will feed your doubt. And that is the opposite of what God told us to do. He said we were to increase our faith, not our doubt. That’s why we are to encourage one

another with the Word of God. The Word contains faith.

Too often Christians will speak what they see instead of what the Word says. That shouldn't be. We are not of this world, but we are now living in it. We will always see the negative. That's why we are told in God's Word to walk by faith and not by what we see.

So when we get together, let's do as the Bible says. Let's speak the Word and we will be encouraged and faith will grow.

# ENDURANCE

## Walk in the New Season

We should be on alert, because something is about to happen. Jesus will return with the saints of God who have gone to heaven before us and call forth the bodies of the living and the dead who are the Church. (1 Thess. 4:14–15.) We are in the final moments before being snatched away. This is not the time to give up or lose heart.

The apostle Paul said, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 Cor. 13:11). Paul was not saying that it was sinful to be a child or that there was anything wrong with being a child. Children are children. Children are young and think like children, act like children, and talk like children. But there is a time when a person is no longer a child. At that time, wisdom would say put away the childish things and walk in the new season.

For 1,900 years, the Church existed in an era looking toward the end of days. For 1,900 years, the earthly nation of Israel did not exist. The biblical prophecies of the future said that it would, but it didn't. And so during these 1,900 years, the great men and women of God who were called to proclaim the Word of God, spoke of a future—a future when Israel would become a nation and a time when that generation would not pass away until all of the prophecy of the end of days had taken place.

On May 15, 1948, a miracle took place. A nation that had not been a nation for 2,000 years, a nation that had no army, no land, no national currency, and no government came into existence in one day. That nation occupied the prophetic land that the prophets of old had predicted. The nation of Israel was reborn and the Church moved into a new era.

For centuries, the Church had taught about the time that was to come, but today

we are in that time. The fulfillment of prophecy is upon us. We are no longer children thinking about maturity, but we are now the mature Church preparing to be received into glory. It's time to build upon the basics we have learned. It's time to be mature. It's time for the Church to walk in the strength and power that was prophesied all those centuries ago: "That He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27).

If you are a born-again believer, you are the Church and you have a responsibility to walk in the full anointing, to stand in full faith, and to be the conduit through which God pours His miracle power into the earth by way of His Holy Spirit. The time of playing church is over. The Church has been in training for a long time; now is the season to walk in what we've been trained for.

Over the centuries, the Church has been preparing for this time, and recently the preparation has been intense. But now we must apply the knowledge and walk in the anointing and power we have been given. Only by walking in this strength will we be the glorious Church that the Lord is coming to get.

The games of childhood are behind us and the solemnness of our calling is at hand. As we press into this new time, each of us has the responsibility to speak God's Word in such a way that those who hear will have a life-changing experience. If someone needs salvation, counsel, or healing, Christians should be the instrument of deliverance.

The words we speak and the actions we take should be so led by the Holy Spirit that there will be no doubt that we represent the King of kings. (Rev. 17:14.) The pettiness of offense and unforgiveness should drop off. As the Church, we must not look back at past failures or even past accomplishments, but must place all our effort on preparation for the return of our Savior.

The enemy has increased his attack because he sees his end drawing near. Those of us who are the Church are the ones being attacked. As you well know, the mission statement of the enemy is to steal, kill, and destroy. (John 10:10.) But the enemy has no authority over us. His only weapon is his mouth and it only has power when we place our belief with his words.

So as we press into this new era, do not fear. Do not become discouraged and above all, do not quit now. We are only moments away from hearing the great shofar blow in the heavens and seeing the appearing of our Savior. (1 Cor. 15:52; Acts. 1:11.)

## Don't Give Up

Let me ask you a question. When you have a problem in your life, and you've done everything spiritually you know to do, what do you do then? When you have prayed and when you have made the confession of faith and it looks like nothing has changed, what do you do?

This question is often asked to those of us in the ministry. As a pastor of a growing church, this is a question that continually arises. So, what's the answer? What do we do when it seems like we've done all we can do and there is no manifestation of our deliverance?

This answer may seem simple, but here it is: Don't give up. When you know that you know that what you are believing for is God's will for you and promised in His Word, then do not quit doing what God has told you to do. Continue to believe His Word and continue to confess His promises in the face of what you see and what you feel.

Second Corinthians 5:7 says, "For we walk by faith, not by sight." As believers, it is disastrous to react on what we see, hear, or feel. Instead of reacting to the senses produced by the world, we must act according to the Word spoken by God. His Word brings deliverance and the words of the world bring destruction. When you feel like giving up, quit going by what you feel. Stand in faith and encourage yourself in what Jesus said: "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23).

Remember, you can do all things through Christ because He strengthens you to do the impossible. (Phil. 4:13.)

## Endure to the End

On September 21, 2009, I was watching the Kansas City Chiefs play the Oakland Raiders. Being raised in the Kansas City area and being a personal friend of Lamar Hunt, the founder of the Chiefs, I've always enjoyed watching the Chiefs play. For many years, Loretta and I would go to Arrowhead Stadium and watch the football game from the owner's suite while having lunch.

However, that day the Chiefs lost to the Raiders. Even though they were winning with less than two minutes to play, they somehow managed to squeak out a loss. As the clock ticked down to the final seconds and the Raiders were declared the victors, the words of Jesus rang in my head. Jesus said, "He who endures to the end shall be saved" (Mark 13:13).

The Chiefs played a good game that day. They were ahead. They had more points on the scoreboard than their opponents. The problem was they didn't endure to the end. It appeared that they quit playing before the game was over.

They lost. And to the victor go the spoils.

Life is much the same way. As Christians, we are in a race. We have been energized by the power of the Holy Spirit and given all of the tools for victory (the Word, the name of Jesus, the blood, and the weapons of our warfare mentioned in Ephesians 6, among others). In the Word of God we have the promises of God. He tells us that we are strong. In fact, the Word tells us that the energizing power inside of us is greater than any power the opponent may have. (1 John 4:4.) We are told that any weapon the enemy uses, any method he may try will fail because there is no weapon the enemy has that can prosper against us. (Isa. 54:17.)

We are told that if we love with the love of God, that this love will cover any fault or inadequacy that may develop within us. (1 Peter 4:8.) We are told that if we will walk in joy, that it will be our strength (Neh. 8:10) and when the enemy yells at us and tells us that it's impossible for us to win, we know that if we only will believe that all things are possible and we will see the manifested glory of God, which no one can defeat. (Mark 9:23.)

The key to all of this power, however, is simply this—we must continue and not quit. We must run and not grow weary of doing good. If we continue, we will know the truth and nothing can stop us. The only thing that stands in the way of our victory is if we believe the lie of the enemy that we cannot win and we make the wrong decision and quit.

We have placed before us life and death. The choice is ours and God tells us to choose life. (Deut. 30:19.) Another way of saying this would be that He has placed before us winning and losing and the only way we lose is if we decide to quit.

So be encouraged today. No one can make you lose. No one can steal your victory. No one can destroy you—as long as you make the choice to continue the race.

Scripture References:

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31–32)

Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. (Hebrews 12:1)

But one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13–14)

I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live. (Deuteronomy 30:19)

No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn. (Isaiah 54:17)

With God nothing will be impossible. (Luke 1:37)

He who endures to the end shall be saved. (Mark 13:13)

## Faith Always Wins

> *Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [who have borne testimony to the Truth], let us strip off and throw aside every encumbrance.*
>
> Hebrews 12:1 amp

What is an encumbrance? It is an unnecessary weight. If you are going to walk on the water, the last thing you need is weight. (Matt. 14:29.)

Hebrews 12:1 continues, saying, "And that sin which so readily, deftly and cleverly, clings to and entangles us" (amp). Notice it says "clings to and entangles." Not only do we have the encumbrance and the weight if we allow ourselves to get caught up in the things of the world, but also we have sin, which cleverly clings to and entangles us.

It's difficult to walk when you are entangled. Have you ever been entangled in something? Being all tied up and having extra weight is not a condition that a Christian should be in. Here's why:

Let us run with patient endurance and steady and active persistence the appointed course of the race that is set before us (Heb. 12:1 amp) .

Every one of us has a goal God has set before us. We should be headed toward that goal. We must be steady and have an active persistence and patient endurance to accomplish it.

I know a lot of people that endure, but they don't endure patiently. There is a difference. You can always tell somebody who is not enduring patiently, because they tell you how much they are enduring. Patience is peaceful. If you are patient, you will be at peace. If you are not at peace, you are not being patient.

The writer of Hebrews then wrote in verse 2,"Looking away[ from all that will distract]." We must keep our eyes on the finish line. In other words, we must stay focused on the goal.

> *Looking…to Jesus who is the Leader and the Source of our faith [giving the first incentive for our belief] and is also its Finisher [bringing it to maturity*

*and perfection]. He, for the joy [of obtaining the prize] that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising and ignoring the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Hebrews 12:2 amp

Jesus pressed in toward His goal and He was able to do it because He did not waver from looking at the prize that was before Him. He was not distracted. Sin equals weight. Anything that hinders you on the way toward your goal is sin. If God has placed a goal before you, if He's put a calling before you, anything that hinders you from obtaining that goal is sin because it is not of faith. The Scriptures tell us anything not of faith is sin. The only way to combat the encumbrance is to fight the fight of faith. (1 Tim. 6:12.)

Sometimes people get a little embarrassed about being a faith person, but we should never be embarrassed to be a faith person. In spite of all the things that have happened in the name of faith (that were not faith), our faith does not have to waiver.

The only person who loses when they are trying to press in is the one who quits pressing in. As long as you do not allow the weight to encumber you, you will win. As long as you do not allow yourself to get tangled up, you will win. As long as you don't get into a pity party because you think you are all by yourself, you will win. As long as you keep pressing in with faith, you will win!

Quitters always lose. Faith always wins!

# ESCHATOLOGY

## The Blueprint for the Last Days

Beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

2 Peter 3:8

This Scripture lets us know that God is not restricted by time the way mankind is. With God, one thousand years is as a day and one day is as a thousand years.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The Bible tells us that creation lasted six days and on the seventh day, God rested. (Gen. 1.) The six days of creation and the seventh day of rest is the blueprint for the timetable of man.

Four thousand years passed from the time God sent Adam and Eve out of the garden until the time Jesus came to the earth, we could say four days. (Gen.

3:23; Matt. 1:25; 2:1.) From the time Jesus resurrected and became the firstborn among many brethren until now is 2,000 years, or two days. (Rom. 8:29.) This is all based on the Scripture in 2 Peter 3:8.

According to all Bible prophecy, the return of Jesus is imminent. When He returns at the end of the sixth day, He will set up His kingdom and rule and reign on this earth for 1,000 years (one day), thus completing the seven-day timetable of mankind.[15]

You may or may not be aware that days five and six (which are the 2,000 years between the creation of the Church and the Rapture) are called the Church Age or the Age of Grace. That has been deemed the time between Jesus' first appearance on earth and His second coming. Everything that happened in the New Testament after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus took place in the same time framework of the creation timetable that you and I are living in. That means every healing, every miracle, every act of God and the Holy Spirit that has taken place after Jesus ascended can happen today in your life.

There are those who say that the power of God only worked in Bible times. They believe that everything recorded in the Bible is either history or future. This makes a very convenient excuse and a comfortable place for those who do not want the responsibility of God's power. Yet Jesus made several statements in the New Testament that tell us what we are able to have and do through Him.

- He gave authority over all the power of the enemy to those who follow Him. (Luke 9:1.)
- Jesus said that those who believe would have signs following them and that in His name they would cast out demons and that they would speak with new tongues. (Mark 16:17.)
- He went on to say that they would lay hands on the sick and that they would recover. (Mark 16:18.)

Does it make sense that Jesus would distribute this power to believers and then take it with Him when He ascended? No, of course not! He ascended into heaven and God sent the Holy Spirit to continue the miracle work here on this earth.

In Acts 8, Philip went to Samaria. Much time had passed since Jesus left the earth and ascendeded to heaven. In Samaria people were saved, baptized, and many miracles took place. Then later the apostles came from Jerusalem and laid hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit. There was visible evidence when this took place, so much so that Simon the magician tried to buy the power of laying on of hands from the apostles.

Yes, the people of Samaria had the Holy Spirit move inside of them when they got saved just like we do today. But, they had a second experience called receiving the Holy Spirit. (v. 15.) Even though they were saved and had been baptized, which completed the New Testament experience of salvation according to verse 16, the Holy Spirit had not fallen upon any of them.

All of this took place in the Bible time called the Last Days, the Church Age, or the Age of Grace. This is the same time we are living in now. To deny these experiences today or to say that they are not for us is to deny what took place in Acts 8. That chapter is the blueprint for the modern Church in these days.

# ETERNAL LIFE

## The Greatest Gift

There is a gift that has been purchased for you and it is the greatest gift in the universe. Without this one gift, all other gifts mean nothing. It is the gift of everlasting life.

Last week, I was watching a history program on television. The program told of the death and funeral of Abraham Lincoln. The commentator said that in the

final years of Mary Lincoln's life, she had a strong desire to die and go to heaven so that she could see her husband. Then the announcer made a statement that startled me. He said, "That's what people used to believe back in those days." Then he explained that there was a time when people thought there was life after death. He implied that believing in it was as naive as believing the world was flat. How sad he didn't know the truth.

The truth is, there is life after death. You will exist in one million years and beyond. But the question is, where will you be and what will you be doing? Will you exist in the presence of God (eternal life) or will you exist separated from God in darkness (eternal death)?

Six thousand years ago, man separated himself from God through disobedience and all mankind received the curse of death. (Gen. 3.) Two thousand years ago, God sent His Son, Jesus, who gave His life as a perfect sacrifice and paid the price to redeem mankind from the curse. (Heb. 9:11–14; 1 Cor. 7:23.) He paid the price we could not pay (Matt. 26:28) and in the realm of the Spirit, everything was done that needed to be done so that man could have everlasting life.

Although the gift was made available to every person on the earth, eternal life was only activated for those who would receive it. (John 3:16.)This gift has been available for 2,000 years and is still available for all who will receive it. Jesus called it being born again. (John 3:3.) Others call it becoming a Christian or getting saved. Some refer to it as the new birth. Whatever you call it, it is the same gift. The price for the gift of salvation and eternal life has been paid in full by the blood of Jesus. (1 John 1:7.)

According to the Bible, all that is required to receive this gift is to:

- Believe in your heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died for your sins. (Rom. 10:9–10.)
- Believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. (Rom. 10:9–10.)
- Repent (turn away from your sins). (Act 2:28; 3:19.)
- Confess Jesus before men and never deny that Jesus is your Lord and Savior. (1 John 1:9; 4:15.)

To receive eternal life may seem like a very simple thing to do, and that's because it is. All of the work has already been done by Jesus. He paid the price in full for this wonderful gift. All we have to do is receive it. God's plan is simple. It is so simple that everyone has the ability to accept it.

We are God's voice on this earth. If we do not share the gospel of the saving power of the blood of Jesus, then many will not hear. And if they don't hear, how can they receive?

If you are a Christian, you have been given the ministry of salvation. Jesus said that we should not keep the light covered, but that we should let our light shine into the world. (Matt. 5:14–16.) You should not be selfish. You have freely received this precious gift yourself, so you have a mandate from God to share it with others. You are a soul-winner!

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:9

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise.

Proverbs 11:30

# EVANGELISM

## Get Real

A few years ago while conducting an out-of-town meeting, we were praying for those who had needs. A man who looked quite distinguished came up to me and said he wanted to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior of his life. This man was unique because he went on to make a very interesting statement. He said that because of the occupation he was in, this born-again experience would be very good for him.

Well, I prayed with him and he accepted Jesus. Several others came forward for prayer also, so it was about a half hour later before I left the front of the building. Then I noticed the distinguished man was still near the back door. He was looking outside as though he was waiting for a ride when my curiosity got the best of me. I had to know. Where did this man work? Why would being a born-again believer in Jesus help him in his job?

I moved toward the door and asked him, “What is it that you do for a living?” He looked at me and asked which highway I had used to get to the meeting. When I told him he said, “As you came into town, did you see the large church building on the right? Well, I’m the pastor of that church.”

I could hardly believe my ears. If someone had told me this story, I would find it hard to believe myself. How can a man preach every Sunday and still not know God?

Sometimes I think that the greatest harvest of souls that could ever take place in these last days would be if we could just get people saved who are already in church organizations but don’t know Jesus.

The church building is the most evangelized place in the world. We bring in the best speakers and the best singers. We advertise and fill the building. But sadly, to many it’s just entertainment. When the show’s over, the people go home and most of the time their troubles and fears go home with them.

Here’s what we need to do. We need to quit playing church. We need to take God’s Word and not only read and meditate on it, but believe and act on it. When we believe the Word of God and act on it, that’s what we call faith. We need for the Word to be profitable in our lives—and the only way it can be is to read it in faith. (2 Tim. 3:16.)

Hebrews 4:2 tells us about two groups of people who each had the gospel preached to them, but it was not profitable to one group because it was not mixed with faith in the hearts of those who heard it.

Faith is the catalyst to the Word of God.

Christians believe that Jesus will someday return to the earth and appear in the sky. We are told in the Bible that we are to daily expect the Lord’s return. (Matt. 24:42.) But what about Jesus? What will He expect when He returns?

In Luke 18:8, Jesus tells us that He will be specifically looking for one thing: “When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?”

When Jesus does return, He won’t ask for your church bulletin to see what programs you have. He will be looking for faith. Will He find it?

## The Principle of One

I appreciate churches. I like big churches and little churches. I like churches that are built with a traditional look and I like contemporary structures. Some churches have pews, some have chairs. It doesn't matter to me. I just love churches. One thing every church should have in common is this—it should grow.

In Matthew 25, Jesus told a parable of the talents.[16] He said the master gave five talents to one, two talents to another, and to the third man he gave one talent. These talents were distributed according to the ability of the one receiving them. But what ability was Jesus talking about? He was talking about their ability to multiply what they had received.

When the master returned, the man who had been given five talents had traded wisely and multiplied them to ten talents. The man who received two talents multiplied them into four. But the man who had one talent hid it and when the master returned, he gave him back exactly what he had received—one talent. (vv. 14–25.) The master called this man a wicked and lazy servant. (v. 26.) The point is, what God has freely given us, He expects us to share and multiply.

Christians have been given the greatest gift in the universe. For those who receive Jesus as their Savior, they have been given eternal life and the availability of prosperity and health. (2 John 3:2.) In James 1:17, we're told that God is a good God who pours out good gifts freely to all who will receive. Ephesians 5:1 tells us that we are to be imitators of God. God wants us to share with others the gift we have been given. When we do this, it can cause souls to be saved and lives to be changed.

If every Christian would live the life of victory that God has for us and share that victory with their friends, families, and coworkers, and if each Christian would only change the life of one person in a year, then our churches would double in size in twelve months. A church of ten would be twenty. A church of 100 would be 200. A church of 500 would be 1,000, and so on.

There is nothing wrong with a church with five members. But at some point in time, it should grow at least to ten. There is nothing wrong with a church of 50 people, but if the people in that church would share the good news of Jesus, then there is no reason why that church shouldn't double in size in just one year.

Now, don't take me wrong. I'm not saying that every person has to act like a pastor or an evangelist or that you become bizarre in such a way as to turn people off. I am saying that if each Christian would live according to God's Word and lead one person to Jesus this year, then one year from today most

Christian churches in the world would need an auditorium twice the size of what they have. Let's begin this day to implement the principle of one and wrap this thing up so we can go home!

> *This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.*
>
> Matthew 24:14

# EVOLUTION

## The Evolution Deception

For years, atheists and scientists have tried to convince people to believe the theory of evolution. But that is all it is, just a theory. Some people even have said that evolution is a religion all in itself. However, there is no evidence whatsoever to prove that mankind evolved from a monkey. I once heard a funny little poem about evolution that goes like this:

I used to be an amoeba, living life completely free.

Then I was a fish, swimming in the sea.

Then I was monkey, hanging from a tree,

And now, I'm a doctor with a Ph.D.!

The idea of evolution is just downright silly when you stop and think about it. In Genesis 1:11, God commanded the grass, the herb, and the fruit trees to bring forth seed and fruit according to their kind. In Genesis 1:21, God created the birds and the fish according to their kind. And in Genesis 1:24, God brought forth the beasts of the earth according to their kind. That's the way it happened way back then, and that is still the way it happens today.

God created life to reproduce itself, according to its own kind. That's why you don't get cotton when you plant corn. That's why fish have baby fish, and monkeys have baby monkeys. You will never see a cow giving birth to a horse, or an animal giving birth to a human. God knew what He was doing when He created the earth, and He still knows what He's doing today!

God created this universe for a specific purpose. He created this world by and for Jesus. (Col. 1:16; John 1:1–3.) Jesus is the reason for creation! God longed for sons and daughters to walk with, because of His father nature. But before He could create man, He had to create a place for us to live.

Isaiah 45:18 says that God formed the earth to be inhabited. God stored up vast

resources of minerals and chemicals. He created all the fruits and vegetables and food sources we would ever need. He also built the beautiful landscapes that we see just for us to look at and enjoy.

Did you know that mankind is the only being throughout all of creation that can experience awe? God put that in us so that we could look at the countryside, or a beautiful lake, or even a flower, and be affected by it. God created this world to bless us!

Some people like to think that the earth is just an evolutionary accident that is floating around in space like some speck of dust, but that's not true. In Genesis 1:14–19, the Word of God says that the earth is the reason for the universe. The other stars and planets were created for signs and for seasons, for days and for years, and to be lights in the firmament and to give light on this earth!

So you see, the Word of God tells us that Jesus is the reason for creation and man is the reason for the earth, and the earth is the reason for the universe.

Some people today believe that mankind is the center of the universe. This is actually a very clever distortion of the truth by Satan. Although man is the reason for the earth, and the earth is the reason for the universe, we must never forget that the reason for man is God! The purpose for our very existence is to have a relationship with God Almighty, through Jesus Christ, His Son.

# FAITH

## Living Faith

I am going to share with you one of the most important truths of the Bible for the Christian. This one bit of knowledge, this one nugget, this one truth, if applied to your life, can take you from sickness to health, from poverty to prosperity, and from bondage to freedom.

Jesus said in John 8:31–32, "If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

What will make us free? Well, according to Jesus, it's not just the truth that will set us free, but it's knowing the truth.

The Greek word used here for "know" is ginosko, which means "to have an intimate relationship with," "to be one with," "to have a close understanding of."[17] In other words, to know the truth so well, to be so positive of it, to understand it so completely that you act on it instinctively, without hesitation. Let me explain.

In Luke 6, Jesus tells the story of two men who built houses. One house was built on a rock foundation and one house was built on sand, without a foundation. When the storm came, the house built on the rock withstood the storm while the house built without a foundation, the one built on the sand, was completely destroyed. (vv. 47–49.)

Jesus then explained the parable by saying that the man who built his house on the rock was like a man who heard His sayings and did them. And the man who built his house on the sand, was like a man who heard His sayings and did not do them.

Notice that both men heard the sayings of Jesus. Both men heard the Word. But even though both men heard the Word, only one knew the Word. Only one man understood it and knew it so completely that he acted on it. It's when we hear and do the Word that faith can be present.

Many good people spend a large amount of time reading the Bible and hearing the Word. A lot of these people even believe what they read and hear. However, it doesn't matter how much you read or hear, and it doesn't even matter how much you believe. If you don't act on what you have learned, it will profit you nothing.

If we only hear and believe, then we will perish when the storms of life come. If we hear the Word, believe, and act on our belief, then our house will be built on the Rock—Jesus—and we will weather every storm. (1 Cor. 10:4.)

Once a lady told me that she had read the Bible through seventeen times. The only problem was this woman didn't have a lick of faith. To her it was only history. She thought that everything in it was just knowledge about the past or a prophecy about the future. She even told me that nothing in it applied to her today. Sadly, this woman fell into the second category that Jesus was talking about in the parable of the two men. Reading or hearing the Word and not acting on it is like knowing about God but not knowing God.

Now, don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that we are to live by works instead of faith. What I am saying is that without works, faith is dead. (James 2:17.) And living with dead faith leaves us unshielded against the fiery darts of the evil one. (Eph. 6:16.)

The point is we must hear the Word, believe the Word, speak the Word, and act on the Word. Only then will our faith be living faith.

## Great Faith or Little Faith?

When Jesus was here on earth, He traveled around from village to village

teaching about the kingdom of God. In every village He entered He taught the Word and He healed the sick.

> *Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.*
>
> Matthew 9:35

Once, when Jesus went into the city of Capernaum, a Roman centurion came to Him, asking Jesus to heal his servant. Now, the unique thing about this situation was that the servant of the centurion wasn't there. The servant was at home, paralyzed.

When Jesus heard the plea, He immediately told the Roman soldier that He would go to the centurion's home and heal his servant. Actually, when you think about it, Jesus made a great commitment. He wasn't able to get into His car or SUV and drive out to the country. Two thousand years ago, travel was slow and difficult.

But the centurion answered Jesus a little differently than might be expected.

> *"Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."*
>
> Matthew 8:8–9

When Jesus heard what the soldier had said to Him, Jesus was so astonished that He turned to the Jews who were following Him and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" (v. 10).

That must have been a shocker to those following Jesus. After all, the centurion was a Gentile. He was not a descendant of Abraham, the father of faith (Rom. 4:12), and Jesus had proclaimed in front of everyone that this Roman soldier had great faith.

Then Jesus turned back to the centurion and said, "Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you" (v. 11). And within the hour the centurion's servant was healed.

A short time later, Jesus was in a boat with His disciples and a great storm came up that caused the waves to cover the boat. His disciples began to cry out in fear saying, "'Lord, save us! We are perishing!' But He said to them, 'Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?'" (Matt. 8:25–26).

Now, let me ask you this. Why did Jesus say the Roman centurion had great faith and the disciples had little faith? After all, the disciples had followed Jesus and heard His teachings. They had seen the great miracles. Why did Jesus consider their faith small or undeveloped?

The centurion understood authority and how to implement it. He knew that one who has authority has only to speak the command and it will be carried out. He didn't just believe that Jesus could heal some people. He believed that if Jesus would give the healing command that his very own servant would be healed.

How do we know that? Well, it's quite simple. Jesus told the centurion that what he believed would happen. And what happened is this— the centurion's servant was healed that very hour. So, that must have been what the centurion believed.

As Christians, we need to be like the centurion. We must believe that the words of Jesus are true. Then when we believe what He has spoken, without fear, it can come to pass. That is the essence of great faith.

## Become as Little Children

I recently got the cutest call on the phone from a Christian friend of mine. She said that her five-year-old son, Matthew, came out of the bathroom and made this declaration: "I've brushed my teeth real good, I've kept my faith in God, and I've been delivered from fear."

When she told me what her son had said, I couldn't help but laugh. You just don't expect a five-year-old to make such a bold statement. But the more I thought about it, the more I began to realize that what our children say is what they have heard.

When little Matthew heard the Word of God being proclaimed in his home, he boldly repeated what he had heard. And, as a child, he believed it because his parents had said it. Sometimes, we as adults need to learn from the children. Their faith is so simple.

Jesus said in Matthew 18:3 that unless we become as little children, we would "by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

So how do we become as little children? How does a little child act? The answer is quite simple. They imitate their parents. They do what they see their parents do and they say what they hear their parents say. And that's the way we are to be with God the Father.

As Christians, we are children of God. (John 1:12.) When we accept Jesus, the Son of God, into our hearts and recognize Him as our Lord and Savior, then the Bible tells us that we enter into the family of God as adopted sons. (Eph. 1:4–5.)

We are born-again believers. We are then subject to our heavenly Father and we are to listen to and obey Him.

When Jesus was here on the earth, He talked about listening and obeying the Father.

> *"I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak."*
>
> John 12:49,50

Jesus himself tells us here that He only said what the Father told him to say. Again, in John 5:19, Jesus said He only did what His Father wanted Him to do, and in John 8:38, Jesus said He only spoke what He saw when He was with His Father.

We as Christians need to speak what the Word of God says. When we pray, we need to pray the Word of God. Too many Christians are out there praying for things to happen in their lives that are totally against God's will for them. If we want God to hear us when we pray, we must know and pray His will.

Let's look at what the Bible has to say about it.

> *This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.*
>
> 1 John 5:14,15

Here's the point. We need to read and meditate on the Word of God and spend quality time with God our Father in prayer. We can't speak the words of our heavenly Father if we never listen to Him.

We need to be like little five-year-old Matthew. We must hear our Father and speak His words.

## Faith Isn't Surprised

As the early Church was growing in the first century, Herod Agrippa, the grandson of Herod the Great, harassed many of the early Church leaders. He killed James, the brother of John. He arrested Peter just because he knew it would please the Jews.

After Peter was arrested, Herod the king put him in prison and had him guarded by sixteen soldiers. Not only that, but he had him bound with two chains between two soldiers and had him placed behind a locked door with soldiers

guarding the door. (Acts 12:4,6.)

None of this was done secretly. The rest of the Christians in Jerusalem knew what had happened. This was during the time of the Passover and there is no doubt that word traveled quickly that Peter was in prison. Acts 12:5 says that the Church was in constant prayer for Peter. They were gathering together in rooms and praying that Peter would get out of prison.

We can only imagine how it was in those prayer meetings, but biblical evidence indicates that they were lamenting in prayer for days, probably praying something like, “Dear God in heaven. Release our dear brother, Peter, from the merciless hand of Herod the king.” Then something unexpected occurred. The day before Herod was going to display his captive Christian to the Jews, an angel of the Lord appeared beside Peter. As Peter was sleeping, still in chains between two guards, light began to shine in the prison and the angel struck Peter on the side to awaken him and get him up. Then the angel said, “Arise quickly!” and chains fell off Peter’s hands. (v. 7.)

The angel then told Peter to get his clothes and sandals together and get dressed, and to follow him. Peter did as instructed and he and the angel walked past the first and second guard posts to the iron gate. (v.9.) When they reached the gate, it opened by itself and they went through the gate and down the street. This was so astonishing and unbelievable that the Bible says Peter didn’t really think it was happening. (Acts 12:9.) He thought it was a vision. But it wasn’t a vision. It was real.

When Peter came to his senses and realized that it was really happening, he decided to go to Mary’s house, the mother of John Mark. Mary’s house was full of Christians, all praying for Peter’s release. When Peter reached the house, he knocked on the door. A girl named Rhoda went to the door but didn’t open it. She recognized Peter’s voice and in her excitement, forgot to open the door and let him in. Instead, she ran in where they were praying and announced that Peter was at the door.

They thought she had lost her mind. How could Peter be at the door anyway? After all, he had to be in prison. That’s why they were praying. Well, Peter kept knocking and when someone finally went and opened the door, those in the room were astonished to see Peter standing there.

Nineteen hundred years later, things haven’t changed much. We pray and when our prayers are answered, we too are astonished.

In Mark 11:24 Jesus said, “Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.” When we

pray, we are to pray in faith. What is faith? Remember, faith is simply believing that God has done everything He said He would do and believing it so much that everything we say and do is based on that belief.

## Will He Find Faith in You?

The Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 that Jesus himself is coming again to Planet Earth. It says He, "will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God."

At that point, the dead who are Christians will come out of their graves from all over the earth and be caught up into the air with Jesus. Every dead Christian, even if they were cremated and their ashes were scattered around the world, will miraculously rise up from the earth into the sky. Then, all the Christians who are alive will be caught up into the heavens with Jesus. According to Scripture, from that point we will be with the Lord forever.

Let me ask you something. Do you believe this is true? Are you expecting Jesus to come again? Are you making yourself ready daily for His return? It is rare that I meet Christians who actually act like they believe Jesus is returning today, tomorrow, or ever for that matter. But, Jesus will return and when He does, it will be too late to change our actions. All preparations must be made before He appears in the sky.

Jesus made an interesting statement in Luke that is often overlooked and untaught. In Luke 18:8 while speaking a parable, Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" What will Jesus be looking for when He returns? He will be looking for people who have faith.

When Jesus returns, He will be coming to gather up the Church. He expects the Church to be spotless and without blemish. (Eph. 5:27.) Jesus is not returning for a puny, beat down Church but for a Church that is victorious and powerful. He will be looking for a Church that is full of faith.

We who are Christians are the Church. The Church is not a building, organization, or a denomination. If you are a believer in Jesus, then you are the Church. When the Bible says Jesus is returning for His Church, that's you and me. Each individual Christian is a part of the Church.

For the Church to have faith when Jesus comes back, we must believe what God says about us and live each day in that belief. Not only do we need to believe, but we must put that belief into action each day. That's what is called walking by faith. (2 Cor. 5:7.)

When we walk by faith, we will overcome the things of the world. Now don't

take me wrong. We won't eliminate our problems, but we will be able to go through them without fear, knowing that God always does what He says.

God has provided, by faith in His Word, good things for those who believe in Him. He has promised health, prosperity, peace, and deliverance. All of these things are promised in His Word for those who seek Him in faith.

If you prepared a good gift for your child, if you spent time and put yourself into it and the child rejected it, how would you feel? God has prepared good gifts for His children. (Matt. 7:11.) James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights." Through faith we can receive God's gift.

Faith is a substance and a gift of God. (Heb. 11:1; Rom. 12:3.) We can accept it and develop it, or we can reject it. But remember this—when Jesus returns, and He will return, He will be looking for faith on the earth.

Will He find faith in you?

## The ABCs of Faith

A = Act on the Word

B = Believe the Word

C = Confess the Word

Hebrews 11:6 tells us that faith is required in order for us to please God. But over the years I have discovered that many people don't know what faith really is. Some tend to think that faith is just believing God. But it is so much more than that.

In order to have faith, we must first hear the Word because we know Romans 10:17 says that faith comes by hearing. But once the Word has been heard, we must decide that we believe the Word we have heard. Once that decision has been made in the realm of our consciousness, then we must make another decision to speak or confess what we believe.

The Bible says to meditate on God's Word. (Ps. 1:2.) But meditate doesn't mean to think about God's Word only. It means to let God's Word quietly roll over our lips.[18] Each time we meditate on God's Word, His Word becomes stronger and heavier within us until it finally drops from our consciousness into our heart. Then with the Word in our heart, we continue to confess; only now our confession has supernatural power.

Jesus said in Mark 11:23 that when we speak, we must believe in our heart and not doubt and believe that what we say will come to pass; then we will have

what we say. If we truly believe in our heart that those things we say will come to pass, then two things will happen. First, our confessions will become heart confessions instead of head confessions and secondly, our actions will automatically follow our heart. Then as we hear, believe, confess, and act on God's Word, the result will be we are acting in faith and what we say can come to pass.

So, whenever I speak to a mountain and it doesn't move, I remind myself to go back to the ABCs. Am I acting, believing, and confessing God's Word? That's where I usually find my answer.

Scripture References:
Without faith it is impossible to please Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. (Joshua 1:8)

If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. (James 2:26)

## Can the Church Function Without Faith?

A few weeks ago I received a letter from a minister in Illinois who was upset because I was teaching faith. He said that if we could just eliminate faith teaching, then the church wouldn't be in such turmoil.

Well, I've been thinking about what he said and you know, I think he's right. If we would just quit teaching about faith and anything related to it, the church would not be in turmoil—because without faith, there would be no church.

What do I mean by that? Well, the Church is not a building. The Church is not a denomination. The Church is not a ministry. The Church is a group of people who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior of their lives. The Church is a body of believers. The Church is the Christians who collectively make up the body of Christ. If you are a Christian, you are the Church. The church building, which is commonly referred to by many as the church, is not the Church, but it is the meeting place of the Church. Christians are the Church.

With that in mind, let's look at how you become a Christian. The Bible says in Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."

Did you catch that? It's "by grace…through faith." Without faith there is no salvation. If no one gets saved, then there is no Church. We need faith for salvation.

Also, Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." Is faith important? Without it we cannot please God. It doesn't say that it is difficult to please God, it says that it is impossible to please God. If we want to please God, we must have faith.

Let's pretend that there was a way to get saved without faith (which there isn't), and let's pretend that there was a way to please God without faith (which there isn't), and somehow we became a Christian without faith (which we can't). At this point it would still be impossible to function as a Christian because we wouldn't be able to pray. James 1:6 says that when we pray, we must pray in faith because if we don't pray in faith, we cannot expect to receive anything from the Lord. In other words, we can pray all we want, but if we don't pray in faith, we might as well be doing something else, because our prayers will be in vain.

The bottom line is this, as the Church we need faith. Without faith the Church cannot exist.

Remember, faith is believing God and acting on what you believe. Where do we get faith? Romans 10:17 says, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

## Four Steps to Faith

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1

For years, as a faith teacher, I taught faith with the following definition: "Faith is believing God will do what He said He would do." As the years passed, I realized that faith is not believing, but faith has believed. So I revised my definition to be: "Faith is believing that God has done what He said He would do and everything you say and do is based upon that belief."

Teaching something difficult is made easier with a simple definition. Likewise, I discovered that something simple can be complicated by making the definition too complicated. Even though my definition was accurate, I decided to make it easier to understand.

So here it is. Faith is: hear the Word, believe the Word, speak the Word, and do the Word.

Let’s take a moment to look at each part of what faith is.

1) Hear the Word.

Romans 10:17 says that faith comes by hearing. Hearing is the first step, but not the only step. Without knowledge, we perish, because without knowledge we do not know what to believe. (Hosea 4:6.) Hearing the Word affects our souls. The soul is the mind, will, and emotions, and hearing the Word brings the Word of God into the realm of the soul (in this case, the mind) so that we can decide what to do with it.

2) Believe the Word.

Once the Word is in our mind, we must decide what to do with it. Believing is the result of a decision. We decide what we are going to believe and what we are going to reject. The choice is ours. What we decide to believe sets the pattern of what we say.

3) Speak the Word.

Second Timothy 1:13 says, “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” We will develop a pattern of words determined by what we have decided we believe and what has developed in our heart as a result of that belief. Jesus said out of the abundance of our heart our mouth will speak. (Matt. 12:34.)

4) Do the Word.

Remember, faith without action is not living faith. James 2:26 says, “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” We must act on what we believe and we must daily reinforce that belief by renewing our minds with the Word. Through the daily hearing and believing of the Word, our words and actions will be more accurate.

To summarize: Faith is important. Without faith it is impossible to please God. (Heb. 11:6.) Through faith we are saved. (Eph. 2:8.) Anything that is not from faith is sin. (Rom. 14:23.) Faith moves mountains and activates our prayers. (Matt. 17:20; James 1:6.) Faith is vitally important in our lives. All that we do must be based on the God-kind of faith. (Mark 11:22–24.)

So, hear the Word, believe the Word, speak the Word, and do the Word and you will please God.

## The Invisible Barrier of Faith

When the apostle James was writing to the Church, he said to consider it all joy when you encounter various trials. We are in a time when many people are

experiencing various types of trials in their lives. But as you experience problems in life, whether they are physical, financial, or emotional, you must know this—your problem is not the issue. It's how you react to your problem that will determine your destiny.

Psalm 34:19 says, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all." This verse clearly tells us that there will be afflictions and that the righteous will be the ones who get them. But I'm so glad the verse doesn't stop there! It goes on to say that these righteous people who are being attacked by the enemy will be delivered out of all their trials.

If you are born again, you are righteous. Righteousness is not something that you earn, develop, or grow in. You are made righteous in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, when you give your heart to Jesus. When you received Him as your Lord and Savior, you became as righteous as you will ever be.

Yes, we grow in holiness. As we develop our understanding of God's Word and as we walk in our belief of what He has spoken, our holiness moves to a higher level. You might say that when you become a Christian, you are made righteous and you start becoming holy, and you spend your life working out your salvation and developing holiness.

Being righteous does not shield you from the attacks of the enemy. It is your shield of faith that does that. According to Ephesians 6:16, your shield of faith quenches "all the fiery darts of the wicked one." Your faith does not make the enemy quit shooting at you; however, your faith will be like a bullet proof vest that will keep his bullets from killing you.

Since the Bible tells us that faith is the barrier between us and the weapons of the enemy, common sense would say that we want this barrier to be as strong as possible. If someone is shooting at me with a powerful weapon, I want that barrier to be thick and strong because the greater the barrier, the more secure I am against an attack. Faith is simply believing God and developing a complete lifestyle of words and actions wrapped around that belief. When we believe in our heart that He heals and align all of our words and actions with that belief, then that strengthens the faith barrier for healing. When we believe He redeemed us from the curse of poverty and wrap all of our words and actions around that belief, then we strengthen the faith barrier against the attack of poverty.

"Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1.) One reason the fight of faith can be difficult for some Christians is that the substance of faith is invisible in this realm, but the enemy's attack can be seen clearly. The enemy stands plainly in the open for us to see and struts around

like Goliath, knowing that if he can cause us to focus on his visible attack instead of focusing on the invisible barrier of faith between us and him, then he can defeat us.

His attack is visible in the physical realm, but our faith is in the spiritual realm. God wants us to focus on what we can't see in the natural because we walk by faith and not by sight. "...We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18).

Your Goliath may be strutting around on the hill claiming that he will destroy you. He could be your physical Goliath, your financial Goliath, or your emotional Goliath, but with the sword of the Spirit and faith in your heart, you can sever his head and he will "Go-lieth" down, dead with no chance of survival! It's just like when you cut off a snake's head. Its body may wiggle for a while without its head, but have no fear, it is dead and can no longer hurt you.

So, when the enemy (illness, debt, and hurt) gets in your face, put your faith in God and His protective promise. Use the sword of the Spirit while holding your shield of faith, and your adversary will fall before you.

Scripture References:

*For we walk by faith, not by sight.* (2 Cor. 5:7.)

*...We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.* (2 Cor. 4:18.)

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. (Ps. 34:19.)

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints. (Eph. 6:10-18.)

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. (James 1:2-3.)

*For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.* (Rom. 5:19.)

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* (Heb. 11:1.)

## Don't Wait for the Attack to Get Prepared

Picture this. A young man is walking down a dark street when he is approached by a large, mean-looking man who will not let him pass. The young man isn't quite as physically fit as he should be because he hasn't been exercising or working out. Seeing that he is no match for the attacker, the young man says, "Excuse me just one moment while I go home and work out with my weight set. Stay right here. Don't move. I'll be right back. Then we will fight." At this point the young man runs home, works out on his weights for 10 minutes and then goes back to the dimly lit street and fights the attacker. He wins because of his ten-minute workout.

It sounds silly, doesn't it? But that's the way many Christians try to live their lives spiritually. They wait until Satan attacks and then at the last minute they try to exercise spiritually by reading a few verses and praying under pressure. Any time we read God's Word and apply it to our lives, it is good, but usually when the man stops us in the alley or Satan attacks our home, it's too late to exercise our body or our faith.

If our spiritual muscles aren't built up before the attack, we may find the attack more than we expected. Be prepared. Build your faith daily. Then when the attack comes, your shield of faith will protect you.

So here's the point—we must walk by faith each and every day. We cannot live like the world six days a week and then put in our two hours and two dollars on Sunday and expect that to be our faith.

Walking by faith is a lifestyle. Remember, 2 Corinthians 5:7 says, "For we walk by faith, not by sight." Everything we do, everything we seek to accomplish, each day is to be in faith.

A few years ago, a friend of mind was facing a disaster in his life. He was at the end of his rope and didn't know where to turn. He had tried everything except God, but now he was desperate. He would try anything to get out of the jam he was in. He wanted me to tell him how to pray to God and how to get his prayers answered.

Even though this man was a Christian, he always tried to solve everything in his life by his own power. I knew that in order for him to be helped, he needed some straightforward teaching and needed to be shown these teachings in the Word.

I showed him that according to James 1:6, we must pray in faith if we expect to receive anything from God. I told him that when we pray according to God's Word, we must believe and expect God to answer our requests.

A few weeks went by and I ran into this man at a local store. When I asked him how things were going, he made an all-too-common statement. He said, "Well, I tried praying in faith, but it didn't work. Somehow I knew before I even prayed it wouldn't and I guess I was right."

Well, you don't try faith. When we say we will try faith, we are admitting that there is a chance our prayers won't be answered. When we believe there is a chance our prayers won't be answered, there is doubt. Where there is doubt, there is no faith. Where there is no faith, God is restricted by His own Word.

We must walk by faith!

## Faith Never Gives Up

Several years ago, my wife and I had a weekly Bible study in our home. We would sit around the living room with our Bibles and study the Word of God. One evening, we had a diversified group of pastors and others in church leadership attend from several denominational and non-denominational churches, along with some folks who didn't go to church anywhere. It was an exciting time. We didn't care where anyone went to church. All we cared about was the Word of God.

When we would open the Bible, we didn't look at it with Baptist eyes, Methodist eyes or Catholic eyes. We simply read and believed what the Bible said, regardless.

God's Word is pure and true. When it is read and believed, it will set us free from any bondage.

Most people who have a problem want to get rid of it. They want to be able to live their lives without stress and worry. They want to live without the bill collector calling every day. They want to live, set free from the sicknesses and family feuds that trouble so many.

But how can we get set free? Jesus told us the way in John 8:31–32: "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Let's closely examine the statement Jesus made. First of all, He said that we should abide in His Word. That means that we

are to continue in His teachings. When you have a problem in your life, look to the Word and see what the Bible says about that specific problem. The Bible addresses everything.

For example, if you are having a problem with your children, then look to the Word of God concerning that problem. Read Proverbs 11:21 where it says, "The [children] of the righteous will be delivered." If the problem is finances, read Luke 6:38:

> *Give and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.*

Whatever the problem, look in the Word for the answer and abide in it. Don't give up. The Greek word for abide can also be translated "continue."[19] To continue is to not give up.

How far do we go in our belief before we draw the line? The answer is that there is no line when we are in faith. If God says it in His Word, then that settles it.

Next, we are to know the truth. That comes from knowing God's Word. It comes from knowing what God said and going one step further and believing Him. Titus 1:2 and Hebrews 6:18 both tell us the same thing—it is impossible for God to lie. So, when we read and abide in His Word we also need to believe Him.

Finally, we must know God's Word so intimately that it becomes a part of us. Knowing the Word means acting on it because we have faith in it. It's at this point we are set free.

Remember what Jesus said. "If you abide in My Word, you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

## Revelation Knowledge vs. Sense Knowledge

God has given us a supernatural method of getting wisdom. It is called revelation knowledge. But the people in the world who are not Christians live according to a different kind of knowledge. They live by sense knowledge. God created us to live in union with Him. We are supposed to function on God's level of ability. When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3), he caused a separation to come between man and God. To become disconnected from God was absolutely the worst possible thing that could have ever happened to the human race.

When man's union with God was severed, man's abilities also became separated from God. Mankind fell from the realm of God's ability, to the realm of man's ability. Without the inner spirit man to lead and guide us, our five physical senses became the doors of our mind. After the fall, man's only touch with the

world came through what we could perceive with our eyes, our ears and our sense of touch, taste, and smell.

At that point in history, reason was born! This is sense knowledge.

The Word reveals that the natural man's walk in life is ordered by his senses. Romans 8:7 says that the mind of the flesh is enmity against (or hostile towards) God. This way of thinking draws information and forms conclusions from the information we acquire only through our senses.

Mankind was designed to live in a world where nothing is impossible. But without God's ability flowing in our lives, we have learned to see anything above man's ability as impossible. If mankind cannot come up with a solution or a cure in his own intelligence, we say that it's impossible! Luke 18:27 says, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God!" God wants us to walk with Him in the spirit realm, in the realm of faith. This is the realm where omnipotent power speaks words into being and substance. It is the realm of God who calls the things that are not as though they were. (Rom. 4:17.) Adam was an under-ruler for the One who had framed the worlds out of the things which are not, by faith in His own Word. (Heb. 11:3.)

Adam was the father of all men, and his sin caused a state of separation from God for the entire human race. Everybody who is not born again is under the curse of being separated from God. That's why Jesus said that to enter the kingdom of God we must first be born again. (John 3:3.)We have to learn once again to partake of God's nature. We have to live as God originally designed for us to live. We must live by faith!

Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." As Christians, we must learn to live by the revelation of God in His Word and by His Holy Spirit. That's called walking by faith and not by sight. (2 Cor. 5:7.) When we walk by faith, all things are possible.

In Mark 9:23, Jesus said, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." So we have a choice to make. Do we live in this world with our sense knowledge and be restricted by what we see, or do we live in the realm of revelation knowledge by faith with God where all things are possible? The choice is ours.

# FAITH AND CONFESSION

## God Responds to Faith, Not Clichés

Sometimes people get in situations where their backs are up against the wall. Something has happened, somebody has done something, or a circumstance has come against them and they don't know what to do.

Here is what some Christians do when there is a problem. They get real spiritual and have all of these religious things that they say. The sayings are based on truth, but they can become a cliché to the point they are not spoken as truth. For example, somebody might ask you what they should do about a problem they have. You say, "You just need to take it before the Lord. You just need to lay it at the feet of the Master. Take it to the Lord in prayer. We'll see what God is going to do." Actually, that's not completely scriptural.

It is scriptural to pray and to ask God for things, but it is not scriptural to throw up a prayer like you're throwing dice and just hope that your number comes up and you win the prize.

It's not scriptural to ask God to do something He has told you to do. You may say, "Well, God can do a lot of things I can't do." That's true. There are many things God can do that we can't—like create a universe or save people. However, we have been given authority on this earth that many Christians are not aware of. The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead dwells in you (if you are born again)—not a different Spirit. (Rom. 8:11.) The same authority that Jesus used on this earth is in you. Jesus gave it to all who believe.

Part of the reason we use religious clichés is this: we want to make an excuse or create a loophole because of our lack of belief. If we truly believed in the fullness of faith, we would simply speak faith from the heart. Loopholes would not be necessary.

Faith is knowing in our heart that God has completed His work concerning our problem and speaking and acting on the faith that is established within us. When Jesus spoke, He spoke in faith and in authority. He spoke with confidence and did not leave room for a loophole. In Mark 4, Jesus spoke to the wind with authority and confidence: "Then [Jesus] arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace, be still!'" and they listened and obeyed: "The wind ceased and there was a great calm" (v. 39). Afterward, Jesus turned His attention to His disciples, who had not been walking by faith.

> *He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"*
>
> Mark 4:40,41

The disciples feared exceedingly because they had just seen something

miraculous happen. They saw a great storm and they heard their Master speak to it. Immediately the storm calmed down, just like He had commanded it to—and it shook them.

When we pray and pray and pray and it seems like nothing is happening, this one thing we know for certain. The problem is not God. That means we must examine ourselves. We cannot allow our confessions to become charismatic clichés. Our confessions must be the Word of God spoken from our heart. When we believe, speak, and act on the Word, that's faith. God responds to faith, not clichés.

# FAITH vs. FEAR

## Faith and Fear Are Opposites

Second Timothy 1:7 says, "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." This verse gives us a very basic principle of faith. Fear is a spirit and it is not sent from God.

Fear is used by the enemy to paralyze, immobilize, and render our faith useless. Terror, bad reports, and all negative words are for the purpose of developing fear. Fear will break you down physically, mentally, and spiritually. The enemy wants to destroy as many Christians as possible. Even though he cannot steal their salvation, he can render them ineffective on this earth if he can only get them into fear.

Fear and faith are opposites. In an airplane, there is a gauge that gives the rate of ascent and the rate of descent. The reason there are not two gauges is because you cannot be doing both at the same time. The plane is either climbing to a higher altitude or descending to a lower altitude. It's the same way with our faith. We are either facing faith with our backs turned to fear, or we are facing fear with our backs turned to faith.

Job was a great man of God. Job 1:1 says that he was blameless and upright and that he feared God and shunned evil. Later, however, after he had undergone many trials, he made an interesting statement. He said, "The thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me" (Job 3:25).

Do not respond to the spirit of fear. When you hear words of terror and disaster, do not fear. Remember Psalm 91:7. Speak it and let it become rhema in your heart. "A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you."

## In with the Faith, Out with the Fear

Luke 12:32 says, “Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Most of the time when I’ve heard teaching on this Scripture, the emphasis is on how God takes pleasure in giving us the kingdom. I agree that this is a great teaching. God wants us to prosper.

However, let’s take a look at the command in the first part of this verse, “Do not fear.” Fear is not from God. Fear is from the devil. As Christians we are commanded, “Do not fear.”

Once, after teaching a lesson on fear, a gentleman approached me and told me that it was impossible for him to live without fear. When I asked him why, his response was, “There is so much around me every day that looks like impending disaster that I am in a constant state of worry. You would be too, if you had to look at the circumstances I see daily.”

One of this man’s major problems in getting rid of fear was that he was not operating in faith. Let me explain. Faith will eliminate fear. Fear is based on what we see and what we hear. Faith is based on what God says and what we believe. If we truly believe God’s Word, then it would be impossible for fear to enter our minds or our hearts.

Psalm 34:19 says, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.” Yes, we know that afflictions do come against the righteous of God. However, our faith is not to be in the affliction, but in the deliverance. Actually, our faith is in the Deliverer himself.

If you know that God said He would deliver the righteous, and if you know that you are the righteous, and if you know that God doesn’t lie, then why in the world would you fear? The only room that fear has to work in is the empty space where faith should be. In with the faith and out with the fear!

## How to Get Rid of Fear

Fear is negative. Faith is positive. Fear is associated with hate, greed, stress, worrying, sadness, depression, and so on. Faith is associated with love, generosity, peace, power, rest and relaxation (not laziness), joy, and laughter.

Jehovah God is a God of faith and it takes faith to please Him. (Heb. 11:6.) Satan is the author of fear and uses fear in an attempt to destroy faith. Everything that pleases God, Satan hates—and faith pleases God.

In order to remove fear, we must develop faith. Here are five basic steps to completely remove fear from your life.

1) Listen to the Word of God and quit listening to the words of the devil:“But whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil” (Prov. 1:33).

2) Speak the Word of God and quit speaking the words of the devil: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Prov. 18:21).

3) Believe the Word of God and quit believing the words of the devil: “Jesus said to him, ‘If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes’” (Mark 9:23).

4) Act on the Word of God and quit acting on the words of the devil: “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26).

5) Let all your speech and actions be motivated by love and reject all pride and hate from your life:“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18).

I understand that a man-made formula to remove fear may not be the answer; but when the above steps become a lifestyle, then faith will grow, and faith and love always remove fear.

# FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

## How to Handle a Family Reunion

Over the years, I have counseled with thousands of people from all walks of life. From the poor to the rich, from the young to the old, regardless of their social standing, I have discovered that many people have problems at family reunions.

Uncle Bob, Sister June, Cousin Emma, and Aunt Thelma may be the nicest people in the world 364 days a year, but at the Jones’ family reunion, the fangs and claws come out and they become ruthless. It is true that there are a lot of good, solid, wholesome families that enjoy getting together at the holiday season. If your family is like this, be thankful and count your blessings because for many, the thought of getting together with family creates stress and pain. This should not be.

God loves families. After all, He created them. God’s plan for your family is peace and stability. Your family should be a place like an oasis. God did not intend for families to argue and fight. What causes family division? The answer

is quite simple.

God is not the author of confusion. God is not divisive and God does not promote division. The devil, on the other hand, seeks to divide and destroy families.

If you are having problems with your family, I encourage you to follow these steps so that peace can be yours.

1) See your family the way God sees them. God sees them worthy of His Son's death.

2) Be gracious in your speech, even when others are not gracious to you. In other words, do not allow anyone else's pride, haughtiness, greed, or slander to affect your words. If the devil can get you to change what you say because of what others say, then he has won.

3) You must know that your life is not about you. Your life is about God and your family. If you always place Him and them first, then your relationships will be in the right perspective.

4) Have a good time no matter what. Choose to enjoy your family whether they enjoy you or not. After all, you only have one family and you're stuck with it. So make the most of it.

5) Use common sense. If Uncle Harry goes ballistic when you mention politics, then avoid politics and don't allow yourself to be drawn into a fruitless argument.

6) Lighten up. Don't go to the reunion with a "spirit of heaviness and dread" upon you. Pray in the Spirit on your way to the reunion and allow the refreshing of the Holy Spirit to be upon you.

7) "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).Follow these simple steps and family happiness can be yours.

## How to Deal with Criticism from Your Family

First John 4:21 says, "This commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also."

Do you have relatives who feel it is their call in life to discourage you? If you do, then you are not alone. One of the worst things you can do when you come into the knowledge of the Word of God is to hang around and fellowship with unbelievers.

Of course, we must keep this in balance because God doesn't necessarily want

us to isolate ourselves, but rather, insulate ourselves from the world.

However, for the young Christian (not age-related but growth level), it is best to find and hang around with as many Christians as possible. Most animals, when they are young, must stay with the older animals in the herd, flock, pack, and so on. The reason is that it's God's plan in nature for the mature to nurture and protect the immature. This holds true in the church also.

As mature Christians, we are required to nurture and protect the young ones who have just received Jesus. However, I have discovered over the years that it's easier to protect young Christians from sinners in the world than it is some of their relatives.

Recently, a teenager who had just received Jesus as his Lord and Savior, was telling me about all of the kids at school he was witnessing to. He had discovered that Jesus had changed his heart concerning some schoolmates that he previously hated.

The love of God was so strong on this young man that he was a powerful witness at school. Then after not seeing him at church for a few weeks, I encountered him at a local store. He apologized for not being at church and said the reason was that his parents didn't want him to be a Christian.

It's sad when family members would rather have a worldly person living in their home than a person who walks by faith and walks in love.

How do we respond to family members who don't understand what the Bible teaches? The answer is quite simple. Jesus told us to "love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34). So, we respond the way Jesus did. We walk in love being led by the Spirit, submitting to authority but never denying the love we have for Jesus.

As 1 John 4:12 says, "No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us."

# FELLOWSHIP (The Power of)

## Stay Connected to the Body

We are in a time of great prosperity and a great harvest of souls. Our associations affect our prosperity and our ability to harvest. As we grow in the things of God, our Christian and ministry associations will increase. Our connections increase. I have more connections in the ministry now than I had ten years ago, which means I can do more now in the ministry than back then.

The more connections you get, the more you can do. As a result, the devil wants to destroy your connections. He destroys connections and associations through division and strife. You can have all the money in the world, but if you don't have the right inroads and the right connections, you will be stymied in the things of God and the devil can hold you back.

We know that God's mathematics is different than our mathematics. The Scripture says in Ecclesiastes 4:12, "Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken." The key meaning of this is, by myself I might be overpowered, but if I link arms with another believer, we can withstand. When three believers link arms with each other, that threefold cord cannot be broken because we are united. The devil knows that. The devil knows that three of us linked together can conquer a lot of his territory.

If the devil can't break us apart or stop our prosperity, which supplies goods for the gospel, what is he going to do? The only thing he knows to do is to take one cord of the threefold cord away so two of us are left to withstand. The one left by himself can be overtaken more easily. Then Satan tries to break the remaining bond. When each one is left by himself, he is easily overtaken.

God wants us to work together. This is why we have the concept of the body of Christ. Paul said one person is a hand, one person is a foot, one person is an ear, and so on. (1 Cor. 12.) Possibly, one person may be an armpit, but we need the armpits! I don't want to be sweating like an armpit on my face! We must work together. There is a purpose in the body working together. Everyone is not a hand, everyone is not an eye, but everybody has a function.

Deuteronomy 32:30 tells us how one could chase a thousand, and two could put ten thousand to flight. Do you understand God's mathematics? It doesn't say that one can control one thousand demons and two of us together can control two thousand demons, or three of us together can control three thousand demons. That's not how God's mathematics works. God's mathematics is one can control one thousand, but two together can control ten thousand. Do you see how God's multiplication differs from ours?

The devil is trying to break us down and separate us. One sheep pulled away by itself can be destroyed by the enemy. On the Discovery Channel, you can see herds of animals in Africa. The lions find a herd and go in and try to separate one animal from the herd. If they can separate that one, then they attack and kill it.

Separated we are not as strong. Together we can more easily overcome the

enemy and destroy his works. We must lock our arms together and become like a threefold cord. Satan's desire is to separate you from the body. Don't give in to the lie. Stay connected.

# FORGIVENESS

## One More Time

Recently, I was talking with a man about forgiveness. He said that he had forgiven everyone in his life except one person. When I asked him who it was, he related a story about a family incident involving his brother that had taken place years ago. When I asked why he couldn't forgive his brother, I got a strange answer. He said it was impossible for him to forgive his brother because his brother wouldn't forgive him.

Jesus said in Mark 11:25 that we were to forgive those who have wronged us. He didn't say that we were to forgive them if they forgive us. He said we were to forgive—whether they love us or whether they hate us, if they forgive us or don't forgive us. Even if they are holding a grudge and are doing everything in their power to destroy us, it doesn't matter. Whether or not they forgive us is irrelevant. Our responsibility is to forgive, unconditionally.

One woman told me she couldn't forgive a certain person because she had forgiven that person several times for the same offense. And even after all that forgiveness, the other person continued to be offensive. She asked me how many times she should forgive this person. I told her "One more time." Any time you wonder how many times to forgive someone, that is the answer. Forgive them one more time.

In Matthew 18:21 Peter went to Jesus and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered and said, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." In today's words, that would be like saying "up to a million times." Forgiveness has no limits. Forgiveness has no end.

The reason for forgiveness is not for the one being forgiven, but for the one who forgives. The one who forgives reaps all the benefits. What are the benefits of forgiveness? There are many, but one that we all need is peace. Forgiveness will give you peace.

Over the years I have met many people who would not forgive. They all have one thing in common. They are never at peace. When we are obedient to the

Word of God, we will be at peace. The peace of God is beyond anything the world can give. Philippians 4:7 says, “The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” If we are not obedient to the Word of God and refuse to forgive, the only peace we will have is what we can glean from the world, and that’s a poor substitute for the real thing.

Forgiveness will allow you to forget the pain of the past. In Jeremiah 31:34, the Bible says that God not only has the ability to forgive but also has the ability to forget. We, however, cannot forget the past, but through forgiveness we can forget the pain of the past. That’s true peace—when you can remember, but there is no hurt or resentment. Try as you might, without forgiveness, it can’t be done.

Daniel 9:9 says that mercy and forgiveness belong to the Lord. God is a God of mercy and forgiveness. As Christians, we are to mirror the character of God. We are to show mercy and we are to forgive.

So, when you become offended because someone has wronged you and wonder if you should forgive again, do this: Forgive, one more time.

## Cancel the Debt and Be Free

When someone deeply hurts you, quite often it leaves you with a feeling that they owe you something. Most of the time, the people who hurt you don’t realize what they have done. Let me ask you something. Do you really think other people are planning their lives around hurting you? The truth is, very seldom does someone intentionally set out to hurt another person. Yes, sometimes they do, but that is usually not the case.

Typically, people hurt you because they are insensitive, rude, or angry. If you allow this to make you so mad that your evenings at home are spent stewing over the situation, then you have allowed yourself to accept the devil’s bait.

While you’re miserable and upset, the person who has hurt you is probably out somewhere having a good time and not even thinking about you. They may even be enjoying a piece of strawberry pie with whipped cream on it while you are at home taking an antacid and trying to keep the pain in your stomach under control. You must understand that letting go of hurts in your life has no bearing on the other person. It’s something you must do with yourself.

While counseling a married couple one time, the wife said to her husband, “You owe me.” Although he had hurt her for fifteen years, it was not within his power to give those years back. When somebody owes you a debt that they cannot pay, the only thing you can do is forgive the debt because it’s not within human

power to change the past.

Another woman I counseled hated her deceased father who had molested her. She refused to forgive him; she felt that he owed her because he had stolen her innocence. I couldn't help but think, How much does he owe you? What are you going to do, dig up his grave and pawn the gold ring off his finger? The reality is the deceased father could not pay his daughter back. He's dead and gone. She now has the responsibility to forgive the debt.

Forgiveness means to absolve from payment or cancel a debt. If you have been seriously hurt, you might as well forgive and cancel the debt because there's nothing you can do to change the past. How long do you plan to live with the pain in your heart? Although you can't change the past, you can change your response to it.

Cancel the debt and be free.

> *Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*
>
> Philippians 3:13–14

## The Silk Scarf and the Leather Jacket

When I was in junior high school in the early sixties, one of the coolest things a guy could have was a white silk scarf to wear with his leather jacket. Well, I was "lookin' cool" in my new white silk scarf. It was a gift and I was proud of it. I was in 8th grade and I was sure all the girls thought I looked good. I was tall and very, very thin. I had lots of hair and big feet. I must have looked like a Q-tip, but I still felt like I looked good. After all, who wouldn't with a white silk scarf around his neck?

Each day after school, I would stand outside waiting for my bus to arrive. I liked standing outside—just me and my scarf. We both looked good.

Then, one day it happened. A 9th grader, who had a black leather jacket but didn't have a scarf, came up to me and told me how much he liked my scarf. Then he knocked me down and took it. I was mad, but he was big, so I did nothing. For weeks I watched him as he wore my scarf openly at school. He was big and strong and he knew it. I didn't dare approach him. Deep inside, I hated him. Each day the hate grew.

After a while, school was out. He went on to high school and I stayed in junior high. I thought of my scarf from time to time and would think of ways I could

hurt him. He humiliated me and took something I loved. He had no right.

Years passed. I went to college, got married, and started growing up. During those early years, I worked as a male nurse at a major hospital in Kansas City. One day one of my patients had a visitor. We stood together in the waiting room. He looked familiar. He looked at me and I looked at him. I could see in his eyes he recognized me. Then I remembered. He was the guy who took my scarf. But something had changed. He was about 5' 8" and thin. I was 6' 4" and medium build. The tables had turned.

I wanted to hate him, but I couldn't. I tried to, but the hate just wouldn't come. The only thing I could do was reach out and shake his hand. He flinched. He must have thought I was going to hit him. I laughed and asked him if he still had the scarf. He was scared, but I felt clean. God had removed the hate and love was in its place.

Only God can change hate to love. Only God can remove the darkness inside us and replace it with light. Only God can take a heart that is full of pain and replace it with a heart full of love and peace. Only God can heal the broken heart.

Jesus said in Mark 11:24, "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them." This verse sounds great and it is true, but we must read God's Word in context. The next verse says that if we have anything against anyone, we should forgive them, because if we don't forgive those who have wronged us, we will not be forgiven by God.

Too many people are living their lives under the stress and pressure created by unforgiveness. As a Christian, we have the God-given power to forgive and all it takes is a decision. Even though it looks impossible and even though the hurts may be deep, if we can decide to forgive and step into forgiveness by faith, then God will empower us with His power to do what looks impossible.

If the wounds are deep and the scars are old, don't believe the lie that you cannot forgive. Believe the truth. Jesus told us in Mark 9:23, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." Step out in faith and the impossible will happen.

## The Benefits of Forgiving

After teaching about forgiveness, I had a man ask this question. He said, "I understand that as a Christian I am to forgive. I understand that Jesus commanded us to forgive. But what difference will it make in my daily life?

Who knows or cares if I forgive or not?”

The answer to that is a simple one. God knows if you forgive or not and God cares. If He didn’t care whether or not we forgive, then He would not have talked so much about it in His Word. God is not a time waster. If He addressed it in His Word, then it’s important to Him. And if it’s important to Him, it better be important to us.

So let’s take just a moment and see why we need to forgive.

1) We need to forgive in order to restore our minds.

When we dwell on the hurts and pains of the past, we will be consumed with self-pity. We will live so much in yesterday that we will be ineffective today. We need to keep our minds on the things of God. We are told in Philippians 4:8:

> *Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.*
>
> *2) We need to forgive so our prayers will not be hindered.*

Remember, Jesus said in Mark 11:25 that when we stand praying, we must forgive others, otherwise God will not forgive us. And in 1 Peter 3:7, the Bible says that a husband who does not treat his wife with honor will have his prayers hindered. Many men harbor unforgiveness in their hearts toward their wives for one reason or another. That is not honoring their wives and it will keep their prayers from being answered.

3) We need to forgive to be obedient to God.

For a Christian, that should be enough. If the Word of God says to forgive, then we don’t need to try to figure out why. We just need to do it.

Many times we talk about what we need to do, but we don’t tell how to do it. So, how do we forgive?

This may sound oversimplified, but it actually is simple: You just decide to. You have to make a mental decision and do it. Let the offense go. Open your clinched fist and let it go. You cannot regard how you feel as truth. You must remember that you have decided to forgive and let it go and not go back on your decision. Your feelings will come in line later.

I have counseled people who have said they prayed for years for God to take away the unforgiveness in their hearts. They blame God because He hasn’t removed it. Well, that’s wrong thinking. God is not the one holding on to the unforgiveness. You are.

Jesus didn't tell us to pray to God the Father and He would take away the unforgiveness and bitterness in our hearts. He said that we were to get rid of it. It's our responsibility. Just let it go!

Forgiveness doesn't mean that you're to get back into a bad relationship. Forgiveness doesn't mean to continue to let an abusive husband beat you. But forgiveness means you have to let all the hurts, resentments, and bitterness go. The situation may not change, but you will. You will be free from the bondage of unforgiveness and when you stand praying, God will hear your prayers.

Remember this: Satan wants to destroy Christians. He uses unforgiveness. God, on the other hand, wants us to be set free. He uses forgiveness. The choice is ours.

## I'll Forgive You This Time, but You Owe Me

How many times have you heard someone say, "I'll forgive you this time, but you owe me?" The reason they feel the person owes them is that in reality, they haven't forgiven him or her. If they would have truly forgiven them, then they would have "canceled the debt" and nothing would have been owed.

Many good Christians are carrying around extra baggage. They are weighed down with inner hurts and resentments and the result is they are being destroyed.

In 2 Corinthians 2:10–11, Paul said that he forgave everything. He then goes on to say that we should not be ignorant of the devil's devices, and one of the devices (or tools) he uses against the Church is unforgiveness.

Unforgiveness, if not taken care of, will consume you. Bitterness and revenge creep in easily and then sin is born.

Once a man told me that he was not holding unforgiveness, he was just hurt. Let's get real. We are just calling unforgiveness by a more acceptable word. When someone hurts you and you hold on to that offense, that's unforgiveness and unforgiveness displeases God.

Some people are waiting around for the one who has wronged them to repay them somehow. Again, the reality is there's no way that people who have wronged you can ever repay you. You just have to let it go. Forgiveness means to let it go! You just have to decide to cancel that debt. They can't repay you the years of hurt. Even if they wanted to, they couldn't. God is the only One who restores, not man. You just need to let it go!

Satan does not want you to forgive anyone for anything. He wants you to hold on to every hurt and pain. He wants you destroyed and he knows that unforgiveness will do it.

Remember what Jesus said in Mark 11:24–26:

> *"Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."*

In this passage, Jesus said that if we don't forgive others, then God will not forgive us. We could elaborate on this, but how much clearer could Jesus be? If we don't forgive, we won't be forgiven.

Once a lady said to me, "But you don't understand. I can't forgive this person who has hurt me and my family. My hurt was not imagined. He really did hurt me." Well, that's the point. The ones who really do hurt you are the ones who need forgiveness. Jesus died for the guilty, not the righteous. Only the guilty need to be forgiven.

And, let me say this. Sometimes the one in unforgiveness is the only one miserable. All the time you're miserable, the one who hurt you is probably out having a good time. Forgiveness is for you. Forgiveness will set you free. Don't be concerned about the other person. Just let it go. Sometimes your unforgiveness doesn't even affect the other person. That's the way unforgiveness is. The one who is destroyed is the one who won't forgive. Holding on to unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.

You may say, "I already have forgiven them, but they have done it again. I can't keep forgiving them." Yes, you can. When Peter asked Jesus how many times he was to forgive his brother, Jesus said there is no limit. (Matt. 18:21–22.)

Unforgiveness is a device of the devil. Don't let the devil destroy your life. Let it go.

# FOUNDATIONAL TRUTHS

## The Greatest Truth in the Bible

When I was a youngster, my Sunday School teacher asked our class an interesting question. She said, "Is there something that God cannot do?" Well, we all sat around thinking and we answered, "No, there is not." We all agreed. There was nothing too big for God. He could do anything. Then the teacher asked the awesome question. "Can God make a rock so large that He can't lift it?"

We all sat there with our brains hurting. We couldn't figure it out. But truthfully, there is something God cannot do. God cannot lie. (Titus 1:2.)

Even the Bible, God's Holy Word, says that He is limited in His actions. In the year 63 AD, Paul wrote a letter to Titus. He started his letter by making an interesting statement. In the second verse of the first chapter of Titus, Paul says that God cannot lie. This could be one of the most important statements in the Bible. Let me explain.

Everything in the Word of God is based on belief—belief in God and belief that He has not lied and will not lie. God expects us to believe Him. He expects us to place our entire existence, everything we are and everything we have, on the line. He wants us to have total faith in Him. In fact, He not only expects it, but He requires it.

All through history God has been moved by belief. He has always responded to faith. When man believes that God will do His Word in their life, God moves to perform it.

Once I taught this in a church in Minnesota. After the meeting a man questioned this. He said, "God does the same thing for everyone. God will not perform His Word for some people and not for others."

I'm sure the man thought what he said was right. But, he was wrong. God promises salvation, healing, and prosperity in His Word, but it is only for those who believe. It is only for those who have faith in His Word and those who believe that He did not lie and then act on that belief.

Jesus died for the sins of the world, but only those who believe in Him will reap the benefits of His death and resurrection. (John 3:16.) God only responds to faith. Doubt and unbelief does not move Him. That's why Satan continually tries to put doubt in the minds of people. Where there is doubt, there is no faith. And according to Hebrews 11:6, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him."

# FREEDOM

## The Word Destroys Sin

> *Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.*
>
> Psalm 119:11

As a pastor of a growing church, I continually have people ask me many questions. One question that I have been asked consistently over the years is this: "Pastor, I have this specific sin in my life and I need to quit. I can't seem to do it

on my own. Can you tell me how?"

The Word of God tells us in John 8:32 that the truth will set us free. The truth it is referring to is contained in God's Word. (v. 31.) Not only is the truth contained in God's Word, but the truth is God's Word.

We know as Christians we are to daily renew ourselves with the Word of God. The purpose of doing this is not just a ritualistic commandment to prove our obedience. The purpose is so that we can have the delivering power of the Word of God embedded in us; then as trials appear, we can be set free and when temptations arise, we will not yield. As the opening verse here says, hiding God's Word in our hearts will prevent us from sinning. Within God's Word is the power to eliminate and overpower the temptation to yield to sin.

Many people have told me that as long as they are attending a Bible-believing church regularly and continually giving time to the study of God's Word, that even though trials and temptations come along, there is still victory. These same people tell me that when they drift away from fellowship and from the daily reading and study of God's Word, the trials and temptations overpower them.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that God's Word will deliver us from the stress and depression that attaches itself to the problems in the world.

# FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

## How to Glorify the Father

In John 15:5, Jesus said that He was the true vine and we as Christians were the branches. Our responsibility is to bear fruit. Jesus explained that a branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it is connected to the vine. Then He goes on to say that neither can we bear fruit unless we are connected to Him.

In the same way that a tree limb withers away and no longer bears fruit when it is cut from the trunk of the tree, likewise without being connected to Jesus we cannot live.

Most people have seen an apple tree. An apple that is ready to eat hangs from the branch, ready to be harvested. But let me ask you this, have you ever seen an apple growing off the trunk of a tree? No, of course not! That's because it's the job of the branch to bear fruit.

As Christians, we know that the fruit of the Spirit is goodness, righteousness, and truth. (Eph. 5:9.) An even more detailed description of the fruit of the Spirit is given in Galatians 5:22–23 where it says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,

peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control." The fruit of the Spirit is the by-product of being a Christian who is connected to the vine.

The source of all goodness, righteousness, and truth is Jesus. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Love, light, and life flow from the vine through us and into the fruit. In the fruit are seeds. The seeds continue to grow and multiply in the lives of others. When a Christian stays connected to Jesus and walks in goodness, the fruit produced can change the world.

Jesus made a very interesting statement in John 15:8 that is often overlooked. He said that the way the Father is glorified is by the abundance of fruit that grows from the branches. Walk in the fruit of the Spirit and glorify God.

Remember, Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

## Don't Let Circumstances Affect Your Joy

> *Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 7:4

The apostle Paul talks here about joy in a way that sounds impossible to attain, but a little later on he tells us why, in fact, it is very possible: joy is one part of the fruit of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:22.) That means that Christians have the seed of joy inside of them. When we become Christians, the Holy Spirit moves inside of us and actually takes up residence inside of our bodies. Our bodies become the temple of the Spirit of God and all of the characteristics of His Spirit we now have. (1 Cor. 3:16.)

A major characteristic of the Spirit of God is joy and when His Spirit is in you, you have no excuse for not being joyful. When you know the enemy is defeated or can be defeated and that victory is within your grasp, you cannot help but have a smile on your face.

Years ago, I attended the final game of the World Series. I was blessed by being able to sit on the front row behind the dugout. The game was intense and the crowd was really into it. But when the final out was made, I observed a distinct difference between the two dugouts. The team that had won was having a victory celebration. They were leaping on each other, jumping up and down and having a great time. While in the other dugout, the dugout of the losing team, there was

great sadness.

Where there is victory, joy is automatic. As Christians, we must know that we are victorious. We must know that greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. (1 John 4:4.) We must know that all things are possible to those who believe and we are believers. (Mark 9:23.) We must know that Satan has been defeated and we are on the winning side.

With this knowledge, there should be great joy. The way things look should never change what we know. If things look bad, we can still have joy because we know the truth and the truth is this: The way things look is not reality. Reality is the truth and the truth is, Satan is defeated and we have the victory. So we can "count it all joy when [we] fall into various trials" (James 1:2)!

# GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

## The Parallel Flow of the Spirit —Praying in the Spirit

> *Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant…. The manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 12:1,7–11

This passage talks about the nine spiritual gifts of the Spirit, but there is a lot of confusion about "praying in the spirit" and the gift of "different kinds of tongues." Much of the reason is because of avoidance, fear, and ignorance on the subject. Paul said here that he did not want us to be ignorant concerning spiritual gifts.

The word ignore is the root word for ignorance and ignorant. When you ignore something, you become ignorant and walk in ignorance. Because of past abuses and incorrect teaching, many ministries, pastors, and teachers have chosen to ignore anything in the Word concerning speaking in tongues.

This avoidance has left the church void of one of the greatest spiritual tools

provided to the Church today. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 11:3 that the gospel was not complicated, but was actually quite simple. Anything avoided or feared will seem complicated, but understanding and truth bring clarity. For this reason, we must search the Word, study, and understand what the Holy Spirit teaches us about tongues.

Generally speaking, there is a parallel flow of the nine spiritual gifts. One flow operates through the will of the Spirit-filled believer and the other is manifested by the will, desire, and timing of the Holy Spirit. For example, wisdom is obtained by asking God. (James 1:5.) The word of wisdom is a gift of the Spirit. Knowledge is obtained by study of the word. The word of knowledge is a gift of the Spirit. (1 Cor. 12:8.) Faith is obtained by hearing the Word. (Rom.10:17.) The gift of faith is a gift of the Spirit. Praying in the Spirit is a result of your desire to pray God's will in tongues. The gift of different kinds of tongues is a gift of the Holy Spirit that is distributed as He wills.

For this lesson we will focus on the parallel flow of tongues, but before we do, we need to understand something about praying in tongues. Praying in tongues is available to all Spirit-filled believers. This can be done anytime. Praying in tongues is subject to the timing of the one praying in tongues. The Bible calls this praying with the spirit. (1 Cor. 14:15.) You can do this whenever you want to.

We also are told in the Bible that when we do not know how to pray, that the Spirit enables us to pray in such a way that He is actually interceding for us. In fact, when we pray in the spirit, we are praying the will of God.

> *Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*
>
> Romans 8:26,27

The great thing about praying the will of God is, when we pray His will, we are assured that He hears us and also that when He hears us, that we receive our request.

So when you pray in the spirit, you can be assured that you are praying God's will and that He is committed to fulfilling that prayer.

> *Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of*

*Him.*

1 John 5:14,15

Although operating in the gift of different kinds of tongues may sound or even seem the same as praying in tongues, it is actually quite different. While you can pray in the spirit (in tongues) anytime you want and there does not need to be an interpretation, the gift of different kinds of tongues is given by the Holy Spirit as He desires. The gift of tongues requires interpretation of tongues (another gift) in order to benefit all. (1 Cor. 12:10-11.)

Some denominations and ministries teach against the gifts of the Spirit and seem to focus on what they call the error of tongues. Sadly, because they don't understand the parallel flow of the Spirit they lump praying in the Spirit and speaking in tongues together as the same thing. Until this basic difference is understood, the Scriptures on the gifts will seem confusing.

Remember, praying in the Spirit is something you decide to do. Operating in the gift of tongues is something the Holy Spirit decides you are going to do and you yield to His will and His gift.

## The Gift of Faith

The third gift of the Holy Spirit as listed in 1 Corinthians 12 is the gift of faith. (v. 9.) Like all the other gifts of the Holy Spirit, there is a parallel flow of faith. The natural flow of faith is faith that is available to every believer. This natural flow of faith comes by hearing the Word of God: "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17).

There is a second flow of faith called the gift of faith. This special faith is limited to the will and distribution of the Holy Spirit: "To another faith by the same Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:9).Faith can be measured. The Bible refers to little faith and great faith. In fact, at one time the disciples of Jesus asked to have their faith increased. (Luke 17:5.) So obviously, faith is something that grows. Remember, it grows through hearing the Word of God. (Rom. 10:17.)

Before we go any further, let's look at the two flows of faith.

1) Natural Faith

In the natural life of all believers, faith is extremely important. Everything a Christian receives must be received by faith. Ephesians 2:8 tells us that we are saved through faith. Hebrews 11:6 says that we need faith to please God. James 5:15 says the prayer of faith will heal the sick. James 1:6–7 says if we don't pray in faith, we won't receive anything. Romans 14:23 says that anything that is not of faith is sin. Then Hebrews 4:2 makes an astonishing statement: it says that

without faith the gospel is unprofitable. And finally, 1 John 5:4 tells us that faith is our victory that overcomes the world.

Is faith important? Of course it is! According to the Bible, without faith we are lost, sick, in lack, in sin, unpleasing to God, defeated, and have a gospel that doesn't work. Do we have to live this way? No, we do not because faith is available to every believer. If you want faith, all a believer has to do is hear the Word, and allow the Word to saturate his or her heart. Then faith grows.

2) The Gift of Faith

The gifts of the Spirit are not received by asking and begging. They are imparted to each believer as the Holy Spirit desires and wills to do so. For every gift and gifting there is a purpose. The Holy Spirit imparts these gifts where they will not be quenched and will fulfill the purpose for which they were given.

Let me illustrate the gift of faith. Several years ago, Loretta and I went to Quincy, Illinois, for a Saturday evening meeting in the student union of a university. The next morning I was to speak at one of the local churches and then we would go to the airport and fly home. Meetings like this were always a joy for me. Not only did I enjoy the meetings, but I enjoyed flying. In fact, I especially enjoyed flying to Quincy, Illinois. The airport was large with long and wide runways and very little traffic. Several times I flew to Quincy just to get a piece of lemon meringue pie ala mode at the little café in the terminal.

However, this ministry trip was different. It seemed like anything that could delay me, was delaying me. It took longer to get the airplane ready, there was the threat of storms, and by the time I got to the meeting, I was not in a good mood. Quite honestly, that's not my nature. I've always had a reputation for being a happy guy. In fact, sometimes I'm so happy it irritates people.

Anyway, as I was sitting on the platform waiting for the meeting to begin, a gentleman in his fifties slowly came through the back door. His arm and back were twisted, one leg was turned so much that it looked backwards, and his head was tilted to one side. It almost embarrasses me to admit this, but as he walked in the back of the auditorium, my attitude was so poor that under my breath I said, "God, don't let this man come forward for healing!"

A friend of mine, who is a senator, had received a flyer saying that I was going to be in Quincy. Although he couldn't attend the meeting, he encouraged a friend of his who was a businessperson from the Middle East to come, and he did. As the music and meeting progressed, there was an anointing from God that came into the auditorium and it changed the atmosphere and my attitude. The Middle Eastern businessperson got very excited about the word on healing that I was

sharing. Although he had never seen the crippled man before, as soon as the invitation was given, he grabbed him, brought him forward, and stood in the line next to him.

People were lined up all across the front of the auditorium. As I looked at the crippled man to my left, the Spirit of God imparted to me the gift of faith. This was not faith that had been built by me reading the Word, although I had been reading the Word. I knew this man would be healed.

Confidently, I walked to him. I calmly pointed my finger in his face and said, "If you will believe you can be healed, you will be healed." He looked at me and said, "I believe." I stretched out my hand to place it on his head, but his head was twisted so far to the side that I actually put my hand on his neck and I quietly said, "In the name of Jesus, be healed."Over the years I've prayed for thousands to be healed, but the confidence I experienced at this healing was different. His twisted hand and arm began to straighten out. His leg turned around until it was completely normal. His back and neck became straight and within thirty seconds, the crippled man stood before me straight and tall, with both hands, both feet, and his entire body completely normal.

Every eye was on this man. A quietness fell upon the entire auditorium. A miracle healing had taken place that could be measured. The man was complete. His body was shalom—well and whole and in good health.[20]

The man looked at me and said, "Thank you!" I said, "Don't thank me. Thank the Lord." So the man looked up and said, "Thank You, Lord," and started walking across the auditorium in front of the long line of people who were waiting for ministry.

The side wall at the university was glass from ceiling to floor. Every eye was still on the man as he opened the glass doors, walked through them and down the long hallway and out of the building, 100 percent healed by the power of God. The gift of faith had been distributed to me. I was totally confident that his healing would be complete. What looked impossible an hour earlier became reality within me even before I saw the healing take place.

The gift of faith imparted on the inside changed the circumstances on the outside.

## The Word of Wisdom

One of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit is called "the word of wisdom." The word of wisdom is wisdom from God imparted by the Holy Spirit that is beyond natural human wisdom.

Wisdom is available to every born-again believer. One of the books in the Bible that talks about wisdom is the book of James. That book is actually a letter that was written by James (one of Jesus' disciples) to the Church. In other words, this letter that we call the book of James is actually a letter written to born-again believers. In James 1:5 it says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him." This verse tells us that a Christian who lacks wisdom can receive wisdom in abundance from God and all he or she must do is ask in faith and receive it.

However, the Bible tells us of a supernatural anointing of wisdom called "the word of wisdom." First Corinthians 12:8 lists it as one of the nine gifts of the Holy Spirit.

What is the difference between wisdom from God and the word of wisdom? Actually, the answer is simple. Natural wisdom that is available to the born-again believer is wisdom that can be used in making the day-to-day decisions in life. This wisdom can be used in the natural affairs and in the ministry affairs of every believer. However, the word of wisdom is not available to every believer all the time. It is available only as it is distributed by the Holy Spirit and only as He wills to distribute it:"One and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills" (1 Cor. 12:11).

Several years ago I was asked to speak to some business people in our local town. The meeting took place in a banquet room at the bank. They asked me to come and speak what was on my heart. The things of God are always on my heart.

Although I was in the ministry at the time, I was also the president of the Lake of the Ozarks Marine Dealers' Association and chairman of the State Marine Board. They probably thought I was going to talk about high performance power boats, but I didn't. I talked about the things of God and after I spoke, I had an altar call. The business people were very receptive. I laid hands on many people and prayed with them.

Near the end of the meeting, one of the local businesswomen came forward. I had never seen the lady before this night. I asked her what she would like to receive from the Lord. She said she wanted God to help her quit smoking. I agreed with her in prayer that she would receive the strength to quit. But as she turned away and started walking toward the back of the bank meeting room, the Spirit of God came upon me and imparted to me the word of knowledge and the word of wisdom.

I called to the lady, who was about fifteen feet from me by then. She turned and

said, “Yes?” I heard myself saying, “The Spirit of God would say to you this night, if you would take the cigarettes you have hidden in the vase by the couch, the cigarettes you’ve hidden in the canister in the cabinet, and the cigarettes you’ve hidden in the drawer and destroy them, you will be delivered of smoking permanently.”

My mind was thinking, What in the world am I saying? For all I knew, this lady didn’t even have a vase beside her couch or a couch for that matter. This information was supernatural knowledge. These were facts about her life I had no way of knowing. No education in any institution of higher learning in the world could have taught me what I was speaking boldly as fact. She turned toward me and acknowledged that what I said was true, but then made a startling statement. She said, “I can’t do that because cigarettes are expensive and when I start smoking again, I’ll just have to go and buy new ones.”

God loved this lady so much that He imparted the word of knowledge to me to reveal a truth in her life. And then He imparted the word of wisdom to me on how to solve the problem. She rejected the knowledge and the wisdom of God.

The wisdom that comes from God through the impartation of the word of wisdom by the Holy Spirit is supernatural wisdom beyond the wisdom of people and wisdom that cannot be attained by intellect or experience.

So the bottom line is this. As Christians we should be asking God for wisdom daily and be ready and willing to receive the word of wisdom as He imparts it to us by His Holy Spirit.

## The Word of Knowledge

Several years ago my wife, Loretta, and I were speaking at a series of meetings in Iowa. At the end of one of these meetings, a man and a woman came to the front of the congregation and asked Loretta and me to pray for them. I asked them what they would like for us to agree with them in prayer for and they indicated that they needed help in the area of finances. They said that even though they both worked, they could never seem to get their finances to stretch to the weekend. Instead of having money left over at the end of the week, they had week left over at the end of the money.

We all bowed our heads and just as I started to pray, Loretta quickly looked up at them and said, “Are you two married?” I glanced down at their hands and they were both wearing wedding rings. I thought to myself, Oops, Loretta’s really missed it this time.

The man and woman both raised up their heads and had strange looks on their

faces. The man said, “Well, yes, of course, we’re married.” Then he paused and said, “But not to each other.”Loretta had hit the nail on the head. These two people were living in adultery and asking God to bless them. But here’s the question—how did Loretta know? We had never been to that church before. We had never even been to that town before.

In Acts 5, there was a man named Ananias who, along with his wife, Sapphira, sold some land. When they sold the land, they kept back a certain amount of the money for themselves. Then Ananias took the balance and gave it to Peter and the other apostles, who were the leaders of the early church.

When Ananias laid the money at the feet of the apostles, Peter said,

> *“Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.”*
>
> Acts 5:3,4

When Ananias heard these words he fell down dead. Later, his wife came in and the same thing happened to her. (vv. 7–10.) How did Peter know that they had kept some of the money? The answer is Peter didn’t know, but the Holy Spirit did. Peter, who had been filled with the Holy Spirit, was operating in the gift of the word of knowledge. There was no way he could have known; but the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of God, knows everything. Nothing is hidden from God.

In John 14, Jesus said that He was going to be with the Father and when He left, the Father would send the Holy Spirit in His name to be here with us as our comforter and helper until He, Jesus, returned. (vv. 2–3,16–18.)

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit that is available to Christians is described in 1 Corinthians 12:8 and that gift is called “the word of knowledge.”

How did Peter know that the land was sold for more money than Ananias and Sapphira had said? The Holy Spirit spoke through him with a word of knowledge. How did Loretta know that the two people were not married? The Holy Spirit spoke through her with a word of knowledge.

Keep this in mind. God’s power has not diminished. He is no less supernatural today than He was 2,000 years ago. (Mal. 3:6.)

# GIVING

## Your Mite Activates His Might

One time Jesus was sitting opposite the treasury and watched how people were putting in their money. He noticed that the rich cast in a lot but that a widow only put in two small coins. (Mark 12:41–42.) The King James Version of the Bible calls the coins mites.

A mite was a coin issued by the Duke of Brabant and the Count of Flanders a few years before the King James translation of the Bible was printed in 1611; the mite was still in circulation at that time and was worth half a farthing. In other words, it could be equal to a penny today. It was considered almost worthless.

Although there was no coin at the time of Jesus actually called a mite, He was referring to a lepton (the proper Greek name)[21] or a coin of little or no value.

Jesus was a teacher. He used every opportunity to teach His disciples. He knew that they would be entrusted to take the gospel to the world. So, He taught them that the poor widow had put in more than everyone else who had given. Yet, how could that be? She only gave two small coins and everyone else had given more. How could she be the big giver of the group?

First, she gave out of her need and everyone else gave out of their extra. She gave everything and they gave some. By giving all she had, she was saying that she put God's kingdom first and her kingdom second. She was more concerned with the house of God having bread than if she had bread. Her heart was seeking first the kingdom of God.

Keep in mind that in Bible times, those who had money were commanded to give at the temple and to give to the poor. But on the day that Jesus sat by the treasury, a poor widow was giving everything. Her heart was right before God—no greed, no envy, just the joy of giving.

Secondly, God can transform a small coin into a fortune. He can take a small amount of fish and bread and feed 5,000 men and their families (an estimated 20,000-plus people) with food left over. (John 6:1–14.) God can take a small seed and move mountains.

God can take your seed and create a bountiful harvest. That is the nature of the one true God we serve. (Isa. 44:6,8.) Our God is a good God of multiplication. He gives us the seed to sow and lets us keep the harvest. Then when we give of the harvest, He multiplies again. That's good news.

> *For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 9:10 nlt

Remember this: the Bible says in Hebrews 13:8 that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. If He watched the treasury yesterday, He is watching it today. If it mattered to Him yesterday, it matters to Him today.

Never allow yourself to think that what you have to give is too small. This is a good deal—exchanging our mite for His might.

## Don't "Tip" God

> *Give to the Lord, O families of the peoples, give to the Lord glory and strength. Give to the Lord the glory due His name; bring an offering, and come into His courts. Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth.*
>
> Psalm 96:7–9

Every Tuesday the men of our church get together for a weekly men's breakfast and Bible study. It starts at about 8 a.m. with breakfast and we try to get our Bible study completed in a timely manner so the men can go to their various jobs in the community.

One Tuesday morning when I woke up, it was about 20 degrees below freezing. Needless to say, it was tempting to be one of the "frozen chosen" and stay home. However, going to church is a choice and I had chosen to go.

At the men's breakfast there is always a coffee can sitting beside the table with a homemade sign on the front that says, "Food Money." As I leave for the men's breakfast, I always make sure that I have a few dollars in my pocket so that I can "pay God for my meal." But that Tuesday was different. As I reached to put a few dollars in my pocket, I heard the Spirit of God speak to my heart with these words: "My house is not a restaurant. I am not a waiter. And you don't give Me a tip."

My heart sank and leaped with joy all at the same time. The rebuke felt wonderful and I went to the men's breakfast with a whole new frame of mind. At the breakfast I told the men that we were no longer going to pass a coffee can and toss in some change to repay God for the biscuits and gravy. And that day something changed.

All through God's Word we are told to worship Him. We were created to worship. But we should worship Him in everything that we do, including our

giving.

Have you ever thought about the word giving? Giving is not the same as payment. We don't worship God with our payment. We worship Him with our giving. He freely gave to us and we must freely give to Him. (Rom. 8:32.) The thought of paying God for breakfast does not bring joy, but the act of eating in His house and giving Him an offering brings great joy. Leave a tip at the restaurant, but take an offering to the Lord.

# GIVING UP

## Why Would Anyone Give Up?

Over the years there have been a lot of people I've known who started living in the things of God and then at some point in time, they walked away and gave up. During that time I noticed several factors involved that can cause people to lose heart and give up. Let's look at each of them.

1) The fear of failure.

Because of past hurts, some have allowed fear of failure in life to enter in. They feel that it's better to have never tried than to try and fail. This is a direct result of lack of belief in God's Word.

2) The fear of what people will say.

There those who live their lives wondering what others are saying about them. The truth is that if you live your life based upon the words of other people, then it will be difficult for you to live your life based on the Word of God. There will always be some individuals who don't like you or understand you. So, get over it!

3) Believing the lies of Satan.

In John 8:44, Jesus said that Satan is the father of lies and he will try to enter our thought realm any way he can. Every thought that comes up into the realm of your consciousness must be examined. If it is of God, receive it. If it is of the devil, reject it.

4) Walking by sight.

Second Corinthians 5:7 tells us that we are to walk by faith and not by sight. In other words, we do not make our decisions based on what we see, but instead we make our decisions based on what God says.

5) Living outside the camp.

When the apostles were released from prison, the Scripture says that they returned to their own company. (Acts 4:21,23.) You must associate with other believers. Associating with the world will bring discouragement and disillusionment and will cause some to give up.

So when you feel like giving up, examine the source of this feeling and remove it. Remember, God is the God of increase and completion. (Ps. 115:14; Phil. 1:6.) He never gave up on you, so don't give up on His call for your life. (Rom. 8:28.)

# GLORY (The)

## The Glory Is His Presence

What is the glory of God? The glory of God is simply the presence of God manifested.

In Old Testament times, the Scripture says that the glory of God filled the temple so strongly that the worshipers could not see. The glory was like smoke or like a cloud. The power of God was so great that the priests couldn't stand. They collapsed.

> *Indeed it came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying: "For He is good, for His mercy endures forever," that the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God."*
>
> 2 Chronicles 5:13,14

The power of God, the glory of God was so strong that their physical bodies could not totally function.

In Acts 22, Paul told what happened to him when he was on the road to Damascus. He described the light that was so bright he couldn't stand and then a voice that came from heaven out of the light. (vv. 6–11.) That light was the glory of God.

When Moses was confronted with the burning bush, the only way he could describe it was a bush that is burning but is not burning up. (Ex. 3:1–3.) What was he describing? He saw the glory of God. Out of the light surrounding the bush, out of the glory, God spoke. He said, "Take off your sandals. You are

standing on holy ground." (v. 5.)

The Bible is actually the story of the glory. In the beginning, man was with God and man walked in the glory. Because he sinned, he lost the glory. Jesus came to restore man back to the glory of God. Adam and Eve were clothed with the glory of God.[22] The glory of God surrounded them and clothed them. When they sinned, the glory departed and when the glory departed, they felt naked and did not know what to do. (Gen. 3:7.)

In Mark 9:23 Jesus said, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." As Christians, we are not to be doubters. If we doubt that the glory of God is going to be in our presence, it won't be.

James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." God is a good God. He has good things for you. God is not trying to trick you into moving into His glory or walking by faith so He can zap you. God wants you to fellowship with Him and He wants a closeness with you.

If we carefully examine the Word of God, we will find hidden nuggets and mysteries that we often overlook. For instance, "To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles" (Col. 1:27). Here is the mystery of the riches of the glory among the Gentiles, as the Message Bible translates it: "Christ is in you, so therefore you can look forward to sharing in God's glory." You only have one hope of ever moving into the glory of God. You only have one hope of seeing the glory. You only have one hope and that hope is Christ, the Anointed One, and His anointing in you.

> *But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 2:7,8

Jesus not only is the Lord of glory, He is the Lord who has the glory. Entering into His presence is entering into the glory, and in Him is fullness of joy. (Ps. 16:11.)

## The Visible Glory

> *For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.*
>
> Mark 8:38

When Jesus comes back, He is going to come in glory. The Bible says that the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout and there will be a cloud. (1 Thess. 4:16.) What kind of cloud is that talking about? Humidity? No, it's not talking about moisture content. It's not talking about that kind of a cloud. It's talking about the glory cloud. It's talking about the awesome, radiant presence of God. Do you want to be there? Do you want to walk in God's glory? I do, and I hope you do too!

When the devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness, at one point he taunted the Lord about mankind losing the glory of God because of Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden.

> *Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.'"*
>
> Luke 4:5,6

The devil was saying to Jesus (who was the Son of God), "You remember Adam and Eve, Your creation? They had the glory! Well, they sinned, and it's been delivered to me! And I'll give their glory (he's talking about our glory—the glory of man) to You, if You will fall down and worship me. Because that's my glory and I will give it to whoever I want to give it to."

One thing you need to remember about the devil—he's a liar. (John 8:44.) Also remember, it is impossible for God to lie. (Heb. 6:18.) Likewise, it is impossible for the devil to tell the truth. The devil did not have our glory. The glory that we have on the earth today, the glory that was restored to us by Jesus, was not given to us by the devil. The devil has never had it. In John 17, Jesus talked about His glory to the Father. He said, "The glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one."

In Luke 9, the Bible records the transfiguration of Jesus. It involved the glory of God.

> *And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and those with him were heavy with sleep; and when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men who stood with Him.*
>
> *Then it happened, as they were parting from Him, that Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said.*

> *While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" When the voice had ceased, Jesus was found alone. But they kept quiet, and told no one in those days any of the things they had seen.*
>
> Luke 9:30–36

When Jesus was transfigured, the Bible tells us there was a cloud there. That cloud was His glory. We can find all through the Word where the glory appeared like a cloud. For example, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Another instance is when Jesus was in Cana and He turned the water into wine:"This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him" (John 2:11). Some people read past that. Not only did He turn the water into wine, but He manifested His glory and His disciples believed in Him. So now, all of a sudden, Jesus' disciples believed in Him after He did His first miracle.

I have heard it taught that the reason they believed in Him was because He turned the water into wine. But the Scripture tells us that not only did He turn the water into wine, but He manifested His glory. You might say, "Well, that may not mean that they saw His glory." When it said His glory was manifested, that meant they saw something. They saw the visible power of God.

Remember, the glory is the manifested presence of God.

## Artificial Glory

I could hardly believe my eyes. As the minister walked onto the platform, the lights were flashing and the smoke was rolling off of the platform. It was quite the entrance. Thousands of people were standing and applauding as the pastor made his way to the pulpit.

I believe we should give honor to our leaders and especially to our fathers of the faith. There has been way too much disrespect and dishonor in recent years. However, when they fired up the smoke machines backstage, it seemed in that instance as though they were trying to simulate the glory of God and His presence.

We're told in the Bible that when they were dedicating the Temple, the Shekinah glory of God filled the temple with smoke. The presence of God was so powerful that the priests had trouble standing up. It's sad when we resort to

producing artificial glory because we don't expect the true manifestation of the glory of God to be present.

At the turn of the century, the glory of God was manifested at the Azusa Street Revival. For over three years the visible, tangible manifestation of the glory cloud was present in the building. I have read the testimonies of many of the children who were there during that revival. All of their stories tell of the same events: young men and women seeking God and God revealing Himself. There were no flashing lights or smoke machines at the Azusa Street Revival.

A hundred years ago, circuit riders were traveling across the United States stopping at every community and preaching the Word of God. Great revivals took place and people of all social standing were coming to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. In one community, a meeting place was set up in a field by one man. After a few days only a handful of people were coming to hear him teach the Word. But he didn't give up. He continued to teach and within weeks, hundreds were attending his meetings.

One evening a farmer showed up with his shotgun at one of those meetings. He was drunk and angry because his wife and daughter had been coming to the meetings. Everything got quiet as the farmer approached the area where the minister was speaking. With his shotgun in his hand, he yelled at the minister, but the man of God had no fear. He pointed at the man and said with a voice of authority, "I rebuke you, in the name of Jesus, and I command you to lay down that shotgun." The man dropped to his knees, sobbed, and immediately received Jesus as his Lord. The town drunk with the violent temper became a strong leader in the church after the circuit rider left town.

Just before Jesus was received up in a cloud after His resurrection, He told His disciples, "You shall receive [witnessing] power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). In order to witness and bring the world to Jesus, we need three things. We need personal salvation, the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit. When we boldly live holy lives, full of power and joy, the world will want what we have. And by the influence of the Holy Spirit, the Bible says that Jesus draws all men to the Father.[23] (John 12:32.)

So here's my point. The modern church can create programs and events that touch the senses of man, but it's only the Holy Spirit who can turn the heart of a man toward Jesus. Don't misunderstand what I am saying. I am not against Christian rallies, concerts, special events, and programs that will introduce people to the house of God and make them feel like they are not excluded or condemned. However, to replace the manifested presence of the glory of God

with man-made substitutes is admitting that we do not expect a true manifestation of His glory. Remember, Jesus told Martha that if she could believe, she would see the glory of God. (John 11:40.)

I want to see the ax head float, the 5,000 fed from a lunch sack, the apostles walking on the water, the sick healed by a touch of the hand, and life exist in the presence of death. (2 Kings 6:6; John 6:1–14; Matt. 14:29; 8:13; John 11:43–44.) Technology can mesmerize and tantalize and bring the level of excitement to a feverish pitch, but only the power of God will raise the dead.

We live in a world of artificial substitutes, but I am on a new quest from this day forward. I'm pressing in for the real thing. How about you?

Scripture References:

Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. (3 John 1:11)

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." (John 6:44)

Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" (John 11:40)

## He Is the God of Glory

> *[Stephen] said, "Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran."*
>
> Acts 7:2

God is not just a God, but He is the God. This scripture tells us that He is the God of glory. If You are the God of glory, it means that You are the God who has control of the glory. The glory is overseen by, controlled by, possessed by, and owned by the God of glory.

God is saying in His Word that He is the God of glory. He is not just another God. There is no other.

Chavod is the Hebrew word for glory.[24] It means weightiness that is substantial, that is heavy; glory and honor; splendor; power; wealth; authority; magnificence; fame; dignity; riches and excellency. These are all part of the Hebrew word that means glory. When we think of God, we need to understand that God is weighted down with these things.

When a king walks into the courtyard and someone says, "Here comes the king in all of his glory," that means the king is coming with all of his authority, all of his power, with his crowns, with his jewels. He has people walk beside him and behind him carrying his possessions. He is weighted down. He is heavy with

riches, substantially heavy. He's heavy with honor. He's heavy with splendor. He's heavy with power.

We must understand that God is the God of power. In Acts 1:8 Jesus said, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." He said that because the power comes from God. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God that comes from the glory.

When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, there is power—dunamis power—that is present in you. Dunamis is the same word the word dynamite comes from. The power on the inside of you, when you are filled with the Holy Spirit, is not available from any other source. That power is not just some little finger fireworks; we're talking about power beyond anything you can think or imagine.

> *Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church.*
>
> Ephesians 3:20,21

According to Scripture the same power that raised Christ from the dead dwells in you when you are filled with the Holy Spirit.

> *If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.*
>
> Romans 8:11

What type of power does it take for God to raise the dead or to create a universe by speaking it into existence? If we could only understand and grasp the power of God, then we would also understand and grasp that the little problems we have are nothing compared to what God can do. Solving our problems does not drain His power. Our problems are nothing to God as far as the energy needed to solve them.

He can solve my problems and your problems at the same time. When I pray and say, "Father, I bring my petition before you," God doesn't say to me, "Get in line. I'm already dealing with someone else. The spiritual Internet is busy right now. We'll get to you when we can." That's not the way God works. God is the God of glory and glory is heaviness with unlimited power, abilities, and riches, and overflowing to those who will receive it.

## Manifestations of the Glory

The manifested presence of God was in the beginning. You can go all the way back to the beginning of Genesis and you will find the manifested presence of

God was there. All through history God has spoken to man from within His glory. With Moses, the voice came from within the bush. (Ex. 3:3.) With Paul, the light around him was from heaven and the voice came from within the light.

> *Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven.*
>
> Acts 9:1–3

What do you suppose that light was? It was the glory of God.

Saul was not a nice guy. He wanted to take Christians back to Jerusalem to be killed so he could destroy the Church. History tells us that Saul, and the men like Saul at that time, went into the houses and tortured people. They had permission to do whatever they wanted to do. When Saul became Paul and wrote the letters in the New Testament, he talked about how he was a bad person. He didn't just mean he didn't leave a good tip at the restaurant. That's not what he was talking about. He was a bad guy! But what changed him? He was changed when he came in contact with the glory!

The glory will either change you or destroy you. "Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'" (Acts 9:4). Where did the voice come from? It came out of the glory.

Many people don't understand how much the glory had to do with the birth of Jesus.

> *Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.*
>
> Luke 2:8,9

The glory of the Lord shone round the angels. Compare this passage with what happened to Moses at the burning bush that was never consumed. A voice came out of the bush. Also compare it with the experience of Paul, who was on the road to Damascus. A bright light shone out of heaven and a voice came out of the light.

Look at what happened on the Day of Pentecost. The glory was also present then.

> *When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing*

> *mighty wind, then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them.*
>
> Acts 2:1–3

It was the glory of God on each of them.

We cannot limit God or His glory. His glory may appear like a light, like smoke, like fire, or like tongues of fire. Nevertheless, it is the glory. Remember, the glory is the manifested presence of God. We must seek God and not the manifestation, but if we seek God, there will be manifestation and it will be God's decision in how He manifests Himself. Seek God and receive the glory.

## Ministering in the Glory

## (A Message to Ministers)

We've seen that chavod is the Hebrew word for glory and that it means weightiness (which is substantial or heavy), glory, honor, splendor, power, wealth, authority, magnificence, fame, dignity, riches, and excellency. Chavod is God's glory. It is not only His honor, renown, and majesty, but also His visible splendor, which filled Solomon's temple and is filling the earth today.

As ministers of the gospel in these last days we must minister as God directs. We must be obedient and we must yield to the presence of God.

More than forty years ago I was licensed and ordained into the ministry by Rev. Joe C. Porter, pastor of Spring Valley Baptist Church in Raytown, Missouri. Over these years I have seen freshness come into many churches. At the same time, I have seen some religious groups grow stale and what I have discovered is this. Sometimes the greatest opponents to the current move of God are the leaders of the previous move of God. We must flow with what God is doing now. Yesterday's manna is not edible today. (Ex. 16:15–20.)

Of course, we never want to throw out yesterday's revelation and the truths of God's Word. We build on them and strengthen our knowledge and revelation of His Word. But as the glory of God is manifested more and more in these last days, we cannot hide ourselves and do business as usual. This is a new time. The shofar is ready to sound in the sky and the return of Jesus is drawing close. (1 Cor. 15:52; Acts. 1:11.)

More than ever, we must take a stand on the Word of God. We must believe what we know and act on what we believe. But in this time of glory, we must be willing to yield to the presence of God.

Here are some things we need to remember about the glory.

1) The glory is the manifested presence of God.

In Luke 9, the glory manifested as a cloud that overshadowed Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, “And a voice came out of the cloud saying, ‘This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!’” (vv. 34–35). Verse 32 tells us that Peter, who was there, was fully awake when he saw the glory.

In John 2, we are told that Jesus manifested His glory when He changed the water into wine. (vv. 9,11.)

When Jesus arrived at Lazarus’ house after his death, He commanded that the stone be removed from the grave. Martha reminded Jesus that Lazarus had been dead for four days and that his body had already begun to decay. Jesus answered her and said that if she would believe, she would see the glory of God. The resurrection of Lazarus was the manifestation of the presence of God. (John 11:1–40.)

2) The glory amplifies God.

Three times in the book of Acts we are told the story of Saul on the road to Damascus and his encounter with the glory that converted him from a man of the world to a man of God and from Saul to Paul. In Acts 22:11, Paul said that the light was the glory and we know that out of the light, God spoke.

It’s interesting that Jesus said that we are the light of the world. (Matt. 5:14.) And He told us in Matthew 5:16 that our light is to shine in such a way that the world will see our good works and that it will bring glory to the Father.

3) We walk by faith and not by sight.

When Elijah and his servant were surrounded by the enemy, Elijah saw the powerful army of God, but the servant did not see God’s army until his (spiritual) eyes were opened. (2 Kings 6:8–17.) Just because he couldn’t see God’s army did not mean God’s army was not there. God’s presence is not based on what you see. Seek God and His glory will be manifested. Seek Him and His presence will be there. Don’t seek the manifestation. Seek Him.

4) The glory will bring abundance.

Of course there is no lack in the presence of God. We must understand that there can be lying signs and wonders. If we only are seeking the light, we need to realize that Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light. (2 Cor. 11:14.) But if we seek the Father, and get into His presence, then the manifestation of the light will always be His and will never be an illusion.

5) Don’t allow fear to hinder you.

Fear is a spiritual force that Satan uses to spiritually paralyze Christians.

Sometimes a fear of what others will think or even a fear of inadequacy in the glory causes some to stand back and observe instead of participating. The problem with becoming a spiritual observer is that many times it opens the door for criticism and criticism blocks the receiving, which creates more criticism.

So rebuke the fear. Stretch out and allow your ministry to be saturated with the glory of God. We are no longer on the brink of the glory. We are no longer waiting for the glory. The glory, the manifested presence of God, is here! As a minister of God, flow in the anointing.

# GOALS

## Live Your Dream

Most people live their lives struggling to find their dream. And many who find their dream struggle even harder to live it. As Christians, we should be living the dream of a lifetime, free from stress and worry. Sadly, this is rare.

You will never be free to live your dream until you accept and move in your calling from God.

God has a plan for the Church, but more specifically, God has a plan for you. It is custom-made for you and your giftings. No one else can do what God wants you to do, the way He wants you to do it. You are one-of-a-kind with a calling from God that is unique. He gifted you for a purpose.

You are God's first choice. If you don't do what God wants you to do, then He will be forced to go to plan B. Don't resist God's plan because of fear that you will live life unsatisfied. God's plan always includes the desires of your heart.

We must be led by the Holy Spirit. When we do not allow the Spirit to guide us, we fall under great stress from lack of direction. Only a Spirit-led life will be at peace. Peace follows obedience.

So, if you are hurting and feel stretched, yield to God's plan. God doesn't change His mind. He has not forgotten you. (Isa. 49:15–16.)

> *For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.*
>
> Romans 11:29

# GOD CANNOT LIE

## Confidence in God

One of our “anchor” scriptures is 2 Corinthians 5:7: “For we walk by faith, not sight.” But let’s analyze this. What does it mean?

Walking by faith means that we base everything we do in life upon what God says because we believe Him. In fact, we believe Him so deeply that everything we say, everywhere we go, every action we take, and every thought in our mind aligns itself with what God says.

A few months ago, I was talking with a lady in my church who was being abused by her boyfriend. She was being abused slightly physically, but she was being severely abused verbally and mentally. The thing that amazed me the most was that even though her boyfriend was abusing her and lying to her regularly, she still continued to believe him and defend him. I remember thinking, Why is it that people will submit themselves to an evil person, but the same person will resist believing a God who has never lied and who always tells the truth?

We serve such a God. Walking by faith should be easy. However, it is a struggle for many. From an early age, we are trained to believe what we see. In fact, a familiar phrase used by many is this: “I will believe it when I see it.” But for the Christian walking by faith, it’s actually quite the opposite. For us, we’ll see it when we believe it.

A truth we find threaded through God’s Word is that everything a Christian receives, he or she must believe for it first. Before we receive salvation, we must believe for salvation. God searches over the earth looking for those who will believe Him. (2 Chron. 16:9.) And when He finds someone who believes Him, then He rewards them because God is a rewarder of those who believe that He is and diligently seek Him. (Heb. 11:6.)

So here’s the key to 2 Corinthians 5:7. We must live our lives based on the truth of God’s Word instead of the facts that are found in the world. We act on the promise instead of the problem. We walk in the truth instead of deception and we walk in the light instead of darkness.

# GOD’S PLAN

## Who Has the Authority Now?

In Romans 8:37 Paul said, “In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” What does this mean to be more than a conqueror?

A person who is more than a conqueror is someone who didn't have to fight the battle but gets to enjoy all the benefits of the victory. And, according to the Bible, if you are a Christian, then that's you!

In the beginning, God placed Adam and Eve here on the earth in the Garden of Eden. He gave them authority over everything and only restricted them from one thing: they were not to eat the fruit of the tree in the midst of the Garden. If they ate it, they would die. (Gen. 2:7,15–17.)

Then Satan, in the form of a serpent, came into the Garden. He told Eve that God was a liar and that God's motives were not pure. (Gen. 3.) Unfortunately, Eve believed Satan and acted against God's command. The result was that Satan, through his deception, separated man from fellowship with God. It looked like Satan had destroyed God's creation. Adam gave up his authority over this world to Satan. It looked like all was lost, but God had a plan.

God the Father sent His Son, Jesus, into the world as a man. While He was here, He taught about the nature of God the Father and He went about healing the sick, raising the dead, and proclaiming the good news.

Jesus said in John 8:44, that Satan is a liar and a murderer. And that's what Satan tried to do to Jesus. The Bible tells us that on the night Jesus was betrayed that Satan himself entered into the body of Judas and betrayed Jesus. (Luke 22:3.) Satan was not leaving a job like this to one of his underling demons. Everything was riding on this one. He took care of it himself.

When Jesus died, I'm sure Satan thought he had just won a great victory, but was he mistaken! The Bible says that Jesus not only defeated death when He came out of the grave, but He also made a public display of Satan. (2 Tim. 1:10; Col 2:15 kjv.) He humiliated him in the spirit realm and took away from him the authority that Satan had taken from Adam.

Now we are getting to the point. The authority that Jesus took from Satan, He gave to His Church. That's right. Jesus gave the authority over the earth back to those who believe, and along with that, He gave us authority over Satan and all the works of his kingdom. Every believer has that authority.

Jesus said in Luke 10:19, "Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you." What does this mean to us?

As Christians, the only way Satan can destroy our lives is if we let him. Jesus has given every believer authority over the works of the devil. So, how does Satan get into the position to torment us? Once again, it's because we let him. Remember, that's what happened in the Garden of Eden. Satan didn't pluck the

fruit from the tree and put it into the mouths of Adam and Eve. He deceived them and they did it.

When Satan comes around with his bag of lies, don't listen to him. Submit yourself unto God. Resist the devil and he will flee.

Remember, you are more than a conqueror through Jesus who loves you. (Rom. 8:37.)

# GOD'S PLAN FOR YOU

## God's Roadmap to Peace for You

> *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.*
>
> Jeremiah 29:11

God has a plan for your future. His plan is good and the path to your destination is paved with peace. Along the path are rest stops and each one is an oasis where God refuels, rejuvenates, and restores vision so you can move forward on the path of peace, all the while moving closer to your destination.

God has preplanned your destination. You have a predestined place in God's plan. But just because God has predetermined where He wants you to be, does not mean you will get there. The choice is yours. Let me explain.

If I were to hand you a map of the United States and tell you to go to a certain place, there are three basic things that must happen in order for you to reach your destination.

First, you must know where you are. Unless you know where you are, you will not be able to follow the roads to get you to where you need to be.

Secondly, you must know your destination. If you don't know where you are going, you won't know you are there when you get there and can waste precious time looking for the wrong place.

Third, you must actually follow the map to get there. If you decide you know a better way and toss the map aside, you could spend years driving in the wrong direction, which would only increase the frustration and disappointment of never completing the trip.

Sadly, many people live their lives without knowing where they are or where they are going. Some who finally figure out where they are supposed to be, throw the map out the window and attempt to create their own roads and usually

end up at a dead end.

God has a plan for your life. Be honest with yourself. Locate where you are in God's kingdom. Seek God and find out where He wants you to be. Then allow the Holy Spirit to guide you on your God-given path.

The road to your God-given destination is lined with trees full of the fruit of the Spirit. If you will set aside pride and fantasy and be determined to follow God's road map, your road will be paved with peace and contentment. Although your task may seem difficult from the outside, the joy and peace you will experience by being obedient to God's plan will far outweigh any obstacles you may encounter along the way.

Remember this: There is no path or destination that you can conceive that can compare to God's plan for your life.

## God's Plan and Timing for You

> *Let the children of Israel keep the Passover at its appointed time. On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, you shall keep it at its appointed time. According to all its rites and ceremonies you shall keep it.*
>
> Numbers 9:2,3

God is a God of timing. He is exact in His plans for Israel and He is exact in His plans for your life. Too often Christians will take just whatever comes their way in life. This should not be. We should reach out and take what God wants us to take. And how do we know what He wants us to take? He wants us to take His promise for us and receive it by faith.

Over the years, faith preachers have been accused of being the "name it and claim it" group or "blab it and grab it" preachers. It's true! If we are truly faith people, then we must name God's promise and claim it personally for ourselves. Only when we reach out to God's Word and believe it 100 percent and confess it and act on that confession will we receive.

God has a plan for your life and that plan is this. He wants you to believe what He says about you and receive it in its fullness.

Years ago I counseled with a man who had been told he had a terminal disease. This man eventually died. In all of my conversations with him we couldn't get past one point. He could not understand that everything that happens in this life is not God's will. He had been taught from an early age that when he prayed he was to say, "If it be Thy will ." Because of this teaching, he did not see the necessity of digging into God's Word and finding out the true will of God for his life. He just simply had an attitude of "Oh well, whatever happens must be

God."

If Satan can lull us into this mindset, then we will never take the authority that God intended for us to take. Jesus gave authority to the twelve disciples and then later gave authority to the seventy that He sent out. And then He gave total authority over the forces of evil to all who believe. If you are a Christian, that includes you. If you are a Christian and you don't believe this, then your belief is contrary to God's Word. This is not an opinion. It is truth.

We've seen how Jesus said, "Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luke 10:19) .Then later, before He ascended, He said, "These signs will follow those who believe" (Mark 16:17).

Yes, God has a plan for your life and for every plan, there is God's timing. Seek God's plan and timing for your life and then take authority over everything that would stand in the way. You are equipped with the necessary power and anointing to do the task.

# GOD'S THOUGHTS

## The Mindset of God

> *The Lord has been mindful of us; He will bless us; He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless those who fear the Lord, both small and great. May the Lord give you increase more and more, you and your children. May you be blessed by the Lord, who made heaven and earth. The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's; But the earth He has given to the children of men.*
>
> Psalm 115:12–16

This scripture tells us that the Lord has been mindful of us. What that means is simply that the mind of God is full of thoughts about mankind. But what is it that God thinks about us when He is thinking about us?

What you write in a letter is what you feel in your heart and what you think with your mind. God has written a letter to mankind. It is His Word and in His Word He shares His desire to clothe man with His glory. (Heb. 1:3 niv; Gal. 3:27 niv, among other verses.) In His letter, He shares His desire to bring increase, prosperity, emotional stability, and health to His children. (3 John 2, for example.)

When I hear people make statements like, "God had a purpose in making me

destitute," it reveals how little they know about the nature and the mind of God. God is mindful of us because He loves us. God is mindful of us because He wants the best for you and for me. God is mindful of us and desires for us to understand and trust Him. Trusting God is a part of faith. And faith pleases God. (Heb. 11:6.)

God's plan for you today is good, greater, better, and best—not bad and less. His plan is increase. He wants increase in your spiritual life. He wants increase in your physical life. He wants increase in your financial life and He wants increase in your emotional life.

So if you ever wonder what God thinks about you, according to His Word, it's good thoughts. (Ps. 40:5; 139:17, among other verses.)

# GOD'S WILL

## God's Mission Statement

"Is it God, or is it the devil?" As a pastor, I hear this question on a regular basis. All we have to do is look at the mission statement of God and the mission statement of the devil and then we can easily define the source. Both mission statements can be found in one verse: "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." I call John 10:10 the dividing line in the Word of God.

This scripture clearly defines what God does and what the devil does. It divides what they do into categories and everything that happens in life can be placed in one of these categories. Let me explain.

The thief is not your friend. He is your enemy. The thief represents Satan and John 10:10 gives his mission statement—to steal, kill, and destroy. But who is it that he wants to steal from? It's you! Who is it that he wants to kill? It's you! Whose life does he want to destroy? It's yours! And he wants to do the same thing to me and every other born-again believer. Satan is the prince of darkness, the father of lies, and the source of chaos, confusion, and destruction. Jesus said that he was a murderer and that there was no truth in him. (John 8:44.)

On the other hand, God sent His Son so that the world would not perish but have life, abundant and everlasting. (John 3:16.) After Jesus stated Satan's mission statement, he proclaimed His own. The mission statements are completely opposite. While Satan's purpose is death, destruction, and lack in our lives, Jesus

came to bring life, restoration, and abundance.

A mission statement can be described as a guideline to keep members and users aware of an organization's or leader's purpose. Jesus clearly states His purpose. He came to give life.

So the next time you hear someone say, "Is it God or is it the devil," the answer will be clear. Which category does "it" come under? It if steals in any way, if it brings death or leads to death, if it destroys or brings destruction, it's the devil. If it brings abundant life full of shalom, it's Jesus. Jesus is not the thief. Jesus is not the one who brings death and destruction. Jesus is not the destroyer. Jesus brings life.

The Bible says that we must rightly divide the Word. (2 Tim. 2:15.) If we are told to rightly divide the Word, then that must mean that the Word can be wrongly divided. I believe that most wrong division of God's Word is due to not understanding this simple truth—God is a good God and the devil is a bad devil. James 1:17 says that every good and every perfect gift comes from the Father and then it goes on to say that God does not change. Remember, Jesus said in John 8:44 that Satan was a liar and a murderer and that there was no truth in him. And according to Jesus, Satan does not change.

When someone says that sickness is of God, then they are attributing the work of the devil to our heavenly Father. Isaiah 5:20 says, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"Once after Jesus healed a man, the Pharisees attributed this work of the Holy Spirit to the devil and Jesus said that their accusation was blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and that it was unforgivable. (Matt. 12:22–32.) When a person attributes the work of God to the devil or a work of the devil to God, that is very dangerous territory.

Recently a minister stated in a letter to the editor that sometimes healing is God's will and sometimes sickness is His will. This man clearly does not know God's heart. For if he did, he would know Satan is the destroyer, but God is the healer. Satan brings death. God brings life. The devil destroys and brings defeat. God brings recovery and restoration.

Scripture References:

Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. (Romans 12:9)

I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. (Romans 16:19)

Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God. (3 John 1:11)

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. (James 1:17)

“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.” (John 8:44)

He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8)

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

# GOD’S WILL FOR YOU

## Knowing God’s Will in Your Life

Over the years, our ministry has received thousands of prayer requests. We believe in the power of the prayer of faith. However, there is one thing that has been consistent. People want to know what God wants them to do. They want to know God’s will for their lives.

Recently a man wrote and asked us to pray that God would show him what job to take. A lady also wrote and asked us to pray that God would show her if she should marry the man she was seeing or not.

Well, there is a way you can know what to do in your daily life—in your business dealings, in your family, in your ministry, and in all your everyday decisions. There is a way to know right from wrong. The way is this: we must be led by the Spirit of God.

How can we be led by the Spirit? How can we know what God wants us to do? First of all, we must listen to God and not to man. (We’ll see how to hear from Him in a moment.) Now, don’t take me wrong. It’s not wrong to get good godly counsel, but ultimately you must hear from God himself and do what He wants you to do.

God will never be confused. His answers will always be clear.

Once I went to a revival where a different minister spoke each night. The ministers only attended the night they spoke. The first night, the minister’s

theme to his message was to “hold on.” Whatever you do, “hold on.”

The next night, the other minister’s theme was “let go.” Whatever you’re holding on to, “let it go.” Some people got confused. When the meetings were over, they didn’t know whether to “hold on” or “let go.”

The Bible tells us, “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33). When we are led by the Spirit, we will not be confused. Instead, we will have direction and move forward in peace.

First of all, to be led by the Spirit of God, we must be born again. Romans 8:14 says, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.”

Secondly, we must spend time with God and His Word. We cannot expect to hear from God if we never allow Him to talk. (He can speak to us through His Word and in our hearts.)

Also, something often overlooked is this: Man is a three-part being. Man is a spirit that has a soul and lives in a body.

> *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
>
> 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Here, in this scripture, we clearly see that the Bible makes a distinction between the spirit and the soul and the body. The point is this: We contact the physical realm with our body. We contact the soul realm with our intellect. And we contact the spirit realm with our spirit. We cannot be led by the Spirit of God if we never enter into the spiritual realm because the things of the Spirit cannot be understood by the natural man.

So, when you have a decision to make and you are seeking God for wisdom, remember this—you can be led by the Spirit. You can have the mind of Christ and know the will of God for your life. You don’t have to be in the dark concerning your destiny. (1 Cor. 2:16.)

## God’s Will Is in His Word

Several weeks ago, a man told me that he had been praying for something for years and that God had not answered his prayer. He went on to say that every time he asks God for the answer to his prayer, nothing seems to happen. He said, “I guess you just never know what to expect from God.”

Well, that statement may sound holy and humble, but it’s wrong. You can know what to expect from God because He has told us exactly what He will do—over and over again, God has told us through His Word, the Holy Bible. There should

be no surprises when we pray. We have been given all the information needed. We have been told what to ask for and how to ask. God has provided all the instructions necessary for us to make the Word of God come alive and work in our daily lives.

For example, according to the Bible, when we pray, we must pray the will of God. First John 5:14 says, “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.” The next verse goes on to say, “And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.”

So, we can see from this Scripture passage that if we pray the will of God, He hears us. Likewise, the implication is that if we do not pray the will of God, then He does not hear us. And logic would dictate that if He does not hear a petition, then He cannot answer it.

Last week I met a man who had a kidney problem. He asked me to pray for his healing, and I did. After praying he looked at me and said, “I guess if God put this illness on me then He can take it away. I sure hope it’s His will to heal me. I’m tired of being sick.”

This man not only suffered from a kidney problem, but he suffered from poor teaching. And he’s not alone. Many good Christians believe that God makes them sick to teach them something. Then they turn around and ask Him to make them well. I guess maybe they’re just tired of learning!

We must know the will of God when we pray. Keep in mind that we know His will through His Word. God’s Word, the Holy Bible, tells us the nature of God and what He wants for us.

If your problem is a health-related problem, Psalm 103:3 says that God is the one “who heals all your diseases.”

If your problem is finances, in Isaiah 48:17 God said, “I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way you should go.” Would God teach you to do something that was a sin? No, of course He wouldn’t. God does want His children to profit. He wants us to prosper.

If your problem is your children, Proverbs 11:21 says, “The seed [children] of the righteous shall be delivered.” It is God’s will that your children be set free.

So, when we pray, we must pray God’s will. And we find His will in His Word.

Remember, anything we ask for that’s according to His will, He hears us. (1 John 5:14).

# GOODNESS OF GOD (The)

## God Is a Good God

Recently I had extensive hail damage at my house. The insurance company sent an appraiser and the appraiser decided it could be fixed for $9,000. Because so many houses had been damaged in my city, it was going to be a while before the contractor could repair it.

A few days later, the insurance adjustor visited my house and wanted to give me a check for $9,000. Of course I invited him in, made him comfortable, and prepared to receive my money. He had the check in his hand along with a form. He said to me, “All you have to do is sign this form and the $9,000 is yours.”

He handed me the form, and before I signed it, I glanced over the wording and these words leaped off the page. “This storm damage was an act of God.”

I handed the form back to the adjustor and said, “I’m sorry. I can’t sign this form.” With a puzzled look, he said, “Why not? All you have to do is sign this form and I’ll give you $9,000.” I told him that if I signed the form, I would be saying that God had destroyed the roof on my house and God didn’t destroy my roof. The insurance man said, “Then who did destroy your roof?” I said, “It wasn’t God. It was the devil.” He laughed, handed the form back to me and said, “Just go ahead and sign the form and I’ll give you your check.”

I stood my ground. I said, “I will not sign a form that says that God destroyed my house.” The insurance man grabbed the form out of my hand, crossed out the word God, and wrote devil above it. He handed it back to me and said, “Will you sign it now?” I said, “Certainly!” I signed the form, I took my check, and everyone was happy.

The world believes that hurricanes, tornadoes, and storms are an “act of God.” But that is so untrue. James 1:17 says that God is a good God and that every good gift comes from Him and that He doesn’t change. Remember, Jesus said in John 10:10 that the thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy. In order to receive the blessing of God, we must first believe that His blessing is good.

Second Timothy 2:15–16 says that we are to rightly divide the Word. If we are told to rightly divide the Word, then that must mean that it is possible to wrongly divide the Word. Much of the wrong division of God’s Word is because some do not understand that God is a good God who has good gifts and He never lies, and that the devil is a bad devil, full of evil, and he can’t tell the truth.

So the next time someone tells you that a great destruction is an act of God, look

to the Word and you will find God is not the destroyer, but God is a good God.

Scripture References:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. (James 1:17)

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. (John 10:10)

That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. (Hebrews 6:18)

“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.” (John 8:44)

# GOVERNMENT

## Align Yourself with the Truth and Vote

> *Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.*
>
> Exodus 18:21

There is a biblical standard for those who are to be rulers over people. According to Exodus 18:21, rulers should be:

1) Able men who fear God

2) Men of truth who hate covetousness

Whether they rule over a few, or over thousands, the standard is the same. God requires a high standard for those who rule.

As citizens in the United States of America, we have been given an awesome responsibility to choose our leaders. However, it is a dual responsibility: 1) we have the responsibility of our citizenship here on earth to choose leaders and 2) we have the responsibility from God to choose leaders who meet God’s criteria.

With that in mind, we must understand this. If we do not choose leaders who are able, who fear God, who proclaim truth, and who hate covetousness, we are being disobedient to God.

Sadly, a lot of Christians don't vote. Here what's even worse. Surveys tell us that of the people who do vote, the vast majority (including Christians) do not vote for a leader because of his or her godly character; instead, they vote for the candidate who will bring the most personal benefit. To do this tells God very clearly that we are more interested in maintaining our kingdom than in maintaining His.

God tells us in His Word that we have choices placed before us. (Deut. 30:19.) All choices, whether secular or spiritual, must be made according to God's desires. In reality, all choices are ultimately spiritual. We have the ability to choose life or to choose death. Every vote we make or fail to make is extremely critical.

To not acknowledge the truth and stand up for it is condoning the lie. Jesus said in John 8:32 that the truth would set us free. Align yourself with the truth and vote.

# GRACE

## Grace Draws and Condemnation Repels

*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?*

Romans 6:1

When we teach, we can teach with an attitude of grace or with an attitude of condemnation. When I was young, I was in old-time revival tent meetings where the evangelist actually made me feel so condemned that I felt there was no way I could ever be good enough for God. I remember the evangelist preaching against alcohol, tobacco, women, pool halls, pinball machines, cards, and anything else that might remotely be connected to fun. As a young boy, I remember leaving the meeting depressed because I had the impression that God didn't want me to think about girls and I was thinking about girls every thirty seconds or so.

Condemnation does not make you quit sinning. It just brings a sin-consciousness and guilt. God is not the God of guilt, but the God of peace and freedom. When you condemn a child, you take away all hope and leave them feeling worthless. Watch a child who is constantly told how bad he or she is and that youngster will remind you of a dog that has a master that beats him continually.

Grace, on the other hand, produces a natural reaction to make you want to live up to a higher standard. Grace does not make you want to sin. To the contrary, grace produces a natural desire to walk in obedience to God's Word.

Christianity is based on faith, grace, and belief in Jesus Christ. It's different than all the other false religions of the world. False religions and cults are based on works. I recently saw one group on the news in a foreign country that was walking down the street slowly with their backs bare. As they were walking, they had small whips in their hands and with each step they would whip themselves over the shoulder, causing their backs to bleed. They thought this was pleasing their god, but all they were getting out of it was bloody backs.

False religions try to produce works through condemnation. Christianity produces blessings through grace. We must remember that what we receive is not a result of what we do, but rather is a result of what Jesus has done.

Ephesians 5:1 says that we are to imitate God. Live your life each day as a godly person giving grace to others freely, just as God has freely given grace to you. As God's love flows from you, others will be drawn to Him.

> *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*
>
> Matthew 5:16

## Grace Is Not a License to Sin

Recently I was speaking at a meeting and my wife, Loretta, was unable to attend. When I called her to touch base after the meeting she asked me, "How did the meeting go?" And I responded, "Honestly, I think it was the best sermon I ever preached." It was safe to say that since she wasn't there! However, it is my personality to feel like every service is a great service and possibly the best of my life to that point.

One particular Sunday, however, after delivering one of those "best sermon I had ever preached" messages on the subject of grace, I was approached by a lady who said, "If you keep teaching grace, then all you are doing is giving people a license to sin."

I've discovered over the years that if someone is going to sin, they don't need a license. They'll do it with or without one.

God's goodness is based on grace and faith, and not on our good works. But that does not give us the right to not do good works. If your heart is right toward God, then good works will still be a product of your life—but the good works will never be a payment to God for a gift received.

Remember, Ephesians 2:8 tells us that we are saved by grace and through faith. Then it goes on to say that it's not because of our works. If we could say our works are what saved us, then we would become boastful and prideful and self-

reliant. We must not be self-reliant, but we must be God-reliant. And while we are relying on Him for His grace and mercy to be manifest in our lives, we must be doing the works of the gospel out of love and a pure heart.

Since Jesus has paid the price in full and completed everything that needs to be done, the only thing left for us to do is to believe and rest in the assurance of His work. By spending time with the Father in prayer and worship and letting the world see His love in us, the work is completed. (John 6:29.)

So even if you have a personality like mine, and you feel that everything is going great, it's only God's goodness and greatness that counts. Do we get what we deserve? No, when we're God's children, we get what He deserves.

## Grace Is the Power to Defeat Sin

We are saved by grace. (Eph. 2:8.) Nothing we can do can get us saved. We can do our best to follow the Ten Commandments and every rule our church and denomination has in their bylaws, but our actions and attempts will not save us. We cannot get good enough to be saved. We get saved by God's grace. God empowers us. He gives us the grace (the ability) through faith (by believing) in His Son Jesus to get saved. So, it is by grace that we are born again.

A person might say, "Well then, if I'm saved by grace and not because I'm good, and Jesus died for my sins, then that means whatever I do in life is okay."

Ah, no…it's not okay. Remember, grace is not a license to sin. The apostle Paul told us that in Romans 6:15, saying:"What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!" In fact, when you receive that license of grace, it becomes a license to not sin. It is your license to do the thing you normally couldn't do.

Take gossip, for instance. A Christian might confess, "Well, I've always gossiped a lot. My mouth runs faster than my brain. I just can't control gossiping." The truth is that's a lie. If you're born again, then you've been given the ability to do something a lost person can't do. What is that? You can say, "I'm righteous." That entitles you to stand before God and ask the Father for something in the name of Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews tells us, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). So you go to the throne and you say something to God like, "Father, You know and I know I have a problem. My mouth runs faster than my brain and I gossip. Your Word says in 1 John 5:14–15 that I can have confidence that if I ask anything that is according to Your will, You hear me and You will give it to me. I

know it's Your will that I don't gossip about my brother and sister. It's Your will that I don't say bad things, and I'm having problems with that. I want to get it stopped. So in the name of Jesus, please give me grace to not gossip."

When you go to the throne of grace, the Father gives you mercy and there you will find His grace that will empower you in your time of need. Now you can do what you normally couldn't do and you no longer have an excuse. So if you start shooting off your mouth, it's not because you don't have the ability to stop it since the Father has given you the license, the permit, and the ability to not gossip. If you continue to gossip, it's because you just decide to do it. You defy grace. You defy what God has given you and you just do it. If you have gone to the throne of grace and asked the Father to help you to not gossip, then He has given you the grace to not gossip. If you continue to gossip, that means you have made a decision to defy God, and that's a sin.

So then you need to repent and ask for forgiveness. You could pray something like this: "Father, in the name of Jesus, I ask that You forgive me for gossiping and forgive me for defying Your grace." The Father then hands you more grace to be forgiven. You're now forgiven and by grace you can start over again. As long as you're sincere and humble and you're doing your best, that cycle will continue.

This might still sound like grace gives us a license to sin. If someone gossips, knowing it is a sin but knowing God will forgive them, is that a license to sin? No, it is not a license to sin. That is called abusing grace. When someone starts relying on grace as a method of sinning and getting away with it, they are abusing God's free gift. Remember what the apostle Paul said about grace: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" (Rom. 6:1–2).

God's grace is limitless and He has empowered us to not continue in sin.

## Grace Is so Much More than Unmerited Favor

All my life I've heard grace defined as God's unmerited favor, and that's absolutely true. But it is so much more.

Have you ever had something you needed to quit and you wanted to quit, but you just couldn't give it up? Have you ever had something you needed to do and you wanted to do, but you just couldn't get it done? Have you ever had someplace you needed to go…you even felt God calling you to go, but you just couldn't get there?

Grace is God willingly applying His ability and power to do through us the thing we need to do (or stop doing), but we can't do it on our own. Grace is God's empowering that helps us accomplish the things in life that we cannot seem to accomplish under our own power. Grace is the power God places in us that enables us to defeat sin.

With our own strength and abilities we can sometimes do the possible, but God's grace empowers the Christian to do the impossible. Truly, it seems God always calls us to do the impossible—but with His grace working in our lives, the impossible becomes reality.

Even though we don't deserve His great and awesome power called grace, He gives us His grace as a free gift. In order for us to be able to accomplish the will of God, we must tap into His grace.

There is no limit to God's grace. His grace is boundless. There is no limit to His power. He can do anything.

God is not waiting to give us His grace; He's already done that. He is waiting for us to receive it. Nor is God restricted by time the way we are. When we go before the Father, it may take us three or four minutes or it might take us an hour to pray our prayer and make our requests. We're tempted to think we took up an hour of God's time. But no, we didn't.

God is not limited by time! God can listen to the prayers of millions of people all around the world at the same time. He is not in the framework of time. He moves in the realm of eternity. God is not bound by time.

God will give us rest and peace if we're "in faith" with Him. In faith is a state of being, comparable to being "in agreement." Being in faith is a decision and it requires certain actions, confessions, and self-control. There is a rest that comes because you are in faith that won't come any other way. You may say, "I have things settled in my life. I am at peace." You may think you're at peace, but if you're not in faith, you're not in total peace.

"There remains therefore a rest for the people of God" (Heb. 4:9). There is a rest for the people of faith that doesn't exist for people who are not in faith. We need to know that. Rest is automatic for the Christian walking in faith. Faith is automatic for the Christian walking and abiding in the Word.

## Grace Is a Foundational Truth

I've heard it said that grace is the power to do God's will and the force that sustains us on the inside while things are being accomplished on the outside. While we're reaching out in faith, we need a substance on the inside to sustain us

while we wait for the outward things to come to pass—that substance, that divine force, is grace. We need to have the grace of God upholding us, energizing and moving in our lives. We must rely on grace, but we cannot back off from our faith and become lazy. Faith must be maintained, nurtured, and strengthened by continuing in the Word daily.

It has always bothered me when people imply faith is a movement. They ask, "Were you involved in the faith movement?" Excuse me? Faith is not a movement. Faith is something we must have all the time. To say faith is a movement is like saying the Church went through a salvation movement.

The Church didn't go through a salvation movement. Salvation is one of the fundamental truths of the Church. It's not a movement. It's something that is to be taught all the time. Salvation is something we cannot live without. We can't enter heaven without salvation. Salvation is required in order to live our everlasting life in the kingdom and presence of God. And, in order to receive salvation, grace and faith are required. (Eph. 2:8.) So if we are saved by grace through faith, don't you think faith and grace are vitally important?

Salvation, faith, and grace are never movements—they are foundational truths.

When Jesus came up out of the grave and put His blood on the Mercy Seat, He defeated sin and death. He became the Head of the Church and made a way for us to be members of His body: "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20).

Jesus was and is the Son of God. Jesus was all God and He was all man. The reality is, Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection made the way whereby we can be saved. He had to lead the way. When we follow Him, we can be born into the kingdom, also. But, here's the key: we're born into the kingdom because of grace and by grace. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves; it's all by what He's done.

Being saved through faith means we believe what God said in His Word about salvation. We believe everything He says about it and we accept it. We don't see it, but we accept it by faith. Salvation is given to us by the grace of God. Remember, grace is God empowering us to do the impossible. It's impossible for us to pass from death to life (1 John 3:14); it's impossible for us to be born a second time! (John 3:3–5.) He gives us the inward power to do what we can't do.

Philippians 4:13 says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." We could say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me to do all things." Look at what Jesus said about that: "'If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes'" (Mark 9:23).

But how are they possible? They are possible through grace. Again, what is grace? Grace is that power God gives us to do those things He wants done that we cannot do under our own power.

The most well-known definition of grace is this: unmerited favor. Is that what grace is? Yes, it is God's unmerited favor, but it is so much more. He gives us grace so we can do what He wants done.

Grace is God making a deposit in us of His very own power and ability so that we can do what He wants done.

## Grace and Faith—the Two Power Partners

As a Christian, you have been given something the world does not have. You have been given the availability of a power that can solve your problems and defeat any enemy that comes against you. Once you become born again, you have access to power that can help you accomplish the impossible—the ultimate power, the power of grace.

Before you become a Christian, you're spiritually defenseless. When the devil attacks and tempts you to sin, you don't have the ability to resist. Envy, strife, gossip, hatred, and all the works of the flesh can come in and take control. Just being a decent human being seems like a hopeless task! But after you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, there is no excuse for defeat any more. You now have the ability to access grace and develop faith. With these two "power partners," you have the potential to move mountains and eliminate any obstacle that would hinder or bind you. We've looked at both of these foundational truths, but they are so important to us as Christians that they need to be mentioned once again.

The apostle Paul wrote much of the New Testament and laid the foundation of the church for the world. He established the government of the church for us. However, he could not have done this on his own. He had to have a supernatural force helping him. (2 Tim. 3:16.) That supernatural force was the power of grace: a special endowment to do that task.

We are to build on the foundation Paul laid, but we can't do it under our own power. We can only do this by using the same power Paul used. That power is grace.

We know faith is equally as important as grace. We've talked about Ephesians 2:8 that says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith." But we can't overlook the supernatural power that only comes through grace. Faith is the catalyst that activates God's Word, causing what we are believing to come to

pass. We're saved by grace, but faith contains the belief and requires action that activates grace. Grace for salvation is always available for the non-Christian. Second Corinthians 12:9 tells us that God's grace is more than sufficient, but grace for salvation is only activated by faith.

As Christians, we know we are to walk by faith and not by sight. We believe God will do what He said He would do. And we know it is impossible for God to lie. (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18.) We know what God says is true. We can take it to the bank. We can count on it. That's what being a faith person is. We walk by faith and we live by faith. We know when God says it, it doesn't matter how things look around us. It doesn't matter if everything appears to be falling apart. If God says it will be a certain way, it will be that way. A faith person believes it has already been accomplished because God has said it and "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7).

When the world hears faith spoken, they usually don't understand. They may say, "Well, it doesn't look that way." But faith says, "It doesn't matter how it looks. You can look at how it looks, but I'm going to look at what God says. You can look at the problem, but I'm going to look at the promise. I'm going to focus on the answer instead of the question. I'm going to stay focused and believe God's Word and what He said."

Faith is simply believing God has done everything He said He would do regardless of how things look, and believing it so completely that everything you say and everything you do is based on what you believe, and not what you see. That's faith.

# GUILT

## Removing the Guilt of the Past and the Fear of the Future

Recently I received a letter from a lady who had a unique problem. She said that in just a few weeks she was going to attend her 10-year class reunion. Her husband, who had attended the same school, had bought the tickets months ago and was really looking forward to seeing his old school buddies. Each day he would talk about the reunion. He was excited.

His wife, however, was not so excited about the reunion. Instead, she was filled with dread. Let me quote from her letter. "My husband is expecting a good time at the class reunion. He probably will have a good time. He was popular and still

looks good. I, however, have put on twenty five pounds. My hair has gray in it and I look terrible. I've tried fixing myself up, but nothing seems to work. Every day takes me one day closer to the humiliation. From the time I wake up till the time I go to bed, I can't think of anything else. Is there any hope?"

In another letter, a man writing from prison said that he was so filled with the guilt of his past that he couldn't think about anything else. He said each day was filled with the thoughts of the past.

These two people have different problems but they have the same root cause. They have fallen into one of the traps of Satan. If Satan can get us to bring the guilt of yesterday up into today and cause us to bring the fear and anticipation of tomorrow back into the present time, then today will be so full of our past and our future that today we will have no time to do what God wants us to do at this moment in time.

In Matthew 6:34, Jesus said, "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." On the surface that doesn't sound like a faith statement, but this one statement alone can change your life.

Jesus simply said that we should take care of the business of today, today. Yesterday is gone. It's like toothpaste that has been squeezed out of the tube. It's spent. Nothing will bring it back. Guilt and grief today will not bring yesterday back. It's gone.

Likewise, tomorrow isn't here yet so nothing you can do today will make tomorrow get here today. God set time into motion and it is still moving at the same pace it did on the day of creation. No slower, no faster. Nothing you can do will speed it up or slow it down.

So my message today is the same message Jesus gave us 2,000 years ago. Do what God has for you to do today, today. Leave yesterday in the past. If someone hurt you yesterday, then forgive them today and when tomorrow becomes today, your calendar will be clear. It's that simple.

Do not worry about tomorrow. Most things worried about today never take place tomorrow anyway. They're just an illusion, a fear of the unknown. But that's the way Satan works. After all, he is the deceiver. Jesus told us in John 8:44 that Satan is a liar—always has been, always will be.

Remember these two truths: you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you (Phil. 4:13), and this is the day the Lord has made; rejoice and be glad in it. (Ps. 118:24.)

The theme of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6 is learning how to live for

the kingdom of God today and learning how to live without the guilt of the past or the fear of the future.

Living by faith, not by guilt, is God's plan.

## You Can't Change Your Past, but You Can Change Your Future

Many years ago, there were two men who entered into a business agreement. Although they were partners and owned the business together, one man invested all of his money and the other man ran the business. The business failed and because of that, the man who furnished the money lost everything. The man who ran the business eventually recovered and became successful, but he carried the guilt of the business failure with him for decades. As the years passed, the guilt increased.

The man who furnished the money and lost everything began to drink and eventually lost his family. He never could get his life back together.

The other man became very successful financially, but daily carried the guilt with him for the business failure of decades before. Although everything looked good in his life, his joy was never complete. He felt that everything that had happened to his previous business partner could have been avoided had he done something differently decades before. The guilt he carried daily robbed him of his joy.

The Holy Spirit does not minister through guilt. Anytime guilt is involved, it is the work of the enemy. Yes, the Holy Spirit does convict us, but conviction draws a person toward repentance, forgiveness, and freedom. When we receive the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we become set free from the pain, guilt, and regret of the past.

Over the years, I have counseled with countless numbers of people who cannot let go of the guilt of the past. While it is true that the decisions of yesterday have created the world and the atmosphere we live in today, we cannot allow the enemy to use guilt to work in our lives today. If we allow the enemy to condemn us by bringing up the guilt of the past, then our future will not be as God has planned it to be.

We must never forget that the decisions we make today will affect tomorrow. If we want tomorrow to be free of pain, we must do something different today. Remember, the decisions you made yesterday created the world you are living in today. The world you will live in tomorrow is being framed and created by the decisions you make and the words you speak today. Nothing is going to change

until something changes. You must decide that change will take place today.

Never forget that the Holy Spirit convicts us in order to bring freedom, but the enemy condemns us in order to bring bondage.

Unbelief brings condemnation. Believing what God has said brings freedom. Jesus said that if we would continue in His Word, we would know the truth and the truth would set us free. (John 8:31–32.) And the truth is this: If we allow the Holy Spirit to minister to us and if we allow God's power (His grace) to work through us, then we can conquer the guilt of the past and move forward with freedom into the future. In the natural, it may seem impossible, but remember, Jesus said that if we can believe, all things are possible.

> *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*
>
> Romans 8:1

# HALLOWEEN

## Inviting Demons to Church

Many years ago after attending a Christian university and majoring in theology, my wife and I joined a little denominational church of about 300 members. Even though I was quite young at the time, I was asked to become the leader of the men's fellowship within the church. I was honored, so I accepted.

I thought that I had been asked because of my vast knowledge of the Bible. After all, I had been a Bible student at a Christian university. However, I later found out that they had asked most of the men in the church and they had all declined and I was the last resort. It was a humbling discovery.

Anyway, as director of the men's fellowship, I was automatically put on the church planning committee and I anxiously awaited the first church planning meeting. The meeting was held in the basement of the parsonage. The committee consisted of the Women's Missionary Union leader, the Sunday School superintendent, the chairman of the board of deacons, myself, and the pastor's wife.

The pastor's wife was the committee chairman and opened the meeting by asking what progress had been made concerning the Halloween party for the youth of the church. Several suggestions were discussed, but after each suggestion the pastor's wife would make the same comment, "Last year the party was so good. How can we top it this year?" It seemed as though every

recommendation made did not measure up to the previous year's party.

Since this was my first committee meeting, I wanted to keep quiet, but my curiosity got the best of me. I asked, "What did the church do last year that is so difficult to top?"The pastor's wife leaned over and placing her hand on my arm, she said, "Last year we got a large round table and brought it down here to the parsonage basement. We covered it with a white tablecloth, lit candles, brought in all the teenagers in the church, and had a séance. It was great!" I couldn't believe my ears. It was my first and my last committee meeting.

How can we truly believe the Word of God and knowingly worship Satan? What an abomination! I had chosen this church for my family for all the wrong reasons. We should never choose the place of worship that will feed our families with the knowledge and lifestyle that will determine our destiny based upon its convenience and social life. While these things are important, and of course are things to be considered, they should never be the main consideration. Find a church that teaches from the Bible and has your spiritual well being as its top priority. Your church is the place where you and your family will receive the teaching that they will carry throughout their lives and will be passed on to their children. While activities are important and can attract people to the things of God, they can never replace the Word of God. It is only the truth of God's Word that sets us free.

On another occasion, I received a notice in the mail from a different large local church. It was an invitation to a church party and my family was invited. In the center of the invitation in large letters was the main attraction. The church had hired a "REAL WITCH" and a "REAL FORTUNE TELLER" for the party.

When I called the pastor and asked him how God felt about bringing Satan worshipers into the church to entertain the children, his reply was shocking. "At our church we don't actually believe that the devil and demons exist. We believe evil is a concept." That's exactly what Satan wanted him to believe. Satan knows that if he can make us believe that he is not real, that he is a "concept," then we will not war against him. After all, how do you cast out a concept?

Yet the Bible is clear on this. It says in 3 John 11, "Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good [or of God]. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God."

# HEALING

## Believe for Your Healing

Did you know that God wants you to be healed? That's right. God wants His people healed.

When Jesus was here on earth, the Bible tells us over and over again that He went about teaching the good news and healing all who were sick and afflicted. (Acts 10:38.) Jesus believed healing was so important that He even healed on the Sabbath day. (Mark 3:1–6.) That was against the custom of the day, but Jesus healed anyway.

Now, Jesus said that He didn't say or do anything unless His Father told Him to.

> *"I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak."*
>
> John 12:49,50

Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." That means what it says—Jesus has not changed. The things He wanted to accomplish in the past, He wants to accomplish today. If Jesus healed the sick in the past, then He will heal the sick today.

Most Christians believe that God has the power to heal. They believe that God has healed and occasionally performs miracle healings today from time to time. But many of these same Christians do not believe that healing is for them.

Let me ask you this. Is it possible that you could wake up tomorrow and the illness or sickness that has afflicted you for years would be gone? Is it possible that the disease that has come upon you and drained your finances could be completely eliminated? Well, the answer is yes! Is it possible for everybody? No! It's not for everybody. It's only possible for those who believe.

In Mark 6, Jesus went to His hometown of Nazareth. His intentions were to do the same thing there He did everywhere else—preach the gospel (the good news of the kingdom) and heal the sick. At Nazareth, however, He was unable to do any great miracles. Let's look at the Bible, the Word of God, and see why.

Verses 5 and 6 say, "Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. And He marveled because of their unbelief."

Belief is essential in healing, and that's where Satan attacks. If Satan can get us to doubt that healing is for us, then healing will be difficult.

Satan's will for you is sickness, disease, and death. Satan's will for your life is

totally opposite to the will of God for you. We've seen God's will and Satan's will in John 10:10. Remember, it says,

"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." Sadly, many Christians believe that healing does exist, but they don't truly believe it can happen to them.

If we don't believe that we can be healed, we are like the people of Nazareth. They didn't believe, so they didn't receive. If you have sickness in your body, then I encourage you to believe that Jesus not only can heal, but that He will heal you.

God's will is that you be healed.

## Lay Hands on the Sick and They Will Recover

When Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth, the attendant handed him the book of Isaiah, and Jesus began to read. He said:

> *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those whose are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."*
>
> Luke 4:18,19

Then Jesus said, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (v. 21). When Jesus stated this, He made it very clear why He was anointed. We know He was anointed to preach the good news to the poor, but He also said that He was anointed to give recovery of sight to the blind. What did He mean by this?

Jesus said that through His anointing, there can be freedom from the bondage of sickness and disease. Through His anointing, we do not have to live under the stress that illness brings. We know this because all through the New Testament, that's what Jesus did. He didn't just say He was anointed to heal the sick, He actually healed the sick. When He would enter into a town and preach the gospel, the good news, He would also demonstrate His power and authority over sicknesses. Jesus walked daily in His anointing.

Several times Jesus said that He did not do anything unless the Father instructed Him to. (John 5:19,30–31.) And if Jesus only did what the Father told Him to do, then healing and freedom must be God's will because Jesus preached the gospel and healed the sick in every village he entered.

Now, here's the point. We as Christians are to walk in the same anointing that

Jesus walked in. In fact, Jesus said in John 14:12, “He who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father.”

Jesus was anointed to preach the gospel, to heal the sick, and to set the captives free. As Christians we have that same calling. We can’t play church any longer. The time is at hand for the Church to fulfill its destiny.

Years ago, a minister approached me and informed me that Jesus was the only one in the Bible who actually healed anybody. He said that healing was not for today and that anyone who thought so was a fanatic. Well, obviously this minister hadn’t really studied God’s Word. Although I shared Bible verses with him where the apostles were involved with healing the sick, he had his mind made up and was entrenched in his belief. For months I wondered how this man could even be in the ministry, knowing as little as he did.

Then, one day I watched a computer salesman trying to sell a computer. Actually, he was the store manager and he didn’t know the difference between a hard drive and a floppy drive. Because he didn’t know his product, he avoided all the technical questions and only talked about the superficial things of computing. At that moment, God spoke to my heart and said, “That’s the way My salespeople are. They know enough to get the job, but not enough to do the job.”

So when it comes to healing, sometimes we need to get past the salespeople and go straight to the owner’s manual. God’s Word clearly states Jesus was anointed to heal the sick. His anointing came from God. His Word also says that Jesus gave authority over sickness and disease to all who believe.

Jesus himself told us in Luke 10:19, “I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.” In Mark 16:18, Jesus said that Christians would lay hands on the sick and that the sick would recover. If you are a Christian, that’s you.

## Understanding the Source of Sickness

Once a man told my wife he was sick and he knew God had made him that way. His reasoning was this—he said God had given him stomach problems so he wouldn’t eat too much and gain weight. He reasoned if he gained weight, he would develop a heart problem and could die. So, in order to keep from dying of a heart problem, he reasoned, God had made him sick so he couldn’t eat and get fat.

This may sound strange, but unfortunately many Christians believe that God makes them sick for a purpose.

It is true that God can and will cause all things to work together for good for those who love Him and who seek Him by the Spirit. The Bible tells us that in Romans 8:28. However, God's Word does not say that God causes bad things. It simply says He causes them to work together for good for those who love Him and those who are the called according to His purpose.

We must understand the root sources of healing and sickness. The One who heals us does not make us sick and the one who makes us sick does not make us well. We must discern right thinking from wrong thinking. We must quit blaming God for the works of Satan.

Let's examine the truth. What does the Bible say about God's view of sickness?

In Psalm 103:3 it says that He is the one, "Who heals all your diseases." Other scriptures on healing include:

> *Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.*
>
> *Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them.*
>
> Matthew 4:23–24

Matthew 8:16 tells us, "When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick."

Then, in Matthew 9:35 it says,

> *Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.*

Matthew 10:1 also tells us,

> *When He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease.*

In Matthew 12:15 we're told, "When Jesus knew it, He withdrew from there. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all."

Again, in Matthew 19:2 it says, "Great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there."

Everywhere Jesus went, He healed people. Remember what He said in John 5. Jesus said that He didn't do anything unless God His Father instructed Him to. (vv. 19,30–31.) So, what does that tell us about God? It tells us that He wants us well and He wants to heal us.

We've also seen that Jesus said He came to earth to destroy the works of the devil and that He said in John 10:10, "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."

The devil is the thief who steals health, kills bodies, and destroys life with sickness. Jesus is the one who gives life

## Why Are Some Not Healed?

Last night as I was reading my Bible, I noticed something very interesting about the teachings of Jesus. He wasn't like the Pharisees and Sadducees who taught legalism and bondage to the laws of man. When Jesus taught, He taught healing, freedom from bondage, and eternal life. Jesus taught good news. He taught faith.

According to the Bible, Jesus went from village to village throughout Israel, preaching the gospel. The word gospel, when correctly translated into English, simply means "good news."[25] Jesus proclaimed the good news of God everywhere He went. What is the good news? You can have eternal life. You can be healed. You can be prosperous. You can live a good life.

People came to Jesus hungry and they left fed. People came to Jesus sick and deformed and they left healed. People came to Jesus deep in sin and bondage and they left totally set free.

But let me ask you this. Was everyone who lived in Israel healed? Was leprosy completely wiped out? No, of course not.

Some people in Israel were still in bondage to sin, poverty, and illness. Why wasn't everyone healed? The reason is that some believed and some didn't. Without belief, there is no faith. Without faith, God is not pleased. Without belief in your heart, God's promises do not apply to you.

We've talked about faith, but it needs to be emphasized that it takes faith to move the promises of God. God never responds positively to doubt and unbelief. He only responds to faith.

All through the Bible and all through the ministry of Jesus, we find that when the people believed, they received. When they believed in destruction, they were destroyed. When they believed in salvation, that's what they got. As Christians, we must believe the gospel. We must believe the good news of God's Word.

God is a good God. He has good things for those who believe. James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." And Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

Did you catch that? God rewards those who have faith and diligently seek Him. Is a reward good? Of course it is. That's why people return things for a reward. If a reward were bad, nothing would ever be returned.

So remember, the gospel, the Word of God, is good news and all the promises to the Church apply to you, if you believe in Jesus and have faith in God.

Right now, you may feel guilt and condemnation and feel like giving up. Once a man told me that if he didn't have great faith by now, he never would. Statements like that sound the bell of victory in the devil's camp. He wants us to give up and quit. He uses guilt and condemnation to get us to do just that. John 3:17 says that Jesus did not come into this world to bring condemnation, but life.

So, don't give up. Build your faith with joy. Remember this—without faith, the gospel will not profit you. (Heb. 4:2.) But with faith (and with God) all things are possible! (Mark 9:23; 10:27.)

## Healing Is God's Will for You

For some reason, I regularly receive mail asking this one question: "Is it God's will that we be physically well? Does God want to heal me? And, what if God is trying to show me something by making me sick?"

These questions have been around since Jesus was here on earth, and here's the answer: It is God's will for you to be healed and it is not God who makes you sick to show you something.

Sometimes people will say, "What about poor, sick old Job in the Bible?" Well, let's look at Job. According to Scripture, he wasn't poor. In fact, he was one of the richest men on earth. And if you read the book of Job closely, you will find that God is not the one who made Job sick and tried to destroy his life. It was God who restored his body and gave him wealth. To top it off, Job was only sick for a few months and after he was restored by God, not only did he live an additional one hundred and forty years, but God gave him double for his trouble.

> *In all the land were found no women so beautiful as the daughters of Job; and their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his children and*

*grandchildren for four generations. So Job died, old and full of days.*

Job 42:15–17

We need to rightly divide the Word of God. Satan destroys and God restores.

When Jesus was here on earth, the Bible tells us the reason He came.

*He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.*

1 John 3:8

Here we are clearly told why Jesus came to earth. He came to destroy the works of the devil. Let's look at what some other verses tell us concerning what Jesus did when He was here on earth.

*Now Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.*

Matthew 4:23

*Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.*

Matthew 9:35

I could go on and on just reading the scriptures in the New Testament that talk about healing, but there isn't room in this book.

If you are sick, or if you are praying for someone who is sick, you need to read these and other scriptures on healing. Meditate on them. They will build your faith. As you do, you will see clearly that it is God's will that you will be healed. And, not only will you see that it is His will, you will know beyond any doubt that God wants you healed, today.

The gospel, the good news, was not just for the people of Israel during the time of Jesus. The good news is for you and for me. And the good news is this: Jesus has paid the price for our sins and our diseases. And because He has paid the price, we can have everlasting life and healing today.

## Five Things You Must Know to Understand Healing

*When they came out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, ran through that whole surrounding region, and began to carry about on beds those who were sick to wherever they heard He was. Wherever He entered, into villages, cities, or in the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged Him that they might just touch the hem of His*

*garment. And as many as touched Him were made well.*

Mark 6:54,56

1) God's will (desire) is that you be healed.

- The Old Testament states that God is our Healer.
- Psalm 103:3 tells us that God is the one, "Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases."
- As we've seen in the New Testament, Jesus said that He did not do anything unless the Father told Him to do it. Jesus went into every village healing all who were sick and oppressed of the devil. Thus, He was doing what God told Him to do. So, it must have been God's will for people to be healed. (Acts 10:38.)

2) God has not changed.

- The things God desired in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, He still desires today.
- “For I am the Lord, I do not change” (Mal. 3:6).
- Likewise, as Christians we are a part of the body of Christ and Jesus has not changed. (Heb. 13:8.) If Jesus healed the sick in the past, then He still heals the sick today.

3) Faith is essential in getting healed.

- In the Bible the person being healed did not always have faith, but faith was always present in someone.
- Sometimes faith is present in the one being healed:

  *This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, “Stand up straight on your feet!” And he leaped and walked.*

  Acts 14:9,10

- Sometimes faith is present in the friends of the one being healed: When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven you” (Mark 2:5).
- Sometimes faith is present in the one calling forth the healing. Jesus healed the man at the Pool of Bethesda. (John 5:1–9.)

4) Christians are commanded to ask for healing:

*Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.*

James 5:14,15

5) Sickness cannot be blamed on God.

- God calls Himself Jehovah-Rapha (Ex. 15:26), the God who heals. He cannot be the God who heals if He is the God of sickness. God is not

bipolar!

- God has not chosen sickness for you. He has placed before you blessing and cursing, life and death and He wants us to choose life. (Deut. 30:19.) The choice is yours.
- I've heard people say, "I've done what I'm supposed to do, but I'm still not healed. What's wrong?" One thing for sure, this we know beyond any doubt —you cannot blame God. He is not the source of your sickness.

These five points may seem very basic, but we must understand them as truth. Only when we align our thoughts, words, and actions with God's Word will we benefit from His promises.

## Eight Proofs that Healing Is for Today

There are two great truths regarding healing. Truth #1—All good gifts come from God and that includes health and healing. Truth #2—All bad and evil things come from Satan.

Satan is the destroyer and Jesus is the Deliverer. (John 10:10.)

With this in mind, I received a letter from a man in Paragould, Arkansas, who made this comment. He said, "I agree that health comes from God and that infirmities come from the devil, but how can we be assured that healing from God is for us today, in the 21st century?"

This man has a valid question asked by many, so I would like to give you eight reasons or eight ways we can know that healing is for us today.

1) Jesus redeemed us from the curse of sickness.

We can see the truth of that in Scripture. For instance, Galatians 3:13 says, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us." And John 3:14–15 tells us, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

2) Healing was prophesied.

Isaiah 53:4–5 is the prophecy and Matthew 8:16–17 is the fulfillment of the prophecy in that passage of Isaiah. The prophet Isaiah said the Messiah would take our sicknesses and carry them for us. That means Jesus paid the price for us. He took our sicknesses so that we could be healed.

3) Believers are the body of Christ.

First Corinthians 12:13 and 27 tell us that as Christians we are a part of Christ's body. As a part of His body, we are healed. Jesus is not sick. He paid the price in

full for health and healing.

4) Jesus has not changed.

Hebrews 13:8 says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” He healed in the past and He must heal today. He has not changed His will or His promise.

5) Believers are commanded to heal the sick.

Remember how Jesus said in Mark 16:18 that those who believe would, “lay hands on the sick, and they will recover”? Would Jesus command us to do something that was not for us to do? Of course not! We must obey His command.

6) “Gifts of healings” is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

First Corinthians 12:9 tells us that the “gifts of healings” is for the Church. Christians are the Church.

7) Sick believers are commanded to ask for healing.

James 5:14–15 says, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him…. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up.” If healing were not for us today, then sick believers would not be required to call for prayer to be healed.

8) Jesus promised that we would receive what we asked for.

Jesus talked about that in John 14:13–14: “Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name I will do it.”

So, is healing from God for today? Yes, of course it is. Nothing has changed since the time of Jesus. God’s true healing power is for you today too. Know the truth. God’s will for you is health and healing.

## Lord, If It Be Thy Will

> *Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 12:7

For the first few years as a Christian I believed that if you were sick, or if you were praying for someone who had a sickness, the proper way to pray would be to say, “Lord, if it be Thy will....” I prayed that way because that was how I was taught to pray.

While it is true that we must seek the will of God when we pray, we must not use

the phrase, “If it be Thy will” as a substitute for knowing His will. God’s Word is His will and as a believer, we have a responsibility to know what the Father loves and what He hates. There is no reason why a Christian should not know God’s will concerning health, prosperity, and relationships. All of these areas are addressed clearly in His Word.

When we base our beliefs on what we see or experience, our beliefs will not always line up with the Word of God. At that point a decision must be made. Either beliefs must be changed to match the Word, or the Word is altered to match our predetermined beliefs. Because of pride, insecurities, and the unwillingness to change, all too often we attempt to change the Word of God. Actually, the Word will always change the heart of the hearer if the hearer has a submissive heart for God. Only a hardened heart resists God’s Word and refuses to believe what God’s Word says.

Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” is a perfect example of what I am talking about, which we’ll look at in a moment. But over the years I have heard countless ministers explain that sometimes God heals and sometimes He doesn’t. Some have even been so bold as to say that there are times when it is God’s will that you be sick and diseased. Nothing could be further from the truth.

All through God’s Word His desire has been that His children experience health and healing. When the Hebrews left Egypt, God healed them all. (Ps. 105:37.) When Jesus entered towns and villages, He healed all who were sick and oppressed. (Matt. 9:35.) Jesus said that He only did what the Father told Him to do (John 5:19) and we never find one instance where Jesus commanded sickness. Jesus healed eyes and never made anyone blind. He touched deaf ears and people could hear. He caused the lame to walk but never made anyone lame. Jesus told the woman with the issue of blood, “Your faith has healed you” (Mark 5:34 niv). A touch from Jesus always brought deliverance, healing, and removed pain.

Jesus said that one of the signs of those who follow Him would be that they would lay hands on the sick and the sick would recover. (Mark 16:18.) There is not one place in the Bible where Jesus ever commanded believers to lay hands on the well and make them sick.

In the book of James, the Church is given instructions on what a sick believer should do. A sick believer is commanded to go to the elders and upon being anointed with oil, the prayer of faith will bring healing. (James 5:14.) There is no record in the Scriptures anywhere of believers being instructed to go to the church and have hands laid on them in order to receive sickness and disease.

Likewise, the Church was given nine gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts are listed in 1 Corinthians 12. One of the gifts is called “gifts of healings,” implying that within that one gift are many gifts and all the gifts contain healing. (v. 28.) You will find in this listing of nine gifts that there is not a gift called the gift of sickness, there is not a gift called the gift of disease, nor is there a gift called the gift of pain. That’s because God is the giver of good gifts. Remember, James 1:17 says that every good gift comes from the Father and then it goes on to say that God never changes. God’s gifts are good, they have always been good, and they will always be good because God does not change.

Cancer, tuberculosis, diabetes, tumors, disease, and pain are not good gifts. Therefore, they must not be from God.

Now back to Paul’s thorn. There should be no debate on what Paul’s thorn was because as soon as Paul said that he had a thorn in the flesh, he immediately said what it was. Paul said his thorn was a messenger (angel) from Satan sent to buffet (torment) him, “lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations.” This demonic spirit had an assignment and this assignment was to create havoc in Paul’s life.

In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul lists all the things that the enemy did to him, trying to take his life. Paul said he had been put in jail, whipped, faced death, been beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, put in prison, left for dead, received forty stripes minus one from the Jews; he also faced danger from robbers, flooded rivers, and the Jews and Gentiles. He faced danger in the cities, in the deserts and on stormy seas, and from men who claimed to be Christians, but were not. He had lived with sleepless nights, been hungry and thirsty, faced cold without enough clothing to keep warm, had been in hunger and thirst, and in cold and nakedness.

Notice that there is not a sickness or a disease in Paul’s list of attacks against him. Rather, he lists the attacks from the angel who had been assigned to him by Satan to destroy his ministry. Make no mistake about it. The devil is a bad devil whose mission statement is to steal from you, to kill you, and to destroy your life and ministry. On the other hand, God is a good God who is using every available method to get blessings and goodness to you.

So the next time you hear someone say, “I wonder what God’s will is?” or “I wonder if God wants to heal me?” open the Word and show them God’s will in His own words. God’s will is healing.

# HEALING (Emotional)

## Living Without the Pain of Discouragement

Disappointment could be defined as an emotional letdown after high expectations. If you are expecting something good and it doesn't happen, the temptation to enter into disappointment is there. The devil is just waiting to lightly push it over onto you. Don't take it!

Most Christians are smart enough to fight off the major things. When depression tries to come on me, I know that's bad and that it is not God. I kick that demon of depression in the teeth by not allowing it to come around me. I will not allow myself to get depressed.

But what about disappointment? A disappointment seems like such a little thing. I might get a little disappointed at something I expected someone to do, or over a report I get about some family or person in the church. Or, when I go out to start the car and find the battery dead, it's just a little disappointing. Yet, if all these little disappointments aren't dealt with right on the spot, they add up.

If you let all the disappointments pile up, little by little, the next thing you know you will get discouraged. Little disappointments can lead to discouragement and discouragement can lead to a broken heart.

We find much teaching in certain Christian circles about healing of the body. We find much teaching about salvation. Of course we need salvation and healing, but we cannot ignore the broken heart. Christians don't have to live their lives saved and healed, but hurting from a broken heart.

Jesus came to heal the broken heart. He said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted." When Jesus said this, He was reading from Isaiah 61. The word heal that Jesus used here can also mean "restoration."26 When something is healed, it is restored to its previous condition. It is completely fixed and whole. In other words, Jesus came to fix, to mend, to complete the thing that has been broken. Jesus came to mend the broken heart completely.

The world teaches that if you have a problem, you will always have that problem. All you can do is to modify your behavior so that you won't drink, you won't take drugs, or you won't have crying spells.

Jesus came to heal all that. Jesus does not cover it up, but He heals it. Jesus did not come to modify your behavior. He came to heal you completely so that you will be just as healed as someone who has never had the problem. You do not have to live with disappointments and discouragements or a broken heart. We must deal with all disappointments quickly or they will develop into

discouragement and a broken heart.

The good news is this—Jesus can restore and fix your broken heart. He can make it shalom.

## Your Broken Heart Can Be Healed

Many people are walking through life with a broken heart. Although they hide it well, behind the smiles and social activities, deep inside there are open wounds and pain from the past.

What causes a heart to be broken? What causes a person to hide the pain deep within? The answer to this question is both simple and complex at the same time, but usually involves rejection, unfaithfulness, lies, and betrayal by a trusted friend or love.

Years ago, a young couple was separated because their parents felt they were not good for each other, and through the years the pain of the separation never went away.

Another lady discovered that her husband was living with another woman on his sales trips.

A young girl, sexually abused by a family member, kept that secret through decades. As an adult, she was not able to respond to her husband correctly because of the abuse that she kept hidden away in her heart.

All of these people and others like them are living their lives each day hiding the hurt, masking the pain, and not living life to its fullest because of a broken, hurting, abused heart.

When Jesus was in Nazareth, He said that God had sent Him to heal the brokenhearted and to proclaim liberty to the captives. (Luke 4:18.) If this is true, then why are there so many Christians living with broken hearts?

Everything in the Word of God must be received by faith. Remember, faith is simply believing that God has done everything He said He would do and believing it so completely that everything we say and everything we do is based upon that belief. According to the Bible, we only receive what we believe.

Many retain their broken heart because they have given up hope that their heart could ever be healed, or they have tried using the world's methods with negative results. Psychology in its proper perspective can help, but only the power of God can completely cure.

The truth is, Jesus has already paid the price. He has already done everything that needs to be done for your heart to be healed. It doesn't matter who has

wronged you. It doesn't matter who has lied to you. Regardless of the physical, verbal, or emotional abuse that you have received in your life, the good news is that Jesus has paid the price for your freedom. Jesus has done everything that needs to be done for your broken heart to be healed and for you to no longer be held captive by the problems of the past, but to walk free, from this day forward, in victory.

How can this happen? Actually, it is so simple that most people miss it. In the same way that Jesus paid the price for our salvation, Jesus paid the price for our emotional freedom. In order for you to have everlasting life, there is nothing that you need to do except to receive the gift that He has already paid for. He died on the cross. God raised Him from the dead. And when you believe that, speak it, receive it, and confess Him publically, you have been born again. In the same way, He has paid the price for your broken heart to be healed.

When Jesus was talking to His disciples, He told them that if they would continue in His teachings and believe them that they would come to a knowledge of the truth and when they received this truth, they would be set free. (John 8:31–32.) The truth is this: You can have a heart full of joy and happiness. You can live in peace without regret or feeling the pain of the past. You can awaken every day knowing that the freshness of life is before you and the blessing of God is on your life.

You may say, "Is this possible for me?" The answer is yes, it is possible, but it's not possible for everyone. It's only possible for those who will believe and receive.

So I have this good news for you. If you woke up today with a heart that was broken, you can go to sleep tonight with a heart that is healed. The decision is yours. Believe and receive what Jesus has done for you. Confess it and it's yours.

Remember, Jesus said, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23).

# HOLINESS

## We Can Live Above Sin

Sin tries to creep into our lives on a regular basis. The devil is relentless. He does not give up. Just because someone decides to be a Christian and follow the things of God, does not mean that the devil backs off and says, "I'm not going to

bother him any more. He is seeking God so I'm just going to give him clear passage." The devil doesn't do that! The reason he doesn't is that he sees every born-again believer as a threat to his kingdom. (Deut. 32:30.)

God's plan is for everything to reproduce after its own kind. (Gen. 1.) In a way, this is what we all do in our daily lives with our lifestyle. Some people are strong and are not influenced by things around them, but a lot are. In the world, leaders are few, but followers are many. If you take a strong stand toward purity in your life, of course not everyone will be influenced, but some will see your lifestyle and feel a draw to attain it for themselves.

Christians who are not living right and have sin in their lives will not influence the world; in fact, they will be a detriment to the kingdom of God. The devil will cause people to look at them and point and say, "Those people claim to be Christians and look at what they are doing." The devil will use us as a good example of a bad example and people will be turned off toward Jesus. So as Christians we must live holy lives.

Yes, we can live lives that are above sin. Some people may say, "Well, I can't do that because the Bible says that every one sins." The Bible says that everyone was born into sin, but it also says that he who is in Christ is without sin. (Ps. 51:5; Rev. 1:5.) You may say, "Well, how can that be?" The reason it's true is that with the Spirit of God living in you, your spirit does not sin. We need to realize that we are three-part beings if we are going to be able to understand that scripture. (1 Thess. 5:23.)

If we have received Jesus, it is our spirit that is born again, and becomes new. The Scripture says when we become born again, when we accept Jesus, that old things pass away and all things become new. (2 Cor. 5:17.) That's talking about our spirit. When we are born again, we become a new creature, a new creation, a new being in Christ. The old man (our flesh, our worldly ways) has died and we are resurrected (spiritually speaking) into new life.

The Scripture also tells us whoever is born of God does not sin, because the Spirit of God resides in him. (1 John 3:9.) That's talking about the spirit of a born-again Christian. God renews our spirit day by day. (2 Cor. 4:16.) That's why we are without sin.

However, we must renew the mind daily through the washing of the Word. (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 5:26.) That's because the mind is not born again. Even though the spirit is born again, the mind needs to be renewed on a daily basis and that is our responsibility.

Likewise, the body is not born again. There will be a time when we will receive

a new resurrected, glorified body. The apostle Paul talks about it, saying that in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, we will be changed. (1 Cor. 15:52.) He's not talking there about our spirit because our spirit has already been changed. Our spirit is already born again. Our spirit is already without sin. But our bodies are changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and we become like Jesus.

With that in mind, we can understand that just because we are born again and our spirit is fresh and new and clean does not mean that our mind and body are. And the devil will work on us to try to get us to sin in our flesh. Even though we are born of God, we can still do things that are wrong that are sins.

This is why it is extremely important for Christians to renew our minds daily with the Word of God. Only then can we keep sin out of our lives and grow in holiness.

> *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*
>
> 1 Thessalonians 5:23

## You Are Made Righteous and Become Holy

When we are born again, we are born righteous. We are made righteous and we work toward holiness. Being righteous gives us the right to stand before God. When we get saved (born again), we are entitled to go to God, stand in the presence of the Father in the name of Jesus, and make our petitions known. How do we become righteous? We become righteous by being born again. When we're born again, we are born righteous.

Hebrews 5:13 says, "Everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness." Being unskilled in the word of righteousness means that you do not understand you became righteous when you were saved, so you try to accomplish righteousness through your works. It means you don't understand that you can go boldly before the throne of grace and say, "Father, in the name of Jesus, I receive Your grace in this situation." If you do not know you are in right standing with God, if you do not know you can go before the Father and He will, by grace, meet your need, then you are unskilled in the word of righteousness.

> *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.*
>
> Titus 3:5

You can be unskilled in the word of righteousness and still be a Christian, but

you are a babe and will never get out of spiritual diapers until you know you can boldly go before the throne and in right standing with God, find grace.

You must know that the righteousness you have is not because of anything you have done, not because of how great you are, not because of how much you gave to the building fund, or how great your musical talents are or even how great you can preach, teach, or witness. You must know you can boldly stand before the throne because, having been saved by grace, you are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:8; Rom. 3:22.) God saved you and gave you the right and the ability to stand before Him. Without God's grace, you would never make it to the throne. He cleansed you and made you righteous by the blood of Jesus.

After God gives you grace, He doesn't want you to be a spiritual wimp. He doesn't want you to feel you're not good enough to approach the Father. He wants you to come before Him the way the Scripture says to approach Him—boldly! On the other hand, some Christians, in error, approach God with an attitude of arrogance. There's a big difference between being bold and being arrogant. We must approach Him not only with an attitude of sincere humbleness, but boldly with confidence. We can only do this through grace.

We work toward holiness by acting on the Word of God. But we are given, in a moment of time, the right (righteousness) to stand before God cleansed of all sin.

When are we made righteous? When old things pass away and all things become new. Remember, the old man dies and we're born as a new creation, a new creature in Christ. At that moment, we become righteous. We were born into the family of God and can stand before our Father boldly. We don't need to be afraid He's going to destroy us because of our sin. We can have confidence and know we have right standing, the ability to stand right before God.

We work toward holiness. The Greek word hagiazo that is translated "holiness" in the New Testament is also translated "sanctification."[27] In other words, we become holy, we work toward holiness, we work through sanctification, through the daily renewing of our minds through the washing of the water of the Word.

> *That He might sanctify and cleanse her [the church] with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing but that she should be holy and without blemish.*
>
> Ephesians 5:26,27

Decide you are going to take what you've learned and make right choices, and by doing that in grace, you'll grow. Understanding you are made righteous and become holy is a major factor in "rightly dividing" the Word of God. (2 Tim.

2:15.)

# HOLY OF HOLIES (The)

## The Real Thing

Recently, I was driving down the highway and listening to my favorite CD by Jewish rock star Chaim David. He lives in the Old City of Jerusalem. Earlier in the year, I was in Israel and one day I was browsing through some CD's at the Moriah Bookstore just outside the Temple Mount. In the store, they were playing Chaim David's CD called "Build Your Home," and I couldn't resist it.

Anyway, as I finished the CD and hit the eject button to put in my next CD, the radio came on and the song that was playing was a secular R/B song titled, "Ain't Nothin' Like the Real Thing, Baby." After listening to Chaim David worship the Lord in Hebrew, that worldly song didn't even compare, so I turned the radio off. However, it made me think.

In the book of Hebrews, it tells us that after Jesus resurrected, He entered into the Holy of Holies and put His blood on the mercy seat. By doing this He made the way for anyone to have their sins washed away simply by believing in Him and receiving Him as their Lord and Savior. The interesting thing about this is that Jesus entered the Holy of Holies, which was the "real thing" and not the copy. Jesus didn't enter into the Holy of Holies in the earthly temple in Jerusalem, which was a mere copy of the real thing. No, He went into heaven itself and put His blood on the original mercy seat.

A copy is good in that it gives us an illustration or an image of what the original is like. But the copy cannot fulfill what the original can.

The earthly priests in Jerusalem sacrificed and placed the blood of bulls and goats on the altar. The altar was not the true altar and the blood was not the true blood. They were only a type and shadow of the original. For this reason, the blood of bulls and goats could never cleanse man from his sin, but could only cover, or atone.

The blood of Jesus, placed on the original mercy seat, made it possible for mankind to be cleansed from all sin. Atoning for (covering) sin is good, but it does not even compare to cleansing, eradicating, and eliminating sin once and for all. The Old Covenant was good, but the New Covenant is better. The copy was good, but there "ain't nothing like the real thing, baby."

Scripture References:

*Who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." (Hebrews 8:5)*

*For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another. (Hebrews 9:24,25)*

# HOLY SPIRIT (The)

## The Spirit of Truth

Have you ever talked to someone who sounded like they knew what they were talking about, but the more you listened, the more you realized that they really didn't know the depth of the subject?

Well, this happens all the time, and usually it doesn't cause much of a problem. However, when we're dealing with the things of God, we must know what we are talking about. Guessing and talking a big talk may impress some people, but it doesn't impress God and can actually be deadly. He requires us to be knowledgeable and act on that knowledge.

Hosea 4:6 says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me." The knowledge it's talking about here is knowledge of the Word of God. We must know God's Word, or according to the Bible, we leave ourselves open for destruction. When we stand before God, we can't say, "I didn't know." That will not be acceptable to Him.

There are a lot of good Christians who think they know God's Word. And because they think they know God's Word, they quit searching for deeper truths. After all, if you think you have something, you don't look for it. Well, sad to say, that is the case with many today. Some have even attended Sunday School as a child and grown into adulthood and still only know the outward appearance of the Word. A box full of Sunday School pins is good, but the Sunday School pins won't set you free. It is only the Word that will do that.

Now don't take me wrong. Any study of the Word, no matter how shallow or superficial, is better than no study. All of the Word is alive. But what I am saying is that there is more to God's Word than just stories. And according to Hosea 4:6,

it is possible to perish because of a lack of knowledge.

Remember, Jesus said in John 8:31–32, “If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Jesus didn’t say that singing in the choir would set you free. He didn’t say that attending church every time the doors were open would set you free. Jesus said that through the Word we would know the truth and the truth of the Word would set us free.

You may say, “Okay, I know that the truth will set me free, but how do I actually go about getting the truth in me so that I can be set free? What is it that I have to do?”

> *[Jesus said,] “When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.”*
>
> John 16:13

Here, Jesus gives us a key to the understanding of truth. The Spirit of truth is the Holy Spirit. God sent the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, here to comfort and help all believers. But we cannot access Him in the natural. We must seek Him in the spirit.

First Corinthians 2:9–10 says,

> *Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.*

For a Christian to know and understand the truths of God basically requires these three steps:

1) Read the Word of God regularly.

2) Meditate and soak up what you read.

3) Listen as the Holy Spirit reveals the truth in your heart.

## God’s Plan Is to Receive the Holy Spirit

Several years after the experience of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Church was still growing greatly. Saul was legally taking Christians captive and the apostles were stationed in Jerusalem. It was during this time that Philip went to Samaria as an evangelist or missionary and preached Christ to the Samaritans. He had great success!

In Acts 8:6–8 the Bible says,

> *The multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. And there was great joy in that city.*

Then in verse 12, it says,

> *When they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized.*

If this would have happened today, most evangelists would have thought they had one of the greatest revivals ever. Look what had happened. First of all, they heeded the things spoken by Philip. In other words, they believed what he said and acted on it. Then miracles took place. Unclean spirits, or demons, were cast out and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed. This was a supernatural time. These things were happening daily and, according to verse 8, there was great joy in that city.

So, here's the point. The people heard the gospel about Jesus and the kingdom of God; they believed what they heard; they acted on what they believed; miracles and healings took place; there was great joy; and in verse 12, all the men and women who believed were baptized. By New Testament standards, these people were Christians. They met all the requirements to be born again.

But then, in verse 14, we find where the news of this great evangelistic crusade got to Jerusalem. Keep in mind that at that time, there was no Internet, no fax machines, and no cell phones. News traveled slowly. So, after much time had passed and the news finally did get to the apostles in Jerusalem, the apostles decided to send Peter and John to Samaria. But why? Why would Peter and John need to go if the people of Samaria had already accepted Jesus and His teachings and were baptized?

We find the answer in verses 14–17:

> *Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.*

When we open the Word of God and read experiences like this one that happened in Samaria, we must read God's Word in truth. Too often when we

read passages like this, we try to mold and twist them to fit the man-made doctrines of our own denominations. This should not be. We should approach the Word of God openly, without preconceived ideas of what we want to hear. We must accept everything that God's Word says. Only then will we know the heart of God.

Ask yourself this question. If you find something in God's Word that goes against your tradition, will you change your belief? Will you deny the truth of God's Word in order to keep the man-made doctrines and traditions that you have become accustomed to?

We've seen that Jesus said, "If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." The truth is there is a second experience after salvation that's referred to in Acts 8:15 as receiving the Holy Spirit. We know this is true because God's Word says it. And God's Word always takes dominion over the words of man.

## Receiving the Holy Spirit Is for You

During the time of Jesus, Pentecost was an annual Jewish festival, also known as the "Feast of Weeks," or the "Day of Firstfruits," a celebration of the first buds of the harvest. (Num. 28:26.) Jewish men were required by law to go to Jerusalem three times each year to celebrate the major feasts and Pentecost was one of them. It took place seven weeks and a day after Passover.

On the day of Pentecost, over one hundred disciples of Jesus were gathered together in Jerusalem in an upper room. In this group were Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and His brothers, to name a few. Then something happened that had never happened before.

> *Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*
>
> Acts 2:2,4

When this occurred, the Bible says, "the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language" (v. 6).

Now, let's look at what happened here. Jesus had been crucified and raised from the dead. He appeared to the disciples and taught them for forty days and then He ascended into heaven. The disciples of Jesus were in the Upper Room on the day of Pentecost and the room had been filled on the inside with the sound of a

mighty wind. The disciples all spoke in tongues—all the disciples, all of the brothers of Jesus, and even Mary, the mother of Jesus. As they were speaking in tongues, all of the travelers from different regions who spoke different languages each heard the disciples speaking in their own native language. Needless to say, everyone was greatly amazed. Shocked may be a closer word. Some started saying, "What does this mean?" (v. 12.) And just as today, others stood by mocking, calling them drunks. (v. 13.)

Then Peter stood up with the other eleven disciples and raised his voice and began to explain what had happened. He told them that it was the fulfillment of a prophecy that was spoken by the prophet, Joel. He told them about Jesus and how He was crucified. He told them that God raised Jesus from the dead.

When Peter concluded his sermon, he made a very important statement:

> *"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."*
>
> Acts 2:38,39

Peter said that the gift of the Holy Spirit was not just for the one hundred twenty in the Upper Room, but that the gift of the Holy Spirit was for all those who were listening to him. Then he said that receiving the Holy Spirit was for their children and for all who are far away. In other words, receiving the Holy Spirit is for everyone who desires to receive Him. That includes you and me.

In Luke 11:13, Jesus said, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"

Believe in Jesus, ask, and receive.

## Gimmicks vs. the Holy Spirit

> *"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him."*
>
> John 6:44

When Loretta and I were first married, I was like a lot of other young men my age. I liked the Beatles music and I felt that Jimmy Hendrix (a famous rock star in the '60s and '70s) was the best dressed man in America. Even though I was a Christian and had been raised in a traditional denominational church, I wanted more and it looked like the world had what I wanted.

Then one day, Loretta invited me to a place on 18th Street in Kansas City called Evangelistic Center. That church met in a renovated movie theater with greatly

slanted floors and a tall ceiling. It was in a part of Kansas City that was considered dangerous to be in after dark. The neighborhood had a reputation for drugs, alcohol, and crime. But when I walked into Evangelistic Center and heard the worship, I desired more of God. The services lasted for hours, but they were never long enough. For the first time in my life I raised my hands and although I didn't understand everything that was happening, I knew this—God was in the house and He loved me.

The building was old and the musicians used whatever instruments they had. The worship services were so long that sometimes you would close your eyes while singing a song and later open them only to find that some of the musicians had changed during the song. There were no television cameras, no stage lights, no fancy stage props, and no security guards. It was just an old theater being filled with the manifestation of the glory of God and people being moved by the Holy Spirit.

Four decades later my heart is still yearning for the glory of God. I have discovered that all the high tech equipment the world has to offer cannot take the place of the Holy Spirit.

When I was a child, I would hear my elders talk about the good old days and I promised myself I would never do that. However, in recent years I find myself breaking my promise. But here is the good news. The good old days are still available. All that is required is that we have the same heart and seek the same things we were seeking then.

We live in a technological world and to a degree, much of the modern church has begun to worship this technology. I understand that technology is a tool that helps us take the Word to the world. Each week technology helps my ministry take the message of hope to potentially billions of people. However, we must remember that the technology and equipment is the tool and not the message itself.

Years ago, I was at a ministers' conference in Texas. About 300 ministers were there. A world-renowned evangelist was the speaker and as he began to speak, a storm took out all of the electricity in the building. It was late at night and the room was dark, but someone handed him a flashlight and he taught the Word without a microphone, without a stage, and without cameras. It was one of the most powerful messages I have ever heard him deliver.

Some ministers would have sent everyone home, but not this man! He had the Word burning in his heart and nothing was going to stop him from delivering it.

For 1,900 years, the gospel of Jesus Christ was preached on this earth before the

advent of electricity. Jesus didn't have the Internet, but He impacted the lives of twelve men and they turned the world upside down with the message. (Acts 17:6.)

So my point is this, the hurting people in the world will not be changed by technology. Technology is the tool that can carry the Word and the Word will change people. The latest gimmicks may draw people to the church building, but no man comes to the Father unless the Holy Spirit draws him. (John 6:44.) It is the presence, power, and anointing of God through the Holy Spirit that draws men to God.

# HONOR

## When We Honor God, God Honors Us

> *Therefore the Lord God of Israel says: "I said indeed that your house and the house of our father would walk before Me forever." But now the Lord says: "Far be it from Me; for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed."*
>
> 1 Samuel 2:30

The Bible tells us here that God honors those who honor Him and that He lightly esteems those who despise Him. By this scripture, we know what we must do, but the question is how do we esteem and honor God?

Of course, we esteem and give Him honor when we worship Him and tithe. But there is another way to give Him honor that is often overlooked.

Jesus said, "...Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matt. 25:40). Who are "the least of these"? The Greek word for least is translated as "in amount: of management of affairs…in importance…in the estimation of men: of persons," and "in rank and excellence: of persons."[28] Here's an example that shows the heart of Jesus in this matter.

When the disciples attempted to keep the children away from Jesus, Jesus rebuked them. (Mark 10:13–14.) The children are considered least by some, but according to Jesus, they are valuable, "for such is the kingdom of God" (v. 14). We can give honor to Jesus and we honor God by giving honor to the little ones.

But that raises the question again, "How do we honor the children?" We honor our children at home and at church by giving them the Word of God and by training them in the ways of the kingdom. As Christian adults, we should supply the very best teaching materials for our children. We must give them quality time

and understanding. We must be an example to them of peace and wisdom.

Too many parents will control their tongue and their anger in public, but release it in an ungodly way privately in front of their children. This should not be. When we do this, we are not giving honor to our children. And according to Jesus, what we do to the least, we are doing to Him.

So how do we honor God? We honor God by giving honor to children and to those the world would consider of less value. We should never judge people because of their income, education, or for the work they do in society. Man looks at the outside, but God looks at the heart. Philippians 2:3 tells us to, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself."

# HOPE—The Doorway to Faith

## Hope Does Not Disappoint

> *Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*
>
> Romans 5:5

While listening to a sermon by a traveling minister, I kept hearing him make the following statement. He said, "Wishin' and hopin' never got anybody anything. God doesn't give two cents if you hope. He only responds to faith." I know that there is some truth in what he was saying. However, we cannot condemn people who are in hope. Hope is a good thing. Hope is not from the devil. Actually, hope is a God quality.

First Corinthians 13:13 says, "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." Yes, it is true that love is greater than hope, but notice that hope made it to the top three! Hope is good and as Christians we are told that we are not to give up our confession of hope.

It is true that faith and hope are two different things, but hope is essential in attaining faith. We must pass through the land of hope on our way to faith. Bible hope is the intent expectation of the good thing from God that's on its way. A hope confession is: "I believe I will be healed." "I believe I will be delivered." "I know God's promise is on its way." These confessions are good. It is true that they are not faith confessions because they are confessing what is going to come. That's hope.

A faith confession is in the now. A faith confession is: "I am healed." "I am

delivered." "I have God's promise now." This is a faith confession.

I believe God's ultimate desire for us is to walk in faith. God's world is a faith world. But as we grow toward faith, we move through hope. We should never criticize, condemn, or offend someone walking in hope.

Remember, Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

# HUMILITY

## How to Measure True Humility

> *Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.*
>
> Colossians 2:18

Tucked away in Colossians 2:18 are some very interesting nuggets of information concerning our personalities. This verse tells us that it is possible to be cheated out of our reward through false humility and by being vainly puffed up by our fleshly mind. Simply put, pride will cheat you out of God's best for your life.

When humility and pride are measured, most people use an incorrect measuring device. Some measure pride and humility by the amount of wealth a person has.

Years ago, two ministers I know were invited to a ministry crusade meeting hosted by a well-known foreign missionary. The missionary was speaking on humility and called both of them to the platform. The missionary, with a clear voice, announced to the crowd that my minister friends were two of the most humble ministers she knew.

When the proclamation of their humbleness had been made, you could hear some rumbling from the crowd. As soon as the meeting was over, another minister attending the meeting approached them and asked, "How can you be humble when you have new cars, new homes, and are probably the only two people in the room who own their own airplanes? Try hanging around with me for a while. I don't have any of those things. I'll show you what true humility is." Sadly, this minister was not measuring humility with the right measuring stick. Humility has nothing to do with how much or how little money we have. Jesus said that He was humble, yet He possessed the universe and had all power. (Matt. 11:29 nlt.) The devil, on the other hand, has had everything stripped from

him and he is full of pride. (Isa. 14:12–15.)

Humility is exalting God and His Word and His plan above our own and willingly being obedient to all that He says. Jesus submitted His will completely to the Father and He was humble. In light of that, if we submit our will to the Father with willing obedience, then we too will be walking in humility.

## Get an Attitude Check

There is a television commercial that says "attitude is everything." Although they are advertising a worldly product, they still understand the principle that our attitude is important. It's not true that attitude is everything, but our attitude toward others can either enhance or destroy relationships.

Years ago I knew a man who was extremely talented in his field of occupation. He had natural abilities and learned abilities that far surpassed all of those around him. Physically he was good looking, but socially, he was repulsive. He had a very poor attitude. Because he had a strong personality, he created turmoil every place he had been employed. He worked a lot of places because it was only a matter of time until he was offensive to the employer and his days became numbered.

As Christians, we must understand that we cannot have the same attitudes that are prevalent in the world. We are required by God's Word to not think of ourselves as better or smarter than those we associate with. If we act haughty and arrogant to other believers, then we are disobedient to God's Word. As Romans 12:16 says, "Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion." This scripture is telling us that we are not to be high-minded. Yes, we are to be wise, but not wise in our own opinion. To have pride is to be high-minded. That means a person thinks of themself higher than the reality of their abilities, their looks, and so on. Galatians 6:3 says that if anyone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, that he deceives himself.

We must know who we are in Christ and, of course, we must operate in our God-given abilities, but we cannot have a poor attitude or high-mindedness because that will lead to isolation and offenses.

> *For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 10:12

# IGNORANCE

## Acting in Ignorance Usually Brings Defeat

> *I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.*
>
> 1 Thessalonians 4:13

Here, Paul makes an interesting statement. He implies strongly that ignorance breeds hopelessness. All through God's Word we are told that we are to increase and grow in knowledge. In Colossians 1:9–10, Paul writes that he wants the believers to increase in knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge and wisdom are good, but knowledge and wisdom must increase. Without the increase of knowledge, there is complacency and a tendency to feel that all knowledge worth attaining has already been attained.

Years ago, I purchased my first computer. It was an Atari 800. I was very well pleased with this computer because it had twice the memory of my brother-in-law's Atari 400. It did not have a hard drive but had a cassette tape as the storage device. At that time, I had about 150 people on my mailing list. I remember one day sorting my mailing list by zip code. I was so happy. It only took the computer 45 minutes. I could have done it by hand just as fast!

Today, my mailing list has grown to many thousands of families and to sort them by zip code takes less than one second. Why is there such a dramatic change in the speed of computer systems since the era of my first computer? It's because knowledge has increased.

As knowledge increases, we are able to work smarter and faster. We can accomplish more in a shorter time. We can be more productive with less work. Knowledge is a great advantage in the world. Likewise, in the realm of the Spirit, knowledge is power.

Jesus said that if we would continue in His Word, we would know the truth and then as a result of knowing the truth, we would be set free. (John 8:31–32.) Knowledge will set you free from the bondage of ignorance. Knowledge will allow you to move into areas of deliverance that would be unattainable otherwise. Remember, in Hosea 4:6 God said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." God's Word is true and this message is very clear. We must gain knowledge of God, His plan and His purposes and then through obedience, act on what we have learned.

Positive action on the truth of God will bring freedom and deliverance. Acting in

ignorance without direction, even when done with the right intentions, usually ends in defeat. With the knowledge of God, we have hope.

# INCREASE

## The Lifestyle of Increase

The world is in bad shape. The world is full of bad news. As Christians, we must live in the world, but we are not of it. (John 17:11,14–16.) The world may be getting worse, but for the Christian, every day should be better than the day before.

When I was a young boy growing up in a denominational church, there was a song that had words along these lines: "Every day with Jesus, is sweeter than the day before. Every day with Jesus, I love Him more and more. He's the One who keeps me. He's the One I'm living for. Every day with Jesus is sweeter than the day before."[29] I understand that this old hymn is not necessarily Scripture. However, in principle, it is true. If each day that we live as a Christian is not sweeter than the day before, then we should examine ourselves and find out what's wrong. If we are living according to God's plan and being obedient to His Word, then every day can be full of new excitement and new revelation.

God is a God of increase. (Ps. 115:14.) When I make this statement, usually people immediately think of money. While it is true that God is the God of increase concerning our finances, increase is so much more than that.

In Galatians 5:22, the Word tells us, "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control." These attributes of the Spirit of God are placed in us when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. However, God expects us to grow in these spiritual character traits by the daily washing of our minds with the Word of God and with the conscious decision to be obedient to His Word as it is revealed to us. (Eph. 4:23; 5:26.)

Once a man told me that he would love to grow in the things of God, but it was just too difficult. This man's problem was that he had believed a lie of the enemy. The commands and callings of God are not burdensome. In fact, Jesus said that in Matthew 11:28–30:

> *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My*

*burden is light."*

# INDECISION

## Indecision Can Be Deadly

*Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.*

Psalm 37:1

When you find yourself in times of trouble and your back is against the wall, it's usually a result of one of two things: foolishness or the enemy. Let me explain.

Remember this: God has a plan for your life and God's plan is always a good plan. The devil has a plan for your life and his plan is always a bad plan. Following God's plan will bring peace and contentment. Following the devil's plan will always bring strife, destruction, and death.

The Bible tells us that we have placed before us life and death. Actually there are three choices. We can choose life or we can choose death or we can choose not to choose. Only one choice will bring life. The other two choices will bring destruction and confusion.

One of the two wrong choices invites the enemy into the camp where he brings havoc and mayhem. The other wrong choice leans toward your own understanding. The understanding and wisdom of man is a better choice than an alliance with the enemy. However, the end result is still the same.

*"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live."*

Deuteronomy 30:19

Over the years, I have seen people make the wrong choice in life, but indecision can also be deadly. Last week I was watching a major league baseball game. The batter hit a line drive into the outfield that looked like it could be caught. The runner on second started running toward third but stopped halfway there. He couldn't decide whether to go to third or to go back to second. The ball wasn't caught, but dropped for a hit. However, the runner on second was easily tagged out because he couldn't make a decision.

God's Word tells us that we must decide. When it comes to the moral issues of the day, we cannot be silent and say nothing. Abortion, homosexuality, and Christian rights cannot be ignored. We cannot allow the enemy to rule our lives because of our indecision. Jesus said in Revelation 3:16 that He would rather for

us to be hot or cold because if we are lukewarm, He would spew us out of His mouth. There's a reason He used that terminology.

Some Bible commentaries say that back then, physicians would use lukewarm water to produce nausea and vomiting.[30] So those Jesus spoke this to emphasize exactly what He meant. One version of the Bible translates that verse in a way that people today can relate to: "Because you are not one thing or the other, I will have no more to do with you."[31]

We have the truth and deception placed before us. Take the truth and leave deception and indecision behind.

# S

# INTEGRITY

## Walking in God's Character and Integrity

> *Above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes," be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.*
>
> James 5:12

Integrity has been defined as: 1) Steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code; 2) the state of unimpaired soundness; 3) the quality or condition of being whole or undivided; completeness. Bible integrity is the lifestyle of being obedient to God's Word willingly, joyfully, and with no regard to the circumstances or consequences.

Integrity is an interesting concept. However, in the life of a Christian, it should not be a concept, but a way of life. Integrity does not cheat. Integrity does not steal. Integrity is fair in business dealings. Integrity is fair and just with spouse and children. Integrity does not lie. Integrity is not hypocritical.

A few years ago, my sister purchased a very nice long winter coat. I'm sure that there were coats that were more expensive; however, this one was very nice and cost several hundred dollars. The first time she wore this coat was to church. It was also the last time she wore it because someone in the church stole it. It was not a mink stole, but it was a "stolen mink."

Another friend of mine, a well-known international minister, was on a trip to Japan with his new $600 camera. He was riding on a crowded subway that circled Tokyo every hour. As he was leaving the subway, he was pushed out with

the crowd and his $600 camera was left on the seat as the doors closed. For one hour, he waited as the subway circled Tokyo making multiple stops. To his amazement when the subway returned to his location one hour later and the doors opened, his $600 camera was sitting on the seat.

The point of these two stories is this—why would a coat be stolen in a church and a camera be safe in a subway in a foreign country?

Of course, the reality is unguarded objects are safer in a church than in the open in a public place and these stories are actually an exception. However, an exception becomes amplified because the world is looking for an excuse to proclaim hypocrisy in the church. For this reason, the character and integrity of a Christian is judged more harshly and stories of moral failure in the church become amplified and repeated. The Bible tells us that the judgment of a teacher is stricter because they are held to a higher standard. (James 3:1.) In the same way, Christians are held to a higher standard because of what we teach.

It's time for the body of Christ to rise up and walk in the character and integrity that God wants us to walk in. If we will be led by His Spirit instead of the flesh and be obedient to God's Word, then the world will see His integrity in us and we will not have to work at being witnesses but we will be a witness. Preaching revival is good, but true revival will take place when Christians operate in God's character and integrity.

> *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."*
>
> Matthew 5:16

# INTIMACY WITH GOD

## Developing Your Most Important Skill

> *Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the Lord.*
>
> Jeremiah 9:23,24

I'd like to take a few minutes to explore this powerful verse of Scripture with you. Before we take a look at what this verse does say, let's be clear about what it does not say.

God tells the people who are wise, mighty, or wealthy not to glory in wisdom, might, or riches. The Word of God does not say that these things are bad or wrong. It simply says do not glory in them.

Some people think security comes from natural resources. Many spend a great deal of their lives seeking knowledge and education. Others spend hour after hour exercising and watching their diets, seeking to be healthy and strong. Still others exert themselves to extremes, seeking to be wealthy. I'm not only referring to people of the world, but many Christians are doing the same thing. Can you imagine what the body of Christ would be like today, if people sought after the things of God the same way they seek after worldly wisdom, might, and wealth?

It is important for us to understand that these things are not wrong. They are not bad. God actually wants us to have wisdom, might, wealth, and more! But what this opening scripture is saying is that we should not glory in these things.

We, as Christians, cannot take our security from them. We cannot judge ourselves by our level of earthly wisdom, might, or wealth. The only thing Christians can use to measure themselves is the Word of God.

God tells us that if we are going to glory in anything, then let us glory in our relationship with Him. The main thing that we should be secure in is our knowledge and understanding of God. Things can happen to our wisdom, our might, or wealth. Situations can sometimes change overnight, and all of these temporal things can be lost. But through our relationship with God, He restores us.

God wants you to know Him. Of course, He knows who you are. He knows all about you. But that's not enough! He also wants you to know Him! He wants to be known by you!

The most important skill that anyone could ever develop is his or her ability to pray. Wisdom, might, and wealth all have their rightful place in our lives, but there is something more important.

There are times when our ability to talk to God and our sensitivity to His voice is the only thing that is going to solve our problem. The highest goal any human could ever attain is to know God. Look at Moses and David. Moses talked with God face to face. (Ex. 33:11.) David was a man after God's own heart. (Acts 13:22.) These men were able to accomplish great feats in their lifetime. The truest measure of a person's success is his or her level of intimacy with God.

So, take a few moments out of each day. Get alone with God. He wants to reveal Himself to you.

# ISRAEL (The Land)

## Do Not Remove the Ancient Landmark

> *"Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.'"*
>
> Isaiah 46:9,10

The Word talks a lot about time and eternity. Second Peter 3:8, for instance, tells us that one day with God is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day. Eternity is immeasurable. Time cannot be measured in the midst of eternity because in eternity, time does not exist. In the midst of eternity, God carved out seven days and He called these seven days time. Based on verse 8, each of the days consists of one thousand years. At the end of the fourth day (4,000 years), God gave Jesus to the earth.

In the two thousand years since then (two days), we have the "Church age," or the "age of grace." The seventh day is the day (1,000 years) Jesus will rule and reign on this earth. (Rev. 20:6.) We call this the millennial reign of Christ. From eternity to eternity and all the time in between, we find one thing that is consistent. God never changes.

In order to find the will of God on the earth today, all that needs to be done is to look to the ancient times of the past. God's plan of the ages has not changed.

While it is true that we as Christians live under a new covenant that was instituted by our Lord Jesus, it is also true that when God gives His word, He keeps it. God's promises to His chosen people are still valid and true and anyone who opposes God's will is in a dangerous place.

As the world looks on and observes the Church, many are confused when they see Christians opposing the Jews when the Lord and Savior of the Christians himself was born on this earth as a Jew.

The world is full of anti-Semitism, but there should never be, under any circumstances, even the slightest hint of opposition to God's chosen people coming from the Church. No logic from the mind of man can justify the opposition to God's plan concerning the Jews. God didn't give the land of Israel to the United States of America. God didn't promise it to the Syrians or the Egyptians. God already has given it to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

As a Christian, there should be no confusion on where you stand on the issue of the land of Israel. Who God gave that land to is obvious just from these two scriptures (and there are many more on this in the Bible).

> *Do not remove the ancient landmark which your fathers have set.*
>
> Proverbs 22:28

> *Do not remove the ancient landmark, nor enter the fields of the fatherless; for their Redeemer is mighty; He will plead their cause against you.*
>
> Proverbs 23:10,11

## God Gave the Land to Israel

> *God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name." So He called his name Israel. Also God said to him: "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land."*
>
> Genesis 35:10–12

Over the centuries, there has been much discussion about how to bring peace into the Mid-East. Some of the world's greatest thinkers and politicians have devised plans that would guarantee peace. To this date, all of man's plans have failed and here is the reason why.

In any given situation, there are only two plans:

1) God's plan

2) Any plan opposed to God's plan

As Christians, we must quit analyzing the situation and start looking in God's Word to find out what He wants. When you do this, you find one thing very clear and defined. God gave the land of Israel to His chosen people, the Jews. Any plan that would divide their land and give it to their enemies is opposed to God's will and that plan will not be blessed.

> *Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.*
>
> 1 Timothy 2:1,2

The Word tells us that we are to pray for all who are in authority. When we pray for our leaders, we must pray that they will be led by the Holy Spirit and will make decisions that are in alignment with God's plan.

We know that those who bless Israel will be blessed and those who curse Israel will be cursed. (Gen. 27:29.) To desire for Israel to have all that God wants them to have is blessing Israel. To take from Israel something God has promised to Israel is cursing them.

You must decide for yourself. Will you bless Israel or curse Israel? To help them keep their land will bring a blessing. To agree with those dividing the land will bring cursing.

God has a place for everyone. But, for the Jews, it's Israel.

## God Has Spoken, Opinions Don't Count

In all of creation there are only two plans that exist. First, God's plan and secondly, any plan that does not agree with God's plan. In the Bible we find that everyone who agreed with God's plan in word and action was blessed. And those who disagreed and opposed God's plan, fell into destruction.

God has not changed and neither has His plan nor His promises. The things God loved 4,000 years ago and 2,000 years ago, He loves today. The things that displeased God 4,000 years ago and 2,000 years ago, displease Him today.

When we make a decision in our personal lives, in the lives of our ministry, or in the direction of our nation, it must align with God's plan. Listed below are only a few of the multitude of scriptures stating that the Promised Land in the Middle East belongs to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Remember, God changed Jacob's name to Israel and his sons became the twelve tribes. (Gen. 32:28.) When God promised the land to the descendants of Israel, He was referring to the Jews.

> *Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*
>
> Genesis 12:1–3

> *"Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory."*

Joshua 1:2–4

*Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.*

Genesis 12:7

*The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him: "Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. Arise, walk in the land through its length and its width, for I give it to you."*

Genesis 13:14,15,17

*Then He said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it." And he said, "Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?" So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.*

Genesis 15:7–11

*And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. On the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram saying: "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates—the Kenites, the Kenezzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites."*

Genesis 15:17–21

*"Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."*

Genesis 17:8

*"The Lord God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my family, and who spoke to me and swore to me, saying, 'To your descendants I give this land,' He will send His angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there."*

Genesis 24:7

*“Dwell in this land, and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; I will give to your descendants all these lands; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.”*

Genesis 26:3,4

*“And give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham.”*

Genesis 28:4

*Behold, the Lord stood above it and said: “I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants.”*

Genesis 28:13

*“The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land.”*

Genesis 35:12

*“Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.”*

Genesis 48:4

*“I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers.”*

Exodus 6:4

*“I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: I am the Lord.”*

Exodus 6:8

*“I have said to you, ‘You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ I am the Lord your God, who has separated you from the peoples.”*

Leviticus 20:24

*“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God.”*

Leviticus 25:38

It is obvious that any plan that supports the giving away of Israel’s land to their enemies, or any plan that does not support them in keeping their land is opposed to God’s plan. Remember, being opposed to God’s plan is not a good place to be.

# ISRAEL (The People)

## Why Should We Bless Israel?

God spoke to Abraham in Genesis 12 and made a covenant with him. In this covenant God made a proclamation that He would make Abraham a great nation and make the name of Abraham great. God also proclaimed that He would bless Abraham and that through the blessing of Abraham, Abraham himself would be a blessing. (v. 2.)

Then God made a statement in this covenant proclamation that has caused nations to rise and fall. He said, "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you" (v. 3). After this proclamation, Abraham departed from Haran and did as the Lord had commanded. He was 75 years old with a barren wife, but because of the faith of Abraham and the promise of God, this covenant of blessing and cursing has become an eternal covenant. God fulfilled His covenant with Abraham and Sarah and they had a son.

The favor of God came upon the son and grandson of Abraham—Isaac and Jacob. And we just saw how God spoke to Jacob at one point and said,

> *"Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name." So He called his name Israel. Also God said to him: "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land."*
>
> Genesis 35:10–12

The Bible tells us that God surveyed the land in an area that we now call the Middle East, and in this place He set borders. All the land within the designated borders He gave to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Proverbs 22:28 says, "Do not remove the ancient landmark which your fathers have set." God loves His chosen people and He has a chosen land with predetermined boundaries for them. The people are not to be cursed and the land is not to be divided. Over the centuries, we have seen great empires that have sought to destroy the Jews and divide their land. Each one has fallen. Today, the United States is the foremost country that has blessed the people and the land of Israel. Since May 15, 1948, the United States has been Israel's best friend and during this time, has risen to be the world's superpower. The Scripture has been proven true that those who bless Israel, will be blessed.

This same principle holds true on a personal and individual level. As Christians, we must love what God loves and hate what God hates. God loves Israel, and He gave a specific piece of real estate to them. In order for the blessings of God to be manifested in our lives, we must bless the people and stand behind them without wavering and we must take a stand against anything that would cause the land that has been promised to them to be divided or taken away.

The Lord said that He placed before us life and death, and blessing and cursing. Then He asks us to choose what we want. Personally, I like blessing and life better than cursing and death. And according to God's Word, if I bless Israel, my life will be enhanced and I will live in blessing, but if I curse Israel, the people, or the land, then curses will be in my life. How about you?

Choose life.

# JOY

## Did Jesus Smile?

Several years ago, I was the worship leader at a church. I loved it. To lead people in worship was a joy and I always tried to present myself as a joyful leader. It's easy when you love to worship Jesus. Joy is almost automatic.

After church one Sunday, my wife and I were eating at a local restaurant when one of the longtime members of the church came in with her husband. They walked over to our table and began to talk. She said, "This morning at church as you were leading worship, I could see that you were happy and enjoyed what you were doing." I smiled and was feeling really good. I thought I was getting a compliment. Then she went on. "And that just disgusts me to no end."

She continued, "When Jesus entered a town, He walked in with six disciples flanked on the right and six on the left. He didn't smile and He certainly didn't lift His hands and look happy when He sang."

At first I thought she was joking and I chuckled, but then I could tell by the look on her face she was very serious. I knew there was no convincing her otherwise, so I didn't try. I treated her politely until she left.

As Christians, we are to be like Jesus. But what was Jesus like? Was He a happy person? Did He get depressed? Did He show joy and happiness? Or was He stern and solemn all the time? Well, let's look to the Bible and see what it says concerning this.

In Luke 10, Jesus sent seventy disciples out into the cities He was planning to go

to. He gave them instructions and when they returned, they gave Him a good report. They said that even the demons were subject to His name. (v. 17.) In verse 21, the Bible says that Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit. The Greek word used in this verse for rejoice suggests shouting and leaping with joy.[3][2] Can you imagine that? Jesus—shouting and leaping with joy! If you can't, you probably have a religious image of Jesus.

In Matthew 19, little children were brought to Jesus and He prayed for them. When the disciples tried to keep the children away, Jesus rebuked them, saying, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for such is the kingdom of heaven" (v. 14). There's no mention here that these children were afraid of Jesus or were forced to go to Him, which to me strongly implies that the children wanted to go to Jesus. Would children be drawn to a grumpy, rigid, mean old man? Of course not! Children are attracted to joyful people who smile and laugh.

Another time, in John 15, Jesus taught His disciples about love. In verse 11 He said, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." Jesus said He was joyful and He wanted us to have His joy.

Listen, God loved us so much that He made a way for us to live throughout all eternity and never die. Through faith, He made a way for us to have special gifts that would help us supernaturally. (1 Cor. 12:4–11.) He gave us His Word that He would heal, prosper, and deliver us. He gave us His Holy Spirit as a comforter, helper, and intercessor. He gave us supernatural love. He gave us peace, not peace like the world gives, but supernatural peace. (John 14:27.)

Remember, James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning."

If we really believe this is true, how can we not jump for joy?

## God's Gifts Are Grounded in Joy

Everyone has times when they like to sit back and think about all the things going on around them. Sometimes it's really hard to find the time, but when those times do come along, I find them very refreshing. Last week I had one of those times.

I took a cup of hot apple cider and went into a room in my house I call "the upper room." It's a room above my garage that overlooks the Lake of the Ozarks. I have never put a television or stereo up there. Somehow it just never

seemed right. The room is so quiet and a nice place to think.

One evening I was in the upper room thinking about the good things of God, when I began to list all the things God has provided for us. As I made my list I began to realize that God's gifts are all grounded in joy.

Let me explain. When we become a Christian, the Spirit of God indwells us. Our spirit is born again and we become a new creation. Second Corinthians 5:17 talks about it, saying, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit lives within us. As a Christian, because we have the Spirit of God within us, we also have the product of His Spirit. The Bible calls it the fruit of the Spirit and says it "is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

Everything God has for us is joyful. When He heals us, is that a joyful thing or a sad thing? Of course, it's a good, joyful thing. When God prospers us, is that a joyful thing, or a sad thing? Of course, it's a joyful thing! But what's unique about being a Christian is that we can have joy in the midst of sickness, financial trouble, or any trial that comes our way.

Why? Because first of all, the joy has already been placed within us as a part of the fruit of the Spirit. That happened when we became born again. Secondly, we know that no matter how great the sickness, no matter how great the financial problem, no matter how great the trial, we can rest in the truth that God said He would deliver us.

In Psalm 34:19 the Bible says, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all." Did you catch that? God delivers us out of all of our afflictions.

If this is true, and we know it is because God's Word says it, then we have no reason to be depressed. Likewise, we have every reason to be joyful. Even though we may be going through a trial, God said He would deliver us out of it. And if God is going to set us free from our afflictions like He said He would, then we can easily let that joy out that has been placed within us.

The problem with joy is not getting it, it's letting it out. As Christians, we have already been given joy as part of the fruit of the Spirit. So since we have it, it's our responsibility to let it flow. We have our hand on the valve that governs our joy level.

# JUDGMENT

## The Righteous Judgment of God

> *In accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.*
>
> Romans 2:5

We know that God is a good God. We've seen that, according to James 1:17, every good and perfect gift is from Him and that He does not change. We know that Jesus said in John 10:10 that the thief comes to destroy, but that He was different. He came to give us abundant life. However, just because God is good does not mean that He does not judge. And we must understand this—righteous judgment is good.

A person who is traveling 45 mph or less in a 45 mph speed zone does not fear the sight of a patrolman. The only person not wanting righteous judgment is the person exceeding the limits of the law. Obedience brings order. Disobedience brings chaos.

If a murderer is brought to trial and if the evidence proves that he is guilty, the evidence convicts him of the crime. The jury determines if the evidence is correct and because of the evidence, the jury confirms guilt or innocence to the judge. The judge, seeing that the evidence has confirmed the crime, then pronounces judgment on the criminal. The judge is not the accuser, nor is the judge the executioner. The judge is the righteous man or woman who confirms the evil deed and pronounces the sentence per predetermined rules.

After 40 years of being in the ministry and studying God's Word and listening to His voice (in my heart) on a daily basis, I truly believe that God is a good God. But I also believe that it's foolishness to not accept the truth that God is the righteous judge. All through God's Word we are told that God rewards good deeds with His blessings and evil deeds will bring a curse or absence of His blessings.

When a person sins or does anything that is contrary to God's Word, the door for the wages of sin is opened. God told Cain that if he did well, that he would be accepted and that if he did not do well, sin was waiting at the door and it desired him. (Gen. 4:7.) However, God said that Cain could and should rule over the sin.

God has placed before us life and death, cursing and blessing. We have a choice to make and we will be judged by our choices. The devil will not judge you.

Your friends and relatives will not judge you. According to Jesus, out of the abundance of your heart, your mouth will speak (Matt. 12:34), and by the words from your heart, you will be justified or condemned. (v. 37.) Remember, your actions will always follow words that are spoken from your heart.

God hasn't changed. The things that pleased Him 5,000 years ago please Him today. And the things that made Him angry 5,000 years ago still make Him angry today. What some could have called natural disasters in Old Testament times (floods, storms, earthquakes, and so on) often were a result of the judgment of sin.

Thank God we are under a New Covenant. Because Jesus paid the price in full for our sin, we are judged righteous by God. As Christians, we can live free from sin knowing that our eternal existence is sealed because of the sacrifice of Jesus. God is not looking over our shoulder trying to find sin in order to keep us from His blessings. To the contrary, He is looking for ways to bless us. Of course, God's values have not changed. He does not become politically correct with any man-made society. But when He judges us, we are judged righteous because Jesus made the once and for all perfect sacrifice on the altar.

God is the righteous judge.

# KINGDOM OF GOD

## Activate Your Miracle

If you are seeking God for a miracle in your life, there is a strong possibility that the release of your miracle is connected to someone else's miracle. God has a plan for your deliverance—and His plan always works. Let me explain.

Recently I was thinking about different ways we could raise money to finish one of our church building projects. God spoke to my heart about it and said something so simple and basic: go before the congregation the very next Sunday and receive a building fund offering for another church in our community that was also in a building project.

At first it seemed awkward for me to stand behind the pulpit to ask our congregation to give funds to help build a church 15 miles away, knowing that we needed money to complete our own building project. But when I did it, a miraculous thing happened. As I told the congregation we were receiving an offering for another church, some cheered, others shouted, but I noticed one thing from wall to wall. Everyone in the church was excited about helping

another church.

We received a building fund offering that day for the other church. The next day I put the check in the mail. Not only did we help another church, but we had a lot of fun doing it. It is a joy to give! Actually, it is being kingdom-minded.

Our community is a resort area. Our church and lighthouse overlook a large lake. In fact, this lake has over 1,300 miles of shoreline. There are over 250 waterfront resorts and over 75 marinas on our lake alone. Also, there are over 150 churches. I teach my congregation that we are not in competition with other churches that teach Jesus Christ is Lord. And when we help other churches instead of being critical of them, we are kingdom-minded.

Jesus said that if we would seek first the kingdom of God, then the things we need would be added to us. (Matt. 6:33.) His kingdom is bigger than my ministry or my church. To be kingdom-minded means that we are not in competition for sheep, but we are competitive together in our fight against the enemy, the prince of darkness.

Through all this we can see God's plan for our prosperity. If we meet the needs of others in the kingdom, then the King of the kingdom can meet our needs.

Although I already knew and understood the revelation of giving and receiving, somehow that revelation seems deeper now. Luke 6:38 tells us that if we give, men will give back to us. And that when they give back, the same standard of measurement will be used in our receiving that was used in the giving.

A foundational principle in God's Word is sowing and reaping, giving and receiving. (Gal. 6:7–9.) There is never a harvest without seed being sown and receiving is in direct proportion to the giving. However, the principle of giving and receiving works in conjunction with the message of Jesus when He said, "Seek the kingdom of God first."

To be kingdom-minded means that you seek God's plan and purpose above all else. It means that if funds are limited, His plans and projects are priority. If you are standing in line with God, always step back and put God ahead of yourself. Make Him first.

You may be seeking God for a miracle in your own life, but you can be sure that there are many others seeking God for a miracle also. If you seek God's guidance by His Holy Spirit, and if you are obedient to that guidance, your seed planting will not be in vain, but will actually meet a need and bring joy to someone else. And as you are obedient to His guidance in your giving, you open the door and make it possible for someone else to be led by the Holy Spirit and give into your need. The seed empowers the kingdom principle that activates

your personal deliverance.

You may say, “But I thought God was my deliverer, not a man or a woman.” Again, Jesus said in Luke 6:38, “Give and it will be given to you.” And then He said that by doing this, the result will be that men will give unto you. God uses people who are obedient to the leading of His Spirit to fulfill the needs in the body of Christ.

So today, activate the kingdom principle of seeking God first in your giving so that you will be a blessing to someone else—and by being a blessing, you open the door to be blessed.

Activate your miracle today.

# LAZINESS (Mental)

## Chill Out!

> *Do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind.*
>
> Luke 12:29

In this verse, Jesus gives us a command that, if followed, will change the way we live our lives and will take away stress. In modern vernacular His command is this: Chill out! He tells us in His Word that we shouldn’t get stressed or anxious concerning what we eat or drink. And He says that we should not have an anxious mind.

Our mind is a part of our soul. As humans, we are three-part beings. We are spirit, soul, and body. When we are born again, it is our spirit man that passes from death unto life. Old things are washed away and all things become new in our spirit man. The Scripture tells us that our spirit is renewed daily by God automatically and we are sealed until the day of redemption.

> *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*
>
> Ephesians 4:30

> *Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 4:16

However, our mind, a part of our soul, must be renewed daily through a conscious effort. The Word of God brought into our thought realm and nurtured

by the Holy Spirit brings our mind and our thought life to a higher level of revelation and glory. We have a choice when it comes to our mind. We can either have an anxious mind or a mind that is at peace. The choice is ours.

We can develop a peaceful mind by washing our mind daily with the Word of God and by bathing and soaking in the Word and allowing the Word to saturate us. Or, we can develop an anxious mind by simply doing nothing—and that's what the devil wants for us.

There are two plans for your mind. God has a plan and the devil has a plan. God's plan will bring peace and freedom. The devil's plan will bring stress and confusion. God's plan involves the Word of God. The devil's plan involves laziness.

Don't be lazy. Take a bath in the Word.

# LEADERSHIP

## Leaders Need a Vision

Every Christian should have a vision of what God has for them to do in their life. One of the biggest problems we have in the church today is people working without direction. Have you ever met someone who always seems to stay busy, but never really accomplishes anything? They are involved in all types of projects and duties but never quite reach their goal. Or, if they do reach their goal, there is no satisfaction. It is very satisfying to have a goal that you know is important. You accomplish that goal in such a way that you can stand back, look at your accomplishment and be at peace. But, all too often this is not the case. In churches around the country, people work religiously on projects, and many times never accomplish anything. Frustrated and tired, they drop out of the church or they continue to work and just burn out. Even ministers are leaving the ministry at an alarming rate. Why? Usually it's due to burn out. Why are they burning out? Most likely they are working without a vision.

Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (kjv). I am convinced that many toiling away at duties in the church have no vision of where they are or where they are going. After all, if you don't know where you are going, you won't know it when you get there.

Getting a vision of what God wants you to do and accomplishing that vision requires two things. First, seek God and find out what it is He has for you and second, do it. Do what God has told you to do, not what He has told someone

else to do. Do what He has for you to do. You are responsible to God primarily for one person—you. You are responsible for one vision—yours.

Seek God and do what He has for you. Move in your vision. Be a voice, not an echo.

Habakkuk 2:2 says, "The Lord answered me and said, 'Write the vision and make it plain upon tablets, that he may run who reads it.'"

Seek God, get the vision, and then write it down. If you're a Christian without a vision, you are in danger of living a dull, unfulfilled life. If you're a Christian leader without a vision, it not only can be disastrous for you, but for all who follow you.

Write your vision down. Make it plain (or understandable), so that those who read it may run with it. If you don't know what your vision is, others won't know where to follow. Follow your God-given vision. But don't be a fanatic. Remember, a fanatic is a person who, after he loses sight of his goal, doubles his efforts so he can get nowhere faster.

You can live three weeks without food, three days without water, but you cannot live three minutes without hope. If you're frustrated, you may not be as far off track as you think. Seek God concerning your vision. Sometimes all it takes is a minor adjustment in your thinking to get back on track.

King Saul looked at Goliath and thought, "He's too big to hit." David looked at Goliath and thought, "He's too big to miss." (1 Sam. 17.)

Seek God, renew your vision, and do it!

## A Clear Vision Makes a Strong Church

> "*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*"
>
> Proverb 29:18 kjv

The poorest person reading this today is not someone without money, it's somebody without a vision. Let me say this. If you want to do something for God, you must have a vision.

You can go to Bible seminary, speak Greek and Hebrew, and have the ability to translate the Bible from its original languages. You can teach, preach, witness, sing, and strive in the ministry. But if you don't have a vision, you won't get anywhere.

You may say, "Well, I haven't done so bad." But the truth of the matter is, whatever you accomplished in your own strength doesn't even compare to what you can accomplish when you have a vision of what God wants you to do.

A minister once said he saw a 16-year-old boy walking around with his shirt tail hanging out, long hair, unbathed, slumped over, shoes untied, dirty clothes, and wearing headphones with music so loud that you could hear it several feet away. Later, he saw the same 16-year-old boy. He was all cleaned up, shaved, smelled good, and had his hair all slicked down. What happened? The teen had gotten a vision. He'd seen a UFO—that's an Unidentified Female Object. See, a vision will change you. It will get you focused.

You can get on a ship, but you shouldn't leave port until you know where you're going. We have too many ships out in the ocean, under full power, but going nowhere. This is probably one of the greatest problems in the church today—ministers without a vision who are leading their flocks nowhere, doing the same old thing day after day. Because of this, many Christians are unfocused, undisciplined, and going nowhere. Without a vision, the people perish. Sheep with a shepherd who does not know where he or she is going are sheep destined for starvation and death.

Of course, some have a vision and are very focused on God's plan for their lives, but sadly many do not. We should not settle for man's best when we can have God's best. We need to get hold of God's plan and His program instead of wasting our time on man's programs and plans.

God wants us to get a vision for His kingdom. With God's vision working in our lives, we can turn the world upside down for Jesus. The best programs our churches can think up will pale by comparison to what one person can do with God's vision working in his or her life.

I've heard it said that Christopher Columbus typifies church leadership. He didn't know where he was going, he didn't know where he was when he got there, and when he got back, he didn't know where he'd been.

We who are church leaders need to get a vision. If a pastor of a church doesn't have a clear vision of where God is taking him or her, the people in the church won't know where to go. The church may have some success. It may have some growth. But it will never have the prosperity and growth it could have had if there was only a vision. How can the people know when they get where God wants them if they don't know where they're going?

Pastors, if your church members don't have a clue where you're going, then think back to your calling from God. What did He place before you? What burns in your heart? Take these things to the people in your church and transmit it to them. Make it clear. Don't give them some vague philosophy. Then the people will have a vision to follow. Then your church and ministry will be a threat to the

kingdom of darkness and you will have great success.

## Holding to a Form of Godliness

Once I sat through a worship service where several thousand were in attendance. The preacher gave an inspiring message about alcohol. For an hour he preached. He had good illustrations and stories. In fact, it was one of the most informative messages on alcohol I had ever heard. The only problem was, when it was over, I didn't know if he was for it or against it. But he sure knew how to speak!

Second Timothy 3:5 says in the last days, men will have a form of godliness but deny its power. Verse 7 says that they will always be learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. This is the way many Christians are today. They attend church meeting after church meeting, but it's only a form of godliness. They seem to always be learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

As Christians, we must never forget the reason for assembling ourselves together. Yes, fellowship is important. Yes, we need to have dinners and fund-raisers for the needy. Yes, we need each other, but, we must not forget the real reason we assemble. We must never forget that the church is a place of worship and a place where we learn about our Savior and hear the Word so that faith can be built up in us.

As ministers, we must remember that we are to preach the Word. We must constantly remind ourselves that we are to build faith within the Church. Romans 10:17 says, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Earlier in the same chapter, verse 14 says, "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"

In Luke 18:8, Jesus asked this question. He said, "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" When Jesus returns, He will not be looking for ice cream and bingo cards. He will be looking for faith.

Once a man asked me, "How will Jesus be able to tell if faith is here?" Well, the answer may surprise you, but it's quite simple. The world we live in is the created world. It had a beginning and it will have an end. The spirit realm, however, existed before the creation of the earth. It exists now. And it will exist throughout all eternity.

According to Hebrews 11:1, faith is a substance. A substance has size and shape and can be seen. For example, when the four men brought their sick friend to Jesus, they had to let their sick friend down through the roof because of the crowd. The Bible says in Mark 2:5 that Jesus looked at them and saw their faith.

In the spirit realm, faith can be seen.

When Jesus returns, He will be looking for faith. But, where does faith come from? Remember, “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

After all this you may be asking, “What is faith anyway?” The simplest definition of faith is this: Faith is simply believing that God has done what He said He would do and acting on what you believe. Isn’t that easy? Just believe what God says and act on what you believe.

# LIGHT OF GOD (The)

## What’s Hidden in the Dark

> *For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.*
>
> John 3:20

A few years ago, I ate at a restaurant that was recommended by a friend. It had been a long day for me with several meetings, duties, and errands so that by the time my wife and I got to the restaurant, it was near their closing time. They seated us anyway and I must say the food tasted wonderful. The atmosphere of the restaurant seemed pleasant; the lights were very low with a sprinkling of candles throughout.

While we were finishing our strawberry cheesecake dessert, the waitress came to our table and asked if it was okay if she started cleaning the restaurant. She was very polite and we were almost finished so, of course, we told her it was okay.

Then something happened that changed the entire evening. The waitress turned on the lights. I could hardly believe my eyes. The floor was covered with crumbs. Grease spots were on the wall. Straw covers were stuck in the chair and the table had a dull film on it. I almost gagged. The place was filthy.

God is light. First John 1:5 says so, and then it says “…in Him is no darkness at all.” The world is living in darkness, but Jesus said that as Christians, we are the light of the world. (Matt. 5:14.) Not only that, but we are commanded in Ephesians 5:8 to walk as children of light.

If you were walking in the woods at night and I instructed you to walk in the light, you could only do that if you had a flashlight or a lantern with you. To walk in the light, there must be light. No matter how much you tried to see in the darkness, it would be impossible without light and the light will only shine if

you have it.

Sometimes as Christians we are trying to get the world, which is in darkness, to walk in the light. It's impossible. Our first goal must be to give them the light, to impart to them the light of God. How is that possible? Jesus said in Matthew 5:16 that we are to let our light shine before men in such a way that they would see our good works and glorify God. That's why Christians must walk in love, honesty, character, and integrity. Even though we are in the world, we are not of the world. The world lives in darkness, but we are the children of light.

Years ago I saw a bumper sticker that said, "God cleans His fish after He catches them." Of course, this is not Scripture and only a slogan, but there is some truth in it. Cleaning that is done in the dark is only superficial. True clean up comes after the light of the gospel has been shed in our hearts and we have been born again into the kingdom of light. Then we can walk in the light as children of light. Then God can reveal His truths to us and expose areas that need change so that we can mature and grow in the Word.

Cleaning your house at night with the lights off is futile. Only in the light of day can true clean up take place.

Scripture References:

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. (Ephesians 5:8)

Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. (1 John 5:5–7)

"I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness." (John 12:46)

## Light Always Overpowers Darkness

"God is light" is a very interesting truth. (1 John 1:5.)

We know that light travels at the speed of 299,792,458 meters per second or 186,282 miles per second. That's faster than most people can comprehend. But let me ask you this. How fast does darkness travel? Well, I'll tell you. Darkness doesn't move. It has no light. Darkness only exists where there is no light, because light always overpowers darkness.

The apostle John talked about light and darkness in John 1.

> *In the beginning was the Word [referring to Jesus] and the Word was with*

> *God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the Light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it.*
>
> John 1:1–5

The Greek word for comprehend could also be translated as overpower.[33] In that case, verse 5 would read like this: "And the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overpower it." Once again, we see that light always overpowers darkness.

With that in mind, remember that Jesus said in Matthew 5:14, "You are the light of the world." And He said in verse 16, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

Again, in John 8:12 Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

Now, if you have problems in your life and it seems as though they are about to get you down, remember what Jesus said in John 8:31–32. He said if we would abide in His Word, we would be His disciples and we would know the truth and the truth would make, or set, us free.

Well, the truth is God is light and in Him is no darkness. If you are a born-again believer, then Jesus is within you and you are light. And the great news is that light always overpowers darkness. Not sometimes, not most of the time, but light always overpowers darkness.

Satan is the prince of darkness. Jesus has already defeated him. The Bible even says that Jesus made a public mockery of him and defeated death. (Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14.) Jesus took authority over darkness and He has given that authority to all who believe. (Luke 10:19.)

Remember this today. If you are a Christian and you are being attacked by darkness, just let your light shine. Greater is He who is in you than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4), and "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21).

If you are not a Christian and the prince of darkness is attacking you, you only have one hope and that is Jesus. Accept Him as your Lord and Savior and you will have the light of God within you. Then you can walk in the light. (See "How Do I Become a Christian?" on page 489.)

The bottom line is this: God is light. And, according to Jesus, we as Christians are light—and light always overpowers darkness.

## You Are the Light of the World

We are living in difficult times. Unemployment is near an all-time high, foreclosures are driving families out of their homes, and because of financial pressures, many marriages are at the breaking point. Recently I talked with two pastors who were ready to leave the ministry because of pressure. This should not be.

In times of trouble, faith people should be standing stronger than ever. Let me explain.

During the day, it might be impossible to tell if a lamp is turned on or not. But in the darkness a lamp, regardless of its brightness, is easily seen. In these times of great darkness our light should actually seem brighter to the world than ever before, even if our light is of no greater intensity than it's ever been.

In times of darkness, many are crying, "Lord, increase my faith." Faith, standing in a world of doubt, should be easily seen. Our light should look brighter than ever. As darkness tries to come over the world, we should remember that our faith has already overcome it. (1 John 5:4.)

The darkness should make our faith look brighter even if we have no more faith than before. I encourage you to stand in faith and to not focus on the doubt and darkness around you. Remember, light always overpowers darkness. Darkness is governed by the light. Darkness only prevails when the light is extinguished and your light cannot be extinguished unless you allow it. You are the one who determines the intensity of your faith. You are the one who has access to the fuel (the Word of God) that feeds the faith in your life. There may be reasons why some doubt, but we have no excuses for allowing that doubt to overtake us.

So, you are a mighty person of God, and I want to encourage you with these words. Greater is He (the Light) that is in you, than he (the darkness) that is in the world. No weapon (of darkness) formed against you can prosper. You can do all things through Christ (the Light) who strengthens you. With God (the Light), nothing is impossible. (1 John 4:4; Isa. 54:17; Phil. 4:13; Mark 10:27.)

And because you are the light of the world (Matt. 5:14), you are victorious and darkness cannot rule over you.

# LIMITATIONS

## God's Power Is Limitless

Do you place limits on God's power? Is there a point in going through a trial where you feel that it's beyond God's will and power to deliver you? Or you

don’t trust Him to deliver you? How far will you go before you draw the line?

In the year 605 BC, Daniel and his friends were deported to Babylon. Daniel had three close friends—Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The king, Nebuchadnezzar, renamed them. He renamed Hananiah, Shadrach. He renamed Mishael, Meshach. And he renamed Azariah, Abed-Nego. (Dan. 1:7.) Changing their names may have been done to make them forget their religious and cultural heritage or as an indication of authority and dominion over them. Or the king might have done it to keep things simple.

Daniel and his three friends were placed in the king’s court to be trained. The Bible says in Daniel 1:17 that God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom. When the king himself examined them, he found them to be ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in his kingdom.

As time passed, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego became rulers over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But some ruthless men, who hated the Jews and wanted them destroyed, talked the king into making a law. (Dan. 3.) They would make a large gold image, and when the music played, anyone who was within the sound of this music would, by law, have to bow down and worship the image. To put teeth in this new law, it was decided that anyone who did not fall down and worship the false image would be thrown into the center of a burning fiery furnace.

Of course, the three Hebrew men would not bow down and worship the image. God had forbidden it and they knew God was more powerful than any man. They knew God had said He would be their deliverer and they believed Him. They knew God did not lie.

When it was reported to the king that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego would not worship the gold image, the king became furious and he demanded the three be brought to him. He gave them one more chance, but they refused.

> *[They said,] “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”*
>
> Daniel 3:17,18

The king was full of rage and commanded his best soldiers to bind the three Hebrews and throw them into the furnace. Because of the urgency of the king’s command, the furnace was made extra hot. As they approached the furnace opening, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego fell down, bound, into the middle

of the furnace. The soldiers who took the three men to the furnace were burned to death.

Then it happened. King Nebuchadnezzar jumped up and called for his counselors. He couldn't believe his eyes. He said, "I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God" (v. 25). Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego walked out of the furnace—unharmed.

> *The satraps, administrators, governors, and the king's counselors gathered together, and they saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them.*
>
> Daniel 3:27

These men did not limit God's delivering power. Neither should we.

# LONGEVITY

## Long Life Is a Promise of God

Long life is a promise of God. Long life is a blessing from God. God wants us to have long days and an abundant life and we must understand this. According to the Bible, we are able to control our time on earth.

God wants you to have long life abundantly and Satan wants you to have short life and peril. Why would God desire life for you and why would Satan desire death?

God has a plan for you. He has things He wants you to do for Him and for His kingdom. He wants you to live your life in such a way that others will be attracted to your lifestyle and want to be like you. His desire for those who follow Him is prosperity, peace, and abundance in all areas.

The devil, on the other hand, wants your life shortened. He knows that a believer who lives a long life of prosperity and health will attract others to the kingdom of God. Satan hates God and will do everything possible to make the kingdom of God look unappealing.

Satan is the king of deception. He tempts us and tricks us into missing God's blessing of long life by tempting us into disobedience.

Proverbs 3:1–2 says that if we do not forget God's law and if we keep His commands, then God will add length of days and long life. Likewise, if we make

light of the laws of God through our repeated disobedience and lack of repentance and if our heart is not set toward keeping His commands, we limit our days on this earth.

Another scripture about our longevity is Ephesians 6:2–3, which tells us that if we honor our parents, then our life on earth will be long. This is one of the reasons that Satan seeks to destroy the family. Rebellion and contention in the home and the dishonoring of parents shortens our lives.

It is true that the thief comes to steal, kill, and to destroy. (John 10:10.) We must understand that we are the ones who are the target of his destruction. Every day that a Christian walks on this earth in the fullness of God, he or she witnesses to the glory of God. We should seek out God's Word, follow His commands, and do everything possible to add length to our days. Although we are told man's days on the earth shall be one hundred and twenty years (Gen 6:3), the quality of life is more important than the quantity. We should live each day to its fullest so that when we reach the end of our time here on earth, we are satisfied and at peace knowing that we have accomplished all that He has called us to do. By living all of our days in the fullness of God and His Word, we bring glory to Him.

# LOVE

## You Don't Get to Choose Who You Love

> *If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.*
>
> Luke 6:32,35

God is light. God is good. God is love. And He loves the world through us; however, we cannot just be the conduit for His love. We must also show love.

When the Bible says that God is light, it also tells us that we are the light. (1 John 1:5; Matt. 5:14.) In fact, Jesus himself said it—that we, as Christians, are the light of the world; and He said that we should let our light shine in such a way that the world would glorify God. (Matt. 5:16.) So, God is light and we are light.

Something else the Bible tells us is that God is good. (Ps. 100:5; Matt. 19:17.) When Moses asked to see God's glory, God caused His goodness to pass by. (Ex.

33:18–21.) God's glory is His goodness.

We're also told in the Bible that God is love. (1 John 4:8.) God loved the world so much that He sent Jesus. (John 3:16.) He gave of Himself while we were still in our sin. (Rom. 5:8.) And Ephesians 5:1 says that we are to imitate God. We should be able to imitate God because we have been created in His likeness and in His image and we have been given His Spirit to live inside of us to help us do what we can't do on our own. God is love and we can be like Him.

Now, don't take me wrong. I am not saying that we are God. What I am saying is this. The very essence of God is love and if we were created in His image and in His likeness (Gen. 1:26) and if we are to be like Him as we are commanded to be in Ephesians 5:1, then we need to actually be love as He is love.

Love must be in our heart. Love must be in our mind. And even if we are cut (or hurt by others), we must bleed love.

## True Love Never Dies

There is a place in love that is rarely traveled or seen. It's a place of true love. It doesn't exist in the mind or in the will of man, but only exists in the heart. It is a place that cannot be explained nor understood with the natural mind. It is a place that cannot be created by desire. Manipulation and control do not exist in this secret room of the heart. This room is only occupied by a substance called love and this thing called love is the most powerful substance in the universe.

First Thessalonians 5:23 tells us that man was created as a three-part being. We are a spirit that has a soul that lives in a body. Your spirit is the real you. Your soul is your mind, will, intellect, and emotions.

God-like love (agape[34]), as described in 1 Corinthians 13, is a decision that takes place in the soul. This God-kind of love is described as patient, kind, not envious, not boastful, not proud, not rude, not self-seeking, not easily angered, keeps no records of wrongs, does not delight in evil, and rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. "Love never fails" (v. 8).

All of these attributes are a matter of choice and will. We decide that we will be patient. We decide that we will be kind. We decide that we will not be rude. The God-kind of love is a decision of the soul and must be carried out with humility and joy. After all, God would never command us to do something that we didn't have the ability to do. The soul of a man is subject to the man.

There is a love that travels to the depths of the heart that is not created by decision nor can it be removed by decision. It is a place of being in love and it is

God-given. There is a difference between decisive love and love of the heart. Let me explain.

I come from a good family. I have a sister, parents, aunts and uncles, and cousins and I love them all. I love them with the love of God and I would die for them. They are special to me and nothing or no one could take their place. However, I am not “in love” with them. No decision of the soul can make a person fall in love. It just happens. Love of the heart isn’t created. It just is.

Every born-again believer has received the love of God within themselves. Every born-again believer has made the decision to love God. But only a few are “in love” with Him. We can experience an intimacy with God that we cannot experience with people because God is perfect and loves us with a love that does not have an agenda and that is rarely found among humans. The only thing that comes close is being “in love.”

There is a special relationship, a special intimacy, a special place in the heart that is only filled through times of intimate worship with God. Sadly, most of what the church calls worship really isn’t worship at all. Singing, holding up your hands, and kneeling can be outward expressions of worship, but if it doesn’t originate with the heart, it is only a mechanical outward show. We should never judge someone else’s worship, but God knows if it’s from the heart or if it is just an outward display.

In a survey where Christians were asked, “Do you love God and do you have an intimate relationship with Him?” the overwhelming majority said yes. Many Christians feel they have an intimate relationship with God only because they have never actually experienced one, or have never experienced true intimacy in life. You can’t miss what you’ve never had unless you see it in someone else.

Once a couple tried to convince me of how much they loved each other. They had been married for 32 years, they had children, traveled together, and enjoyed the same sports and hobbies. They loved where they lived and they loved their life.

However, the more they talked to me, it became evident that they received more satisfaction from their like accomplishments and desires than they did from each other. While they enjoyed everything they did and everything they had, and they enjoyed it together, a part was missing. It seemed they would not enjoy each other if everything else was taken away. They didn’t miss what they didn’t have, because they didn’t know it existed.

Once I heard a lady say to another lady, “It really doesn’t matter who you marry as long as you have some basic things in common, i.e. religion, desire for

children, or occupation." How sad that this lady obviously had not experienced the joy of falling head over heels in love with someone she just couldn't live without.

Likewise, some Christians love the things of God, i.e. church, fellowship, or prosperity, but don't experience the intimacy that comes from having a personal relationship of love with the Father.

True love can never die. It lives in the heart and cannot be removed by trials or separation. Love forgives and love always brings peace. True love can withstand pressure and pain because love is patient and never gives up. True love does not count time, but in time, love always prevails because God is love and love never fails.

## Walk in Perfect Love

As we near the return of Jesus, one thing becomes increasingly clear. The prophecies of the Bible are being fulfilled at an accelerated rate. For centuries, theologians have spoken of the time to come, but the time to come is now here. We are in the time of the Glorious Church.

God loves you and Satan hates what God loves. Our Savior will return and when He does, He is returning for a Church that is walking in the anointing and power. The enemy is doing everything he can do to destroy the Church. If you are born again, you are the Church.

So how can we walk in victory? How can we live lives that are surrounded with turmoil yet still at peace? Second Corinthians 10:3–4 says, "Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal [fleshly] but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds." The attacks are coming and what you do is important. It will decide your destiny.

Jesus gave us one command that was above every command and that commandment was to love each other. The Bible has much to say about that. We are told in 1 John 3:14–15 that the way we will know that we have passed from death unto life is that we will have love for the brethren. Then it goes on to say that he who does not love his brother abides in death.

It's interesting that in 1 John 4:7–8, it says that we should love one another because love is of God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Then it continues, saying that anyone who does not love does not know God, because God himself is love.

First John 4:20 tells us that if someone says they love God, but actually they hate their brother (or sister) in Christ, that person is a liar. Then it asks how can

someone not love their brother that they see every day and claim to love God, whom they have never seen?

We are in the last days when the Spirit of God is moving in a greater measure. However, we cannot move in the Spirit of God if we do not walk in the love of God. God has not given us a spirit of fear, but He has given us the spirit of love, power, and a sound mind. (2 Tim. 1:7.)

God is not moving through casual Christians. He is moving through obedient, dedicated believers who abide in His Word, know the truth, and walk in love. When we walk in perfect love—"love that is complete (or mature), or that is allowed to exert its proper influence on the soul"[35]—1 John 4:18 says that there will be no fear because perfect love casts out fear. Fear involves torment and anyone who fears and walks in torment has not been made perfect in love. According to that scripture, keeping your love walk perfect is the highest priority a Christian has in life. You will never be satisfied, complete, or at peace unless you are walking in perfect love. The cares and irritations of the world will fall away and perfect peace will be yours when you walk in perfect love.

Second Corinthians 2:11 tells us that if we are ignorant of the devil's devices, he can take advantage of us. His greatest weapons against the Church are offense and division, backbiting and gossip, hatred and strife. But how can we keep all of these things out of the church so the church can be the Glorious Church? The answer is quite simple. Walk in the perfect love of God and then, as the Word says in 1 Peter 4:8, love will cover a multitude of sins.

Of course, there are times when you may feel that it's impossible to forgive and walk away from hurt and strife. But that is a lie of the enemy. The truth is this. You have been empowered with God's grace (His power and ability) so that you can do everything He commands you to do.

So the next time you hear the voice of the enemy trying to drag you into a non-loving situation, know who you are. Submit to God, rebuke the enemy and walk away. Remember, you are the Glorious Church.

## The Greatest of These

First Corinthians 13:13 says, "Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

For years this verse has been used to show the greatness of love. Love is great. We know that Jesus taught extensively about love. With Him, it was a very important subject.

In fact, in Mark 12:28, Jesus was approached by a scribe who had been listening

to Him teach. He came to Jesus and asked Him to tell him which commandment is the most important.

In verses 29–31, Jesus answered him and said,

> *"The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."*
>
> *The scribe gave a wise reply."Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."*

When Jesus saw that the scribe had answered wisely, Jesus said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (v. 34). In other words, all the scribe had to do to enter into the kingdom was to believe in Jesus and confess Him as Lord of his life. The point is, Jesus tells us here in Mark 12 that the greatest commandment is love. It is the number one commandment, second to none.

Another time Jesus touched on this when He was talking with His disciples in John 13 and He told them that He would be leaving soon. (v. 33.) Then He gave them a command.

> *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*
>
> John 13:34,35

Isn't it interesting how Jesus said that we as Christians could be identified? He said that everyone would know that we are Christians by the way we show love to one another.

First John 4:11 says, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

Once I was counseling with a lady who said she had a fear of love. She had been hurt so many times in her life that all her defenses were up, all the time. She didn't want anyone to get close to her and she feared getting close to anyone else. The apostle John talked about that in verse 18, which says, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love."

In verses 20–21 John goes on to say,

> *If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.*

Remember, God is love. God has not given us a spirit of fear, as perfect love casts out fear.

## The True Mark of a Christian

In talking about loving others, let's look at a Scripture passage that is interesting and often overlooked.

> *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*
>
> 1 John 4:7,8

On the surface, that just seems like a couple of nice Bible verses. But let's look closely at what it says. It says that if we do not love, we do not know God. That's a powerful statement! Think about it: without love in our hearts we do not know God.

When Jesus was talking with His disciples in John 13:34, He explained to them how other people would know that they were His disciples. He didn't give them a gold-embossed certificate that they could display on their office wall saying they had passed the requirements to be a disciple. He didn't say that they would have a certain type of robe or suit to wear that would set them aside. He told them that the only thing that would set them apart from others, the only thing that would let others know that they were His disciples was this: they would have love for one another.

Sometimes when we think of love, those who lived though the sixties think of hippies walking around in bell bottoms, giving the peace sign and saying, "Love, brother."

Well, that's not what we are talking about. We are talking about a godly, supernatural love, not the kind of love that comes from ourselves, but the kind of love that can only come from God the Father. This love will cause us to love those who are not lovely and to be more specific, it will cause us to love those who hate us.

You may be asking yourself if this love is really as important as I am making it out to be. Well, the answer is, yes. It is extremely important! Romans 13:8 says, "He who loves another has fulfilled the law." Remember, the Bible also tells us

that “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18).

We know faith is important. We are saved through faith. We are healed by the prayer of faith. Anything that is not of faith is sin and Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith, it is impossible to please God. So why am I saying this?

Well, as important as faith is, the Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:2 that we can have all faith, even enough faith that we could move mountains, but if we do not also have love, we are nothing. Remember, the last verse of that chapter says, “Now abide faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love” (v. 32).

While we were in sin, God sent His Son Jesus to die for us. Then, God raised Him from the dead so that we who accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior can have eternal life. When we accept Jesus, we become children of God. As His children, we should have the same character as our Father. We should not only love one another, but we should love those who do not deserve it. That’s what God did when He loved us. And when we truly love Him, we can’t help but do the same to others.

## What Is Your Motivation to Love?

Years ago, there was a song that talked about how people look for love in all the wrong places. Actually, some look for love for all the wrong reasons. One lady who was in a marriage that was falling apart because her husband was abusive, told me that the only reason she fell in love with her husband was because she was on the “rebound.” Getting married on the rebound is a direct result of fear. We should never attempt to love because of fear. Love should be based on faith.

Over the years, I’ve met many couples who were brought together for the wrong reasons. Depression, jealousy, and manipulation are all grounded in fear and based on control.

Colossians 3:19 says, “Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.” Titus 2:4 says that young women are to love their husbands and their children. Hebrews 10:24 says that we should consider one another in order to stir up love and good works. Yes, we must love, but we must love in faith and not by the spirit of fear.

Faith is associated with love in the same way that fear is associated with hate. What love is described as being in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8, so is faith. Faith is kind and does not envy. Faith does not parade itself. Faith is not puffed up and is not rude. Faith is not self-serving and is not easily provoked. Faith does not dwell on evil and does not rejoice in someone else’s failure. Faith believes and hopes and endures. Faith never fails.

The opposite of faith is fear. Fear is not patient and is unkind. Fear walks in envy and parades itself. Fear is rude, self-seeking, and easily provoked. Fear is evil and rejoices in sin and despises the truth. Fear does not believe, has no hope, and will never endure. Fear always fails.

So what is your motivation to love? Is it based on faith or is it founded in fear? True love and faith are eternal and nothing can overpower them.

## The Source Produces Life

As Christians, we need to remember that if other people don't love God, it is only because they don't know God, and it's our job to be God's witnesses.

In the world around us, we meet many people each day who are either walking in deception and unbelief, or they are in bondage to the powers of darkness. They are part of the reason why we as Christians are on the earth today. You and I must reach out to others.

As Christians, we are supposed to love one another and walk in the fruit of the Spirit which, as we've seen, is "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness [and] self control" (Gal. 5:22–23).

In Matthew 7:1 the Word says, "Judge not, that you be not judged." In John 15:13, the Word tells us what to do instead: "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." We are to lay down our lives through prayer and intercession for others, through meeting others' needs, through spending time reaching out to them and loving them.

Ephesians 3:17 says that we need to be rooted and grounded in love. In John 15:4, Jesus said that the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine. Neither can we bear fruit unless we abide in Him. Then Matthew 7:20 says, "By their fruits you will know them."

The picture I'm trying to create here is this—God is the source, Jesus is the vine, we are the branches, and by our fruits we will be recognized.

Can you remember the science experiment that many of us did in school, where we stuck a piece of celery or a carnation in some colored dye? If we put a white carnation in a glass of red dye, the flower would eventually draw that red dye up into the flower, and the flower itself would turn red. Whatever the plant is rooted and grounded in will show up in the fruit of the plant.

The branch's only responsibility is to stay in union with the vine. The branch does not have any control over the fruit, other than to provide a conduit for the life juices to flow from the main plant. In the same way, Christians have no other responsibility than to stay in union with God through Jesus, and provide a

conduit for His love and Word to flow. God will take care of the rest. Isaiah 55:11 says God's Word shall not return void, but it shall accomplish that which He pleases, and prosper in the thing for which it is sent.

Bearing fruit is a totally natural process for the plant. The next time you walk by a fruit tree, go stand right beside it. Put your ear up next to the trunk if you want to, and listen very carefully. You will never hear a tree groaning and straining to produce fruit. It's not hard work. It is a natural process for the tree.

The same goes for us as Christians. If we will make certain that we study the Word every day, spend time in prayer, and stay faithful in church, then our lives will naturally bear fruit. It is not up to us to decide what kind of fruit we should bear. Our only job is to stay connected to Jesus and allow His life and His love to flow out through our lives towards others.

Remember, God is the source. Jesus is the vine. And we are the branches. The fruit of the Spirit is "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness [and] self control." If these are not evident in your life, check your source.

## The Source of True Love

In Colossians 1, Paul, along with Timothy, is sending a letter to the Christians who are in Colosse. In this letter, Paul makes a startling statement that is often overlooked. In his opening remarks, he states that one of his fellow servants, who is also a faithful minister named Epaphras, had told him something about the Colossians. Epaphras told Paul and Timothy that the church in Colosse was full of "love in the Spirit" (Col. 1:8).

Then Paul goes on to write that for this reason he is able to pray certain things that he was not able to pray before he heard from Epaphras about their "love in the Spirit." Paul stated that he was praying that this particular church would be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and with spiritual understanding.

He went on to pray for them:

> *That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy.*
>
> Colossians 1:10,11

Then in verse 12, Paul said that they were qualified "to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light."

Paul did not say simply because of their love he would pray for them. He basically said that because he and Timothy had discovered their love in the Spirit, now he was able to pray that they would receive deeper revelation and understanding. He also said that because of their love in the Spirit, they were now qualified to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the glory.

When most people think of love, they think of a love act or a gift given or received as a result of love. While it is true that love requires action, we must not start thinking that the act or gift itself is love. Love is not outward, pressing in. But love is spiritual and flows out.

Over the years I have met many men who were convinced that the show of affection would develop into love. That is not true. Affection can create closeness and a type of bonding, but true love must develop in the realm of the Spirit and the natural result will be an overflow into the realm of the physical.

A true love relationship must be founded in the love of God. A relationship based on money, companionship, physical affection, or control will never be eternal. True love flows from the heart of God to the heart of man in the realm of the spirit and is manifested by overflowing into the realm of the physical.

## Performance-Based Love vs. Unconditional Love

> *God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
>
> Romans 5:8

God is a faith God and He demonstrates His love toward us by faith. This verse says that God demonstrated His love toward us in such a way that He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for us while we were still sinners. Again, God's love is based on faith. Man's love is based on performance.

Years ago, while counseling with a young couple, I looked at the husband and made this statement: "Do you love your wife?" He looked back at me and said, "I would if she would only…" What he wanted her to do was irrelevant. The fact is he wanted her to do something in order to earn his love. True love does not have to be earned. True love is given freely without the expectancy of a return action.

Of course, it's much more pleasant to love someone who loves in return or to love someone who's pleasant. But God's love stretches beyond the natural love of man. God's love loves unconditionally.

What I'm going to say may irritate you, but according to the Word of God, it's true. God loves the prostitute as much as the preacher. He loves the murderer as much as the victim. Now, He doesn't love or condone what the prostitute and murderer have done (prostitution and murder), but He does love them. This seems totally contrary to the way we think, but the reason is that people base their love on performance.

Not everyone receives love. There are those who will reject your love and there are those who even reject the love of God. When we reject God's love, we do not benefit from it. Only those who receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior are saved. Those who reject Him are lost. But nevertheless, the same love was extended to both.

So today, remember this. First, God loves you unconditionally and wants you to accept His love. Secondly, we must be like God. This doesn't mean that we subject ourselves to abuse, but it does mean that we must be like God and love unconditionally whether that love is received or not.

## The Commandment to Love

Once a man told me that it was impossible for him to love a certain person. Then he spent much time telling me the details about this man and how he had destroyed his home and his marriage. Finally, the man concluded, "So you see, that's why it's impossible for me to love this man. I'm sure God understands."

God does understand that under natural circumstances, it would be impossible to walk in love. However, that's why He sent His Son, Jesus. Once we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, then we have access to power that helps us love those who don't deserve it.

After all, what's the big deal about loving someone who is nice to you and loves you? Anybody can do that. The mark of a true Christian is when we love those who do not love us and are hard to love.

In Matthew 5:43–46, Jesus said,

> *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven…. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax*

*collectors do the same?"*

Here Jesus puts it on the line. If we only love those who love us, we are no different than the world. Even the people of the world who are not Christians love those who love them. But we are to be different. We are not under the old law. We are under the New Covenant. We live under the law of love.

> *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*
>
> John 13:34,35

# LOVE (God Is)

## Love, the Visible Attribute of an Invisible God

> *He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*
>
> 1 John 4:8

E.W. Kenyon, a well-known nineteenth century evangelist, pastor, and author, said that if a person walks in love, the devil cannot touch him. The devil still comes against Christians, but he cannot harm us if we are walking in love.

Love is the greatest power in the universe. Love will keep you in obedience and love will keep you from sin. According to Romans 13:10, love will never do harm to a neighbor and love is the fulfillment of the law. Love is the law of liberty. Love will keep you from being self-centered and perfect love will cast out fear.

One thing that has always surprised me is the attitude of some Christians when they are in public places of business. A few weeks ago, I was having lunch with another minister. As the waitress was serving the food, this minister noticed that something on his plate was not exactly the way it was ordered. To me, it was a very minor thing and most people would never have mentioned it. But this man started making it into a major complaint. I was embarrassed and as we left the restaurant, I went back inside and apologized to the waitress for my friend's rudeness and gave her an extra tip.

Jesus said that the world would know that we were Christians by the love that we have for each other. (John 13:35.) But too many feel this scripture says they will know we are Christians because of the love we have in the church. Romans 12:9 says, "Let love be without hypocrisy." That means our love is not restricted to the church, but is a way of life and is the essence of God that pours out of

everything we do.

John 3:16 tells us that God loved the world so much that He sent His Son, Jesus, and He showed His love to the lost world through Jesus. Jesus ascended and took His place as the Head of the Church, and He now works through His body to show His love on this earth. We are the body of Christ, and now God loves the world through us. Let's live and show the true nature of God. Remember, God is love.

# MATURITY

## It's Time to Grow Up

> *When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 13:11

It's interesting that when Jesus talked about coming into the kingdom of God, He used the phrase born again. (John 3:3.) When Paul talked about new Christians, he called them babes and children. (1 Cor. 3:1; Gal. 4:19.) In another place, Paul said that we should grow up spiritually and become mature. (Eph. 4:13–15.)

I have often thought that the church would be unstoppable on this earth if the church was full of mature adult Christians. It's sad, but there are adult Christians all over the world who are infants and children in their spiritual walk. I am very pleased that people are being born into the body of Christ. Nothing thrills me any more than to see someone receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

However, we should know more now than what we knew six months ago. And six months from now, we should know more than we know now. As Christians, we must grow up and mature.

Children do things halfway and without understanding. When you tell a child to clean up their room, they only do it if they get a big reward and afterwards they don't understand why it had to be cleaned up in the first place. That's called immaturity.

A six-month-old child drinking from a bottle and wearing a diaper might be cute, but it would not look cute if you saw a forty-year-old doing it.

We shouldn't expect baby Christians to walk as elder saints. Who would put an army uniform on an infant and ship them off to war? They may look cute, but they wouldn't survive. A fully grown adult should be able to care for and protect himself and not act as a child.

It is extremely important for newborn Christians to immediately sit under mature Bible-based teaching. As a mature Christian, your responsibility is to give proper food, training, and guidance to the younger ones. Together we are a growing family and we can accomplish God's ministry on this earth.

# MENTORING

## Increase in Honor and Favor by Association

> *So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen's equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant.*
>
> 1 Kings 19:21

According to the Bible, Elisha served Elijah for a period of between twenty and thirty years. That takes dedication, desire, and patience. You cannot serve someone for nearly thirty years and not pick up something.

Elisha followed Elijah everywhere he went. He watched his every move and he learned from him. It's interesting that Elisha did not try to receive an anointing from God by overpowering Elijah or by trying to eliminate him and move him out of the way. Instead, Elisha continually learned from his mentor.

In God's timing, when everything was in its season, God removed Elijah from this earth and because of Elisha's diligence and patience, he received the prophet Elijah's mantle. (2 Kings 2:13.) The book of 2 Kings reports that Elisha was involved in exactly double the number of miracles of Elijah. We might say he received a double anointing.

Recently I read a book by a great man of God. He has an international ministry, many employees, books, tapes, and an international television presence. It's interesting to note that this great minister did not start out that way. In fact, he spent many years serving another great man of God. He did this in humility and he was not seeking his own agenda. In due season, God raised him up.

Most young ministers recognize this principle in the Word and they've heard many sermons on receiving a prophet's anointing through being a servant first. However, being a servant means you must have the Master's plan in your heart and not be seeking to raise up your own ministry.

So today, if you are a person of God and are seeking a place in the ministry, find an anointed ministry and submit. In due season when God feels you are ready,

He can raise you up.

*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.*

James 4:10

# MINISTRY

## Believe the Prophets and Prosper

Several years ago, I knew a young man who was a marriage counselor. He had all the right education. He had a degree with the diploma hanging on the wall. He was intelligent and had a great personality. The only problem was that he himself had never been married and knew little about life in general. Perhaps today he is a mature counselor. However, at that time he was just too young to have the experience and wisdom required to advise married couples about their lives. He had the education, but he needed wisdom.

When Loretta and I were first married, I was fresh out of college and became the pastor of a rural Southern Baptist church. Even though I studied the Word, my sermons were not very good. Education is good, but education alone is no substitute for revelation, wisdom, and experience.

One thing I have discovered over time is there is wisdom in age. Of course, not every old person is wise. But, for those who have spent their lives in true ministry, serving God with all their hearts, there is wisdom that should not be wasted.

There must be respect for elders. When I was a boy, I was taught that doors should be opened for women. In the presence of elders, I was taught to speak when spoken to. The world has changed, but the church should not change.

We must tap into the wisdom and experience of our fathers in the faith. Second Chronicles 20:20 tells us to believe the prophets of God and we will prosper. Our prosperity is directly connected to our submission to the prophets of God. If we truly believe the prophets of God, then we will submit to their words. Belief in God's Word requires submission on all levels of ministry.

After teaching this principle at a conference, a couple approached me with a worried look on their faces. The husband said, "How can we submit ourselves to another minister as a mentor? He might just be a false prophet."It is true that the Bible says that there are false prophets in the world (1 John 4:1), but we, especially Spirit-filled ministers, should not be fooled into following them. Jesus said in John 10:27, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow

Me.” According to Jesus, we know His voice. Take time to listen and another voice you will not follow.

Elisha submitted himself to, or interned with, the prophet Elijah for many years. The word intern could be defined as “a person who works as an apprentice or trainee in an occupation or profession to gain practical experience. An intern submits his or her time, will, and energy in order to learn from the mentor. It would be foolish to make a recent medical school graduate head of an established brain surgery team. It is no different in ministry.

We need to implement ministry internship. Elisha was an intern with Elijah. Solomon submitted to his father, David. Samuel was taught by Eli. Timothy was a student of Paul before going out on his own.

First Timothy 5:1 says, “Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father.” We must respect, honor, and submit to anointed eldership.

Belief and submission are partners. To believe truth without submitting to it profits nothing. Honor eldership. Believe the true prophets of God and prosper.

# MIRACLES

## Upsetting the Religious Mind-set

In Acts 3, Peter and John went to the temple to pray. As they went through the gate to the temple, there was a man who had been crippled from birth and had been taken daily to the temple gate to beg for money.

When Peter and John were about to enter the temple, the crippled man began to beg for alms. At that point, the Bible says that Peter fixed a gaze on him and said, “Look at us” (v. 4).

The beggar gave them his attention. He was expecting to get some money, but Peter said to him, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk” (v. 6).

Then Peter took the man by the right hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were healed. The man started walking, leaping, and praising God—and he leaped, praised, and walked right into the temple.

The people and the religious leaders in the temple were astonished at what had happened. They recognized the beggar and knew this was a miracle that had happened. It could not be denied.

Needless to say, the beggar wouldn’t let go of Peter and John (v. 11), so as the

two disciples stood in the porch of the temple with the beggar holding tightly on to both of them, they began to preach about Jesus. In verse 16 they said,

> *"His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all."*

Then in Acts 4, while Peter and John were still speaking to the people about the good news of Jesus, the captain of the temple and the Sadducees approached them. They were greatly disturbed and they grabbed John and Peter and physically took them to a holding cell until the next day. When the next day came, the rulers, elders, scribes and many of the high ranking priests and family members who were gathered in Jerusalem questioned Peter and John. They asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?" (v. 7).

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, preached to the religious leaders. Peter told them that the name of Jesus was the name that had healed the lame man. He told them that only through the name of Jesus can anyone be saved. They were amazed at his boldness. They marveled at his speech and realized that Peter and John had been with Jesus.

After Peter's speech, the leaders met and made a decision. They commanded Peter and John to quit teaching about Jesus and to never speak His name again.

When Peter and John heard this they said, "You decide whether God wants us to obey you instead of Him! We cannot stop telling about the wonderful things we saw Jesus do and heard Him say." (vv. 19–20, author paraphrase.) Even though the religious leaders had threatened Peter and John, they had to let them go. They didn't want a riot.

The point is, when you truly believe and act in faith, you can see miracles. But in so doing, you'll upset the religious mind-set. That sounds like Jesus, doesn't it?

## Miracles in the Church

If I were to ask you if you believe in miracles, what would you say? Well, if you are a Christian, the answer should be yes, because miracles are a major part of the church.

Let me explain. When we read about the offices in the church, we usually read Ephesians 4:11–12 where it says,

He Himself [referring to Jesus] gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Here we find that Jesus placed apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and

teachers in the church to build up the church. But when we study the Scriptures, we cannot take one verse and build everything on it. In other words, we must take the sum of the Scriptures and see what it says.

With that in mind let's look at 1 Corinthians 12:28. Here it says,

> *God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.*

Did you catch that? God placed the miracles in the church, just like He placed healing, teaching, and apostles. If this is true, and it is, then why do we not see more miracles in the church?

The answer to that is actually explained by the Bible. In Mark 6, Jesus went to his hometown of Nazareth along with His disciples. When the Sabbath day came, Jesus began teaching in the synagogue. Many people were there who had traveled to hear Him, and they were astonished at what He said. In verse 2 the people said "Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands!"

Then some of the people began to doubt Jesus' authority. They said, "Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" (v. 3.)

In other words, they were saying, "Who does this guy think He is? He's just the local neighbor boy who grew up down the street." Then verse 3 tells us that the people became offended at Him.

But Jesus told them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house." In other words, Jesus said that when you are among strangers, the people will listen and believe, but at home, the people are too familiar and it's harder to believe.

But listen to this. The Bible says in Mark 6:5 that in Nazareth, Jesus could not do many mighty works. Notice it doesn't say he would not, it says He could not. The reason is that the people there did not believe. In fact, verse 6 says that Jesus marveled at their unbelief.

Remember, Jesus said all things are possible for those who believe. That must, in turn, mean that all things are not possible for those who do not believe. The choice is ours.

## The Power of God Will Draw the Multitudes

> *Then great multitudes came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and He*

*healed them. So the multitude marveled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.*

Matthew 15:30-31

The little Baptist church had invited me to hold meetings. The church was truly seeking God. Even though I was ordained a Southern Baptist minister, most of the churches where I had been asked to speak were non-denominational. Somehow I had found favor with most churches. That's not always an easy task.
As the morning service was nearing an end, I told the people that if they had a need of any kind that God was greater than that need. About that time, an older woman stood up. Grabbing the arm of a thin old man next to her, she yanked him to his feet. The old man had what looked to be about a half box of tissue wadded up and pressed against his face. The tissue was mostly blood red.
With a loud voice, the woman began to speak. "Last night Herman got a nose bleed. He couldn't stop it. It bled all night and into the morning. As he was getting ready for church this morning, he bled on his church shirt. He had to change, but we came anyway. His nose has been bleeding during Sunday School and church and it is still bleeding now. Can God stop it?"
The sanctuary was quiet. The old man almost looked comical standing up with the big wad of tissue on his face with his head tilted back.
I simply stretched my hand toward him and said, "In the name of Jesus, be healed." The flow of blood immediately stopped.
I slipped out the side door in order to make another appointment that afternoon. Little did I know that all afternoon, the town was buzzing with the news of Herman's healing. That night when I returned, the church was packed to capacity. Everyone who was at the morning service had returned that evening, bringing with them everyone they could get to come. A deacon in the church told me that he had never seen that many people in the building as far back as he could remember, even on Christmas.
The point is this. Programs, pulpit pressure, guilt, and condemnation will never fill the church. When people are taught the good news and experience the gentle move of God's Spirit, then our buildings won't be large enough to handle the crowds.

## Unconditional Belief Produces Miracles

Once I asked a Christian man if he believed a certain verse in the Bible. To my surprise, he commented that he would have to read it first and let me know later. Isn't that amazing? Why would a Christian have to read a verse before deciding whether or not he believed it?

God's Word is true. Not just a verse of it, not just a chapter, not just a book, but all of it—the whole Bible is true. Yet we must believe God's Word and act on it in order for it to be effective in our lives.

Years ago when I was pastor of a denominational church, a man counseled with me that he loved his wife. He said that he loved her with all of his heart and that there would never be anyone else he could ever love the way he loved his wife. The problem was he didn't act like it. All of his actions were opposite of the way he said he felt. The result was, she left him.

In the spiritual realm, things are much the same. We must not say we believe in God and His Word and then act like we don't. We must believe and act on His Word. That's what we call faith. When we say we believe but do not act like it, that is being a hypocrite.

No one likes a liar. No one wants to be a liar. But when we say we believe but act like we don't, we are liars.

Jesus said in John 8:31–32 that if we would abide in His Word, then we would be His disciples and we would know the truth and the truth would set us free. In other words, in order to be set free, we must know the truth.

Without getting into a deep study of the Greek language, let me say this. The word for know used in this passage for knowing the truth is ginosko.[36] This doesn't mean knowing with your head only. It's not talking about intellectual knowledge. It means to be one with the truth, to be so intimate with the truth that it is actually a part of you. When the truth is that much a part of you, you will instinctively act on it. When we do this, we are acting on the Word of God and when we do that, we get results. This is what the Bible calls "walking by faith," and that pleases God. (2 Cor. 5:7.)

Little children believe the Word of God so easily. Probably that's because they have nothing to unlearn.

A few years ago, a missionary friend of mine returned to the United States with some exciting stories. In the continent where he was preaching, most of the people had never heard of Jesus. They had never been exposed to missionaries and because of this, they had to be taught the basics of God and His Word as a child would be taught.

In sharing his testimony, the missionary said that literally thousands of people were accepting Jesus and some great miracles had taken place. He said the blind regained their sight, the lame walked, and a man had been raised from the dead.

It was at that point someone looked at him and said, "That is really hard to believe." The missionary looked back and made a statement I'll never forget. He

said, “You find it hard to believe? That, my friend, is why you haven’t seen it.” How right he was.

## Yes, All Things Are Possible!

In Mark 9:23, Jesus said, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” If you have a physical ailment, is it possible that the sickness that has plagued you could be gone tomorrow? Could you wake up tomorrow and all of this trial with your body just be like a bad dream? Is it possible?

If you are struggling in your finances, is it possible that the financial problem you have could be resolved? Is it possible that somehow you could come up with all the money needed to pay your bills and have some left over to buy some new clothes? Is it possible that the relationships that have been destroyed over the years could be somehow knitted back together? Is it possible? Yes. Is it possible for everyone? No. It’s only a possibility to those who believe. Remember, Jesus said, “All things are possible to him who believes.”

Too many people are waiting for God to do something in their lives, when in reality, He has already completed everything that needs to be done. Let me explain.

When you become a Christian, you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. He, in the form of His Holy Spirit, resides within you. You become a new creation. You become what Jesus called “born again.” (John 3:3,7.) But let me ask you this. Does Jesus have to come to earth again and die again and be raised again from the dead so that you can be saved? No, of course not.

Jesus has already paid the full price for your salvation, once and for all, two thousand years ago. He paid the price. He doesn’t have to do it again. He has already done it. So, if Jesus has already paid the price for the salvation of the world, is every one saved? No. Only those who believe will be saved.

John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Is everlasting life possible? Yes, but only if you believe. Jesus said, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.”

First Peter 2:24, says, “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.” What this means is that not only did Jesus pay the price once and for all for our sins, but He also paid the price for our healing. This verse tells us that Jesus bore stripes on His body for our healing.

In the same way that Jesus died for our sins, He took stripes for our deliverance

from sickness and disease. In the same way we become Christians through faith, we are healed through faith. We must believe God's Word and act on it without doubt.

Once I was talking with a man who said that he didn't believe that Jesus really died for his sins. He went on to say that he really didn't believe that God could have loved him so much that He would have sent Jesus here to die and raise Him from the dead, just for him.

With that one statement, he eliminated supernatural possibilities in his life. Everlasting life is possible, but only for those who believe. Is everlasting life possible? Is healing possible? Is prosperity possible? Is peace and joy possible? Jesus said in Mark 9:23, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."

# MONEY

## Breaking the Financial Curse

We must understand the difference between the curse and the blessing.

To rightly divide the Word of God, we must separate the works of God from the works of the devil. When we attribute the work of the devil to God and we attribute the work of God to the devil, it creates confusion in our souls and the result is a wrong decision and destruction.

Deuteronomy 28 describes the blessings and the cursings that are a result of obedience or disobedience to God's law. The blessings of the law are life, health, and abundance. The curse of the law is death, disease, and poverty.

When I turned 16, my father took me to the bank to help me finance my first car. I had a job at the time and I could have easily saved the money and paid for the car. However, my father wanted me to establish good credit and the only way to do that was to borrow money from the bank to pay for the car. If I had saved and paid cash for the car, the car would have been mine. But instead, the bank owned the car and I owed them payments for three years. Unknowingly, my father was teaching me to live under the curse.

Borrowing money is not a sin, but it is a curse. It is not God's best. God's plan is for us to be the lender and not the borrower. (Deut. 28:12.)

Recently, a young couple told me of the great blessing that they had received from God. They had received a credit card in the mail with a $5,000 limit. They were rejoicing at the blessing. Deep inside, my heart was sad for them because

they were perceiving debt and usury as a blessing when God says it's a curse.

Deuteronomy 28:12–13 tells us that the blessing of God is for us to be the head and not the tail and that we will lend but we "shall not borrow." Verses 43–44 tell us that the curse of the law is that we will be borrowers and instead of being the head, we would be the tail.

Here, the curse of the law is clearly defined. When we are the borrower, we are the tail. When we are the lender, we are the head. Being the head is definitely better.

We must not be deceived. We must know the truth. As Christians, we have been delivered from the curse of the law and it's time for us to start walking in our deliverance.

Scripture References:

The Lord will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. And the Lord will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them. (Deuteronomy 28:12–13)

The alien who is among you shall rise higher and higher above you, and you shall come down lower and lower. He shall lend to you, but you shall not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you shall be the tail. (Deuteronomy 28:43–44)

# MORE THAN CONQUERORS

## He Disarmed Principalities and Powers

In the beginning, Jesus was with God. At the time of creation, He was there. Everything that was made was made through Him and then to make the point as clear as possible, the Word tells us that nothing was created without it being created by Jesus. (John 1:1-3.)

Then in the fullness of time, Jesus came to earth and conquered the darkness that had overtaken it. The Bible says that the Light, Jesus, came to earth and the darkness in the earth, Satan, did not overpower Him. Jesus became the victor. He became our champion.

Jesus defeated the prince of darkness and took back the authority that Adam had surrendered through his disobedience to God. (Gen. 3.) Jesus then made a public display of the demonic powers: "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He

made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:15). Satan and his demonic hosts were not only defeated, but they were humiliated publicly.

Satan is the most prideful being in existence. He has done and is doing all he can to cover his tracks. Remember how Jesus said in John 8:44 that Satan is a liar? Like most liars, when he gets caught doing something wrong, he blames someone else. Guilt and condemnation are tools of the devil. He reminds me of a criminal who tries to get as many others implicated in the crime as possible.

Now, here's the point. When Jesus came to earth as a man, He was executed and buried. Although He was buried and in the grave, He overcame death and came back to life on the third day. By doing this, He defeated Satan and made a way of escape for you and me. All we have to do is accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

Satan, on the other hand, will do everything within his power to blind the eyes of the lost so they will not accept Jesus.

For the Christian, however, Satan has a special plan. He knows that one Spirit-filled Christian, hearing and doing the Word, can deal a severe blow to his kingdom. He knows he only has one hope and that is to confuse and distract Christians. When we become distracted from the Word, then our faith is in peril. God loves faith, but Satan hates it and he will try to destroy it any way he can.

Now, here's the good news. We do not have to listen to the lies and deception of Satan. Jesus defeated him. Romans 8:37 says that as Christians we are "more than conquerors through [Jesus] who loved us."

So when Satan attacks you with guilt and condemnation, just remember that he is a liar and he is defeated. Jesus conquered him and we who are in Christ are more than conquerors!

# MOTIVATION

## What Motivates You?

Everything we do, we do by motivation. I've heard people say that they did nothing by motivation, and I've heard people say they are motivated to do nothing. The reality is everything that is done is a result of some type of motivation. The man who says he has no motivation and lies in a hammock all day is actually motivated. You may say that you see no motivation in laziness. However, I've seen some people work harder at doing nothing than people who actually work hard.

As a Christian, everything we do must be motivated by love. If we are walking

in the true balance of life, the result will be healthy minds, healthy bodies, and a soul that is at peace. This can only be accomplished if love is our motivation.

If love motivates what you eat, then you will eat healthy. Because you love your family, because you love your children and because you love yourself, you will eat properly. If love is your motivation, your work habits will be balanced. You will be ethical and of high character because you love your boss and your fellow workers, because you love your family, and because you love God's law.

If the love of God is your motivation for attending church, then there will be no strife in you and you will not allow any strife near you because of the love of God in your heart. Your motives will be correct for singing in the choir, for teaching a class or for any job that you do in God's house. With the correct motivation there will be no fear or insecurity because perfect love casts out fear.

God has a plan for your life. He wants to be the motivation behind everything that you do and say. God is love, therefore, everything you do and say must be motivated by love.

## Motivated by the Call of God

I have been around musicians all my life. In my younger years, I played rock 'n roll with the best of them. For a while, I was a studio musician. One thing I have discovered is that musicians who work for a living are usually not motivated by money. I've met some highly intelligent men who could make a fortune in the business world, but they gave it all up to play their guitar for little or nothing.

Likewise, I have been around salespeople who get more excited about making the sale than the money that will pay the bills. I've seen good people stay with a job that paid less because they love the working conditions. Strange as it may seem, most people do not stay at their place of employment because of the money, but because of their heart.

What motivates you in life to do what you do? Motivation, in itself, is an interesting concept. If you are motivated by what is good, your life will be good. If you are motivated by evil, then your life will be destroyed. We must have the correct motivation in all that we do.

It is difficult and almost impossible to determine someone else's motivation for what they do. Two people in the same situation doing the same thing the same way can be motivated by two completely different objectives.

One man can work long hours and rarely take a day off in order to support his family, to pay the bills, and to supply his family with good things because he loves them. Another man working in the same environment can work long hours

and rarely take a day off. However, his motivation may be to stay away from his family because he does not want to go home. To someone working with these two men, they would see that both men are hard workers but not see the motivation behind their hard work.

The point is this, you may be working hard in the ministry. You may be pressing in and trying to accomplish much, but you must be doing this because of the call of God on your life and because He has told you that ministry is what you are supposed to do.

As Christians, we must understand that God has a plan tailored specifically for each one of us. The key is to listen to Him (in our hearts) and to do what He tells us to do and to not do what He tells us not to do. Our motivation must be obedience to what He has told us. We cannot seek accomplishments to be seen by men or to exalt ourselves. We must have the right motivation and that motivation must be obedience to God's personal command to us.

> *Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*
>
> Hebrews 12:1–2

# NEW YEARS

## God's New Year's Resolution for You

When I was a teenager, there was a science fiction movie called 1984. It was, of course, about how "Big Brother" would rule the world in 1984. Well, 1984 passed and Big Brother never showed up. There was another science fiction TV series called "Space 1999" about a colony living on the moon. Then there was another movie about space travel in the year 2001. It was appropriately called 2001 Space Odyssey with a sequel titled 2010.

All of these movies predicted the future, and they were all wrong. However, there is a book that has predicted future events and has been perfectly accurate. It is, of course, the Bible.

The Bible tells of nations and kings, even using their names, before they were ever born. It tells of the rebirth of the nation of Israel. All the facts of the future that were written in the past have happened, just as written.

With this in mind, we can easily ignore all of the disastrous forebodings of

failure that the world predicts. While it may be true for some, it will not come near those of us who are born again. (Ps. 91.)

So, what has God promised His children? What has He predicted for their future? The Bible says that the Holy Spirit shows the believer “things to come” so we should know. (John 16:13.) Those who abide in Christ, meditate the Word, and listen, do know.

In God’s Word we are told that Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law. (Gal. 3:13.) The curse, as described in Deuteronomy 28, is death, sickness and disease, and poverty. Jesus came to bring us life, healing, and prosperity. It is our promise for the present and it is our destiny for the future.

So as you listen to all the earthly “experts” predict failure, remember that as a Christian, you have been promised success in all areas of your life, both now and in the age to come.

As you make your New Year’s resolutions keep this in mind: God has already made one for you. He has resolved to make this new year your most successful and wonderful year to date.

That means your best days are ahead of you.

Scripture References:

A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. (Psalm 91:7)

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. (John 16:13)

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us. (Galatians 3:13)

# OBEDIENCE

## God’s Plan for Blessing Your Children

*The righteous man walks in his integrity; his children are blessed after him.*

Proverbs 20:7

There are blessings that come with obedience. In Deuteronomy 30:19, God said in His Word that He placed life and death before His people and then He goes on to say that we must choose life. It may seem strange that He has to tell us to choose life, but in reality there are many people choosing death.

God wants us to make the right choices. When He gives us His Word, He will usually tell us the benefits of obedience at the same time that He gives a command. This is what He does in Proverbs 20:7. God said that a righteous man walks in his integrity, and that is so true.

When we are made righteous by accepting the blood of Jesus and accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior, God's will and desire is for us to walk in integrity. From that moment on, we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us and we have God's grace empowering us. We no longer have an excuse for living with the character of the world. We can now do all things through Christ and we can fulfill the verse that says a righteous man walks in his integrity.

Proverbs 20:7 gives us God's plan. He wants righteous men to walk in their integrity. But the blessing for doing this is also stated in the remainder of the verse—His children are blessed after Him. This simply means that not only is the righteous man blessed because he walks in integrity, but after he receives his blessing, his children are blessed also.

If you have children, do you want them blessed? You have a choice. Before you is placed life and death for your children. Before you is placed blessing and cursing. What will you choose for your children? Whether or not you have children, what will you choose for yourself? If you choose blessing, it is yours (and your children's if you are a parent) as long as you are a born-again believer and you walk in your integrity.

God's Word is true. His blessings are yes and amen.

> *I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.*
>
> Deuteronomy 30:19

## Obedience Pays Off

Centuries before Jesus came to the earth, God's people, the Hebrews (or Israelites), were captives in Egypt. God told Moses to guide the people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. (Ex. 3:10.)

Later on, after leaving Egypt with all of the Israelites, Moses sent twelves spies into the Promised Land to check it out before the nation of Israel entered into it. (Num. 13.) When the twelve spies returned, ten of them were horrified and in great fear. Even though the Promised Land was beautiful and full of an abundance of crops, they were fearful of the people who occupied the land. Ten of the spies said, "The land is full of giants that are so big that we see ourselves

as grasshoppers compared to them." (v. 33.)

The remaining two spies, Joshua and Caleb, were not fearful and had a completely different outlook on the situation. In their report to the people of Israel they said, "The land is bountiful, flowing with milk and honey, and while it is true there are giants in the land, that is totally irrelevant. If God has told us to take the land, we can do it and it doesn't make any difference who is there or what the circumstances look like." (Num. 14:7–9.)

At this point in this story, we find the first account of a democratic government decision. The vote was 10 to 2 in favor of fear and disobedience. Because the Israelites decided to believe the negative report of failure, they received the consequences of the decision. They believed the negative words of the ten spies instead of believing the positive promise of God and they got what they believed. The Bible goes on to tell us that every person above the age of twenty at the time of the decision to not follow God's command, died in the wilderness and did not see the Land of Promise. (vv. 22,29–30.) Only Joshua and Caleb and the next generation entered into the land of Canaan. (v. 30.)

This should be a strong lesson for Christians living in the last days. First, government decisions are not always right. Secondly, we must believe what is right and even though we may be affected by the decisions of the government, victory will be ours if we continue to believe God's Word. Joshua and Caleb were forced to obey the law of the land and were not able to enter the Promised Land during the time that God had told them they could. But because they believed God and did not waver in their belief and because they stood up for what they believed, their lives were extended beyond anyone else and they were able to walk in the promise that they believed in.

I encourage you today to continue in the commands of God and you will receive the blessing that is the result of obedience. During the times when everyone is saying, "Keep your seed," you must continue to sow. Seed in the sack will never yield a harvest. It's only seed sown in a fertile field that brings forth harvest. (Gen. 8:22.)

## Living Beyond the Command

> *My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*
>
> 1 John 3:18

As Christians, we must not be actors. We must be the real thing. An actor is only a representation of the true image. But an actor is not the true image. Let me explain.

In the movie, The Ten Commandments, directed by Cecil B. DeMille, the actor who played the part of Moses in this internationally acclaimed movie was Charlton Heston. He dressed up like Moses. He said the things that Moses said. He portrayed the actions and the essence of Moses for the wide screen. But one thing we know for sure—Charlton Heston was not Moses. He was only an actor pretending to be something that, in reality, he was not.

The Bible tells us in 1 John 3:18 that when we love, we are not to act like we love, but we must love in truth. We know that Jesus commanded us to love. He said in Mark 12:29–31 that there was no commandment greater than for us to love one another in the same way He loved us. This is a commandment and to obey this commandment is honorable. But we must grow in God's love to the extent that we are not doing it because it is a command, but we love out of the fullness of the love that is in our heart.

Ephesians 5:1 tells us that we are to be like God. God created us in His image and He wants us to be like Him. (Gen. 1:26.) We've seen that God himself is love. He is not full of hate, envy, or strife. He does not murder nor is He the destroyer. He is full of love and compassion and expects us to be just like Him.

I have six young grandchildren. As a good grandfather, I have taught my grandchildren to love. But it warms my heart so much when they come to me and say, "I love you, Grandpa." And when they go to each other and give each other a hug without my instructions, it pleases me to see them love out of their heart instead of only being obedient to a command.

Yes, it is true that as Christians we are commanded to love, but it warms the Father's heart to see His children walk in love on their own as a result of the love of God that has been shed abroad in their hearts.

# OFFENSE

## Skandalon—Satan's Trap

Offended people are everywhere—they're not only in the world, they are also in the church. No matter where you go in life, you can meet someone who is upset and offended. Even a routine trip to the grocery store can become a nightmare after a brief encounter with an angry checkout clerk, and all you are thinking is: Don't smash the eggs! Because offense is such a widespread problem, Satan uses it as a tool to detour believers from what God has called them to do.

The Greek word used for offense in the New Testament is skandalon, which can

be translated as “trap stick,”[37] or bait stick. The best way that I can communicate the purpose for a bait stick is to tell you about a program televised by the Discovery Channel demonstrating how the natives of one particular culture caught monkeys.

The natives placed a cage in the jungle containing a bait stick that the monkeys desperately wanted. As the monkeys approached the cage, they saw the bait inside and reached through the bars of the cage to grab it. However, as long as their fists were gripped around the bait stick, they could not pull their hands out of the cage. Although the animals could have been set free from the trap, they desired the bait so badly, they refused to let go of the stick, making their seizure effortless for the locals.

When the natives approached with their clubs, the monkeys began jumping up and down and violently squealing, still unwilling to release the bait. They could have been set free at any time by simply letting go of the bait stick and pulling their hands from the cage, but they wouldn’t. The closer the natives came to the animals, the more fierce their shrieking became. Fully aware that death was imminent, they stubbornly refused to loose the counterfeit treasure. The predators simply approached their target and clubbed them to death. The monkeys literally held life and death within their grasp.

That is a perfect illustration of what happens to someone who takes hold of offense. Whether you realize it or not, offense is Satan’s bait stick that allows him to destroy your life. As long as you are determined to cling to the offense, your freedom will escape you in the same way it escaped the monkeys. While you desperately cling to the bait, the devil effortlessly moves in with death and destruction.

What is it that offends you? Is it as simple as somebody’s breathing or the way they snort? Or is it what others say about you? Perhaps someone won’t allow you to do what you want. Or possibly you’re offended by something that was done to you as a child. Once the devil knows what offends you, he will continually send that particular thing into your life, hoping to lure you into his trap.

Sometimes harboring offense can feel good to your flesh because you are looking for the opportunity to get revenge. You know that you are seeking revenge when you mentally plot and scheme to get back at someone who has offended you. No longer seeking retribution is evidence that you have let go of offense.

However, as long as you cling to offense—like the monkeys held on to the bait

stick—you can scream, you can jump up and down, you can even pray, but you will be snared by the devil's trap nonetheless. Even though offense and thoughts of revenge may feel good for awhile, they will soon bring ruin into your life.

All that was necessary for the monkeys to be set free was for them to let go of the bait. The only real thing that hindered them from freedom was their own intense desire. James 1:14 says, "Each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed." In reality, the only thing that stood between complete freedom and ruin was the monkey's strong desire for the bait. A simple decision to let go brings life. In the exact same way, anyone willing to make the decision to release offense can live in complete freedom.

## Offense Comes with a Purpose

Like many carnal people, those who hold offense tend to defend themselves by saying, "I have a perfectly good reason for acting the way I do about this situation." But what they have failed to realize is that offense comes with a number of objectives. The devil will bring offense in order to destroy you, your anointing, your marriage, your family, your finances, and your friendships.

The second reason offense comes is to disrupt your communion with God. Mark 11:25 says, "Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." This verse clearly reveals the connection between forgiving others and being forgiven by God.

Offense will not only produce a barrier between you and God that hinders your prayer life, it will also keep you in a constant state of being upset towards the person who has offended you. Many times, the person with whom you are angry doesn't even realize that they have done something to hurt you. So, while you are being eaten up with hurt and unforgiveness, they remain carefree. The issue is not whether the hurt was intentional or not; what matters instead is that unforgiveness and offense are not allowed to take root in your life.

The third reason the devil brings offense into your life is to steal the Word of God that has been sown in your heart.

> *The sower sows the word. And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble.*

Mark 4:14–17

After the Word of God has been sown in your heart, the devil will immediately bring trials, tribulations, and persecution for one purpose: to steal the Word of God before it takes root.

The Greek word skandalizo is not only translated "offend," but also "stumble."[38] That means when someone is offended, there is a stumbling block in their path, prohibiting any advancement. Although these people receive the Word with gladness, they stumble when persecution or trials come, because they have no root in themselves.

It is always God's desire to give good gifts to His children; however, offense can make the power of God ineffective.

> *If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!*
>
> Matthew 7:11

Don't allow offense to sidetrack you from the miracle God has planned for you! Instead, choose to forgive every hurt and wrongdoing so the stumbling blocks that are prohibiting your advancement in the kingdom of God will be removed.

## Offenses Will Come

Jesus made a statement regarding the poor in Matthew 26 that we can parallel with an attitude of offense. When the disciples questioned the woman for pouring expensive perfume on Jesus' feet, they said, "Why this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor" (v. 8–9). Do you really suppose the disciples had a legitimate concern for the poor? I don't think so. They were more concerned about the profit they could have made from selling the perfume.

But notice how Jesus answered them: "You have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always" (v. 11). What exactly did Jesus mean by this statement? Was He indicating that He had created a certain number of poor people to balance out society? No, that's not what He meant. Instead, He meant that there would always be an element of society that would not accept Him as their Lord. Even a fragment of those who did accept Him would not walk in the fullness of their inheritance.

There will always be a certain group of people who will not live in prosperity because they think it's wrong. And there will be some who won't receive divine healing because they either don't believe healing is for everyone, or they believe

divine healing passed away with the apostles. Jesus could just as easily have said, “Not only will we always have the poor with us, but also the sick, the lost, the defeated, and the depressed.”

Just because there are Christians who suffer doesn’t mean that it is God’s will. Second Peter 3:9 makes that very clear:

> *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*

It’s not God’s will that anyone should perish, be poor, be sick, or be offended. However, there will always be those people who miss the perfect will of God.

Jesus was not making a bad confession when He said, “Offenses must come” (Matt. 18:7). No, He was stating a fact. Jesus was simply making the point that as long as you are in the world, you will be surrounded by offensive situations; however, you don’t have to become offended by them. Whether you believe it or not, you can, as a born-again believer, let offensive words roll off your back like water rolls off a duck’s back. You do not have to become offended!

## Offense Stops the Blessing of God

One of the most destructive, yet prevalent, issues that plagues the Christian community today is the vast number of people who are hurt and offended. As Christians, we must realize that offense is a very serious business. Make no mistake about it, the devil wants you to become hurt and offended in order to make you ineffective as a Christian—whether the offense you hold is against your spouse, your children, your neighbor, your family, or even against God.

Have you ever wondered why the devil is so determined to destroy God’s people? Ezekiel 28:14 tells us that Lucifer (the devil) was at one time the anointed cherub—one who stood before God, leading heaven’s hosts in worship. But after he tried to exercise his will over the Most High God, he was banished from heaven and was stripped of the anointing that he once possessed. (Isa. 14:12.) Satan knows firsthand just how powerful the anointing is. And the fact that he no longer has access to the most powerful force in the universe—the burden-removing, yoke-destroying power of God—has made him hate God’s people. (Isa. 10:27.)

If that isn’t enough, the anointing that Lucifer once possessed now dwells in the body of Christ. First John 2:27 says, “The anointing which you have received from [Jesus] abides in you.” As a result of the anointing dwelling within Christians, the devil’s mission to kill, steal, and destroy is focused against every

born-again believer—including you and me! (John 10:10.)

Not only does the anointing abide in us, but we also have the Holy Spirit available to move in and through us. When Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit, it means the Spirit of God sets up residence in our spirit, giving us the ability to walk in the anointing of the Spirit. Because we are God's creation (His handiwork), the devil will do anything possible to cause us to be ineffective in our Christian lives.

Remember, Satan has no new strategies—he uses the same old tactics to prevent Christians from producing fruit. And because offense prevents God from moving freely in our lives, it has become one of Satan's most effective strategies. Whether you realize it or not, hurt and offense are designed specifically to prevent the Holy Spirit from bringing God's blessing to your life.

Jesus expressed the benefit of remaining unaffected by offense to His cousin, John the Baptist. While John was in prison, he sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He was the "Coming One" or if they should look for another. (Matt. 11:3). Jesus clarified the matter with the response He sent to John the Baptist.

> *"Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."*
>
> Matthew 11:4–6

Some theologians actually believe by the way this passage is worded in the Greek that John the Baptist was offended at Jesus. Notice the serious admonition that Jesus sent to John and his followers: "Blessed is he who is not offended because of Me." Jesus stressed that if John and his disciples would not become offended, the blessings of God would continue to flow to them. On the other hand, if they did become offended, then the blessings would be hindered.

You can be certain that the devil will send the opportunity to become offended your way, using any person or circumstance available. The critical question is: How will you react when offensive situations come? While one reaction will bring the anointing, the blessing, and the goodness of God, the other will bring a curse.

Although Galatians 3:13 says that Christ has redeemed us from the curse, you can make choices that will leave you vulnerable and defenseless to it. Through disobedience to God's Word, you can open a door to the devil that will allow him to take advantage of you. For example, when you allow offense to consume your heart, it will begin to fester like a cancerous disease that will soon destroy

you.

Remember, even though the Word of God says offense will come, you can respond in the same manner in which Jesus did toward Peter and refuse to take hold of it! (Matt. 16:22–23.)

## What Is Hindering Your Ministry?

Once I taught a class called Jump-Starting Your Ministry (or How to Know the Call of God on Your Life). One thing that we discussed in this class was how to know you are called, and if you know you are called into the ministry, how to get your ministry started. The more we discussed in class, we began to realize that in actuality, everybody is called.

Everybody who is a Christian is called to teach the Word of God somewhere. It may be on the assembly line at General Motors. It may be behind the checkout stand at Wal-Mart. Wherever you are is where the calling is on your life. The calling is not a building. The calling is not a place. The calling is not a radio program. The calling is not a book. The calling is the Spirit of God working in you and speaking the gospel through you. That's the calling.

Of course, we know that some are called into a special placement in the church. Ephesians 4:11–12 says, "He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry." If you are a saint (born again), then you are called for the work of the ministry. What is the work of ministry?

The call on your life is to be a witness and an influence to everyone you come in contact with. Is there something that hinders the call? Is there something that is holding you down and keeping you from going forward? Are you living your life without witnessing power? Could it be there is something really simple that is keeping you from influencing people? The answer to that is, yes!

We know that Acts 1:8 says, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." That power is to be a witness.

You can do all the right things—go to church, raise your hands, sing, and read the Scriptures—but for some Christians it seems that everything is stale. Nothing seems to be working. The two main things that can cause this staleness and hinder the call of God are offenses and unforgiveness.

Remember, Jesus said in John 8:31–32, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Here's the truth. If you are offended or if you are in a state of unforgiveness, you are bound. If you have unforgiveness and offenses in your

heart, you are not going to accomplish anything for the kingdom and the call of God will not work in your life. You need to be set free.

If you are an offended, unforgiving person, the influence you have on the people in your neighborhood, those who work with you, the ones who come into your office will be null and void for the gospel. It won't work. You can know all the right scriptures, you can sing all the right songs, you can pray all the right prayers, but your life, by being an offended, unforgiving person, will nullify everything that you do. People will look at you and think you are a hypocrite because you talk it, but you don't walk it. This is what hinders so many people in their personal ministry.

So, let's look at offenses. Matthew 18:7 says, "Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!"

Jesus said that offenses will come. Here's what the word offend means: to trap, to snare, to entice to sin, to place a stumbling block or an impediment in the way. It means to cause a person to distrust one that he ought to trust.[39]

When you become offended, you step into the devil's snare. He entices you to sin and he places a stumbling block, which is the offense, in your path that will keep you from doing the ministry that God has called you to do. The word offend also means that you will distrust the trusting hand. So when someone reaches out their hand to help you, you will distrust them.

Offended people feel they are never wrong. They always have an excuse and they will always look back at the offense as the reason for their actions. Offended people offend people. This cycle must stop.

Galatians 5:15 says, "If you bite and devour one another, beware." This is not talking about actually walking up to somebody and biting them on the arm. What is biting and devouring? Biting and devouring are actually hurting and taking a bite out of someone else's heart. Devouring them is a type of destroying. Verses 15–16 tell us that when we hurt someone's heart that way, we should, "beware lest you be consumed by one another! I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."

The remedy to biting and devouring each other, then, is for us to walk in the Spirit. To walk in the Spirit is to be led and guided by the counsel and influence of the Holy Spirit, and by the Word of God. (See Rom. 8:1.) When we walk in the Spirit, we can walk above the offenses of life. You cannot hear God properly if you are offended and you will not function in your calling until you are "offense-free!"

## Getting Offended Hinders Your Miracle

The apostle Paul made an interesting statement when writing to Titus, whom he called his “partner and fellow worker” (2 Cor. 8:23), and “a true son in our common faith” (Titus 1:4).

In the first sentence of his letter, Paul said that God cannot lie. (Titus 1:2.) This one statement alone is the most important statement in the Bible. Without this one truth, everything we believe—all our hope, all of our faith—would be useless. Let me explain.

Everything in the Word of God is based on belief. But belief in what? Belief in God and belief that He has not lied and will not lie. God expects us to believe Him. He expects us to place our entire existence, everything we are and everything we have, on the line. He wants us to have total faith in Him. In fact, He not only expects it, but He requires it.

When Jesus went to His own town of Nazareth, He taught in the synagogue. Many people heard him and were astonished. In fact, they were so amazed at His teachings that some even wondered where He got all His knowledge. But then something happened. Some of the people realized that this Jesus was the same Jesus who had grown up in the town of Nazareth, and this offended them. When they became offended, they quit believing what He was saying and as a result, Jesus could not do many mighty works in that town.

> *Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. And He marveled because of their unbelief. Then He went about the villages in a circuit, teaching.*
>
> Mark 6:5,6

The Bible says He could not do many mighty works, not that He would not do many mighty works. How can this be? Well, God has always been moved by belief. He has always responded to faith. When man believes that God will do His Word in their lives, God moves to perform it.

God promises salvation, healing, and prosperity in His Word, but it is only for those who believe. It is only for those who have faith in His Word. It is only for those who believe that He did not lie and then they act on that belief.

Jesus died for the sins of the world, but only those who believe in Him will reap the benefits of His death and resurrection. God only responds to faith. Doubt and unbelief do not move Him. That’s why Satan continually tries to put doubt in the minds of people.

Where there is doubt, there is no faith. And, according to the Bible, where there

is no faith, even the Word does not work. Hebrews 4:2 says that there were two groups of people. Both groups had the same gospel preached to them. But the gospel that one group heard did not profit them because they did not mix it with faith in their hearts.

There is much power in the Word, but only for those who have faith. Faith believes God. Faith knows God does not lie and places everything on that belief.

Remember when Paul was in Lystra and a certain man who could not walk and was crippled from birth was sitting by the road?

> *This man heard Paul speaking. Paul, observing him intently and seeing that he had faith to be healed, said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked.*
>
> Acts 14:9,10

When Paul looked at him, what was he looking for? He was looking for faith. Is faith important? According to Scripture, it is.

## Don't Cripple the Body

Have you ever stepped on your own foot? Does your foot then refuse to work because it got offended by the other foot?

As Christians, we are just like a physical body. We must work together and we must not hinder each other. Can you imagine what would happen if your hand was envious over your feet getting a new pair of shoes? Can you imagine how it would be if your hand refused to tie the shoe or your eyes refused to look at your feet because they wanted a new pair of shoes? Can you imagine how silly it would be to give in to the eyes and buy your eyes a new pair of shoes?

This may seem silly and ridiculous when we talk about a physical body this way, but it is no less ridiculous when the body of Christ contends with itself in discord. If our physical body reacted the way some people in the church react, we would be crippled and useless, never being able to do anything or go anywhere.

Paul said that we are one body, but many members. (Rom. 12:4.) We must work together without envy, jealousy, or contention, and without becoming offended. Offenses will come. There will be times when someone will step on you accidentally, but snap out of it and do not get offended.

As the Church, we are told that we are to walk by faith and not by sight. (2 Cor. 5:7.) No evil can prevail over the Church as long as we believe God's Word and act on it. However, Galatians 5:6 says that faith works through love. Love and forgiveness are essential in our Christian walk. Our ministries, our families, and

our relationships will only be complete and whole when we walk in love. Remember, love is not offended. Love never sees a wrong done, and love never fails. (1 Cor.13.)

# ORIGINAL SIN

## Resurrection Glory

The history of the glory of God on earth goes all the way back to the first man on earth, Adam. When Adam was created, God breathed into him the breath of life. (Gen. 2:7.) The Scripture says that he was crowned with the glory of God. (Ps. 8:5.)

We've all seen old religious paintings with the little moon glow around the head, or paintings with a little halo. What the artist is trying to depict is the glory of God. The glory of God is a power and a covering that Adam had that would actually allow him to live forever and never have sickness and disease in his body. It allowed him to have no lack and to live the way God wanted him to live. That's the way that Adam (and all of humanity) was supposed to live.

If Adam and Eve had not sinned in the garden, they both would still be alive today. You may say, "What about me? If Adam and Eve hadn't sinned, I wouldn't be here." Oh, yes you would. You would still be here because God had commanded them to multiply, reproduce and replenish the earth. (Gen. 1:28.) They had been given that command. We just wouldn't have gone through the procedure we have gone through to get where we are.

Perhaps you are thinking, If Adam and Eve hadn't sinned, preachers would be out of a job. No, we preachers would still be called. We just wouldn't be preaching the salvation we are preaching now. We'd be preaching dominion. Adam and Eve had been given dominion over the earth. (v. 26.) They had been given a job to do. After they sinned, they were naked. (Gen. 3.) The reason they were naked was because they had lost their covering. They had lost the glory of God.[40] They did not qualify for the anointing anymore.

Even with the glory gone, God still had a love for man and mankind, His creation. He had a supernatural love that we can hardly understand. In fact, the angels could not even understand it. The Bible tells of one of the angels talking to the Father and asking Him, "What is man that you are mindful of him? …You have made him a little lower than [Elohim]." (Ps. 8:4–5; Heb. 2:6–7.) Some translations say angels, but actually the original Hebrew word is translated

Elohim, which is the plural of God.[41] So, the angel actually said: "What is this thing called man that you created him and crowned him?"

From the beginning, it was God's plan for man to be crowned with the glory of God and to live with God and fellowship with God. Man was placed in fellowship on this earth and he was covered with the glory of God, but then he sinned and he lost that glory. He became naked and tried to cover himself up. There is no substitute for the glory of God. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus walked in the glory and that He was resurrected by the glory of God. (Rom. 6:4.)

The Bible actually is the story of the glory. It's the story about how God created man, covered him with glory, and then gave His best to bring back the glory to man. We know that one of these days, one of two things is going to happen to each of us. We are either going to die physically or Jesus is going to return before we die. Scripture tells us that if we die and we are in Christ, then we will be caught up with Him in the sky.

> *I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep [that's talking about those who have died], lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.*
>
> 1 Thessalonians 4:13,14 explanation mine

> *For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.*
>
> 1 Thessalonians 4:15–18

This means there is going to be a time when Jesus is going to return and He is going to take every single believer who has died and resurrect their body out of the ground. They will become alive again. You may say, "How can that happen?" The way it will happen is the exact same way that it happened with Jesus—by the glory of God.

# PARENTING

## Always and Never

One day while picking up supplies at a local store, I saw a young boy running down an aisle with a large toy in his hand. He wasn't creating a problem, but as his mother came around the corner and grabbed him, I could see that she was thoroughly upset with him. She grabbed him and the toy and with great irritation separated them. She threw the toy on the shelf and turned toward the boy, grasped both of his shoulders and started yelling in his face.

I can't remember the exact words, but what she said went something like this. "When will you ever stop being a problem to me? You are one of the most unruly and undisciplined children I have ever seen. I've had all I can take. I'm not putting up with you anymore. You've never done anything right. You've always been a problem and as far as I can see, you will never amount to anything."Now, the boy was just being a child and didn't seem to be a problem. However, the parent created a scene in the store and the child was thoroughly humiliated.

The Word says in Proverbs 18:21 that death and life are in the power of the tongue. This parent was unknowingly speaking death into her child. Sometimes we wonder why children turn out the way they do. Of course, they make good and bad choices; however, as adults and parents we should do everything within our power to help our children make the right choices.

Jesus gave us a good rule of thumb for parents and guardians to follow.

> *"Whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says."*
>
> Mark 11:23

Because of this spiritual principle, it is extremely important that we speak blessings over our children rather than cursing. We must speak what we want our child to be rather than speaking out of the irritation of the moment.

Not only does God have a plan for our lives as adults, God also has a plan for the life of every child. It's our duty and command from God to nurture and train our children in such a way that it will be easy for them to choose God's plan for their lives.

The words never and always are powerful words. If you use either of these words in discipline, then make sure that they line up with the Word of God. Yes, God wants us to discipline our children, but we must not cross the line and condemn.

Godly discipline will develop self-esteem and nurture love. Condemnation will create rejection, hurts, and offenses that can last a lifetime.

## Faith Parent

In Matthew 19:14 Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for such is the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus loved the little children when He was here on the earth, and the implication is that not everyone else did. We must be like Jesus. We must love, protect, and teach the little ones. We must train them in the things that are right. When we do this, not only will our children be strong in the Word of God, but they will be at peace. Isaiah 54:13 says that our children are to be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of our children if they are. How will our children be taught of the Lord? The answer is quite simple. We must teach them.

Last week while I was in a restaurant, I saw a minister who I had known for years. Although I had spent many hours with him and we had always enjoyed our time together, I had never met his family. One of the first things he did when he saw me was to introduce his wife and his young son. I reached out my hand to shake the hand of the young boy. He probably was in the first or second grade. The young boy would not shake my hand, but drew back and grabbed his father’s leg and held on tightly. Why did he do this? Quite simply, the reason was that his trust was in his daddy.

Children place their trust in their parents. They will believe what their mom and dad say before they will believe the word of a stranger. They will trust and obey their parents more than anyone else on this earth. Of course, there are times when parents may wonder about this statement and there are times when children seem rebellious, but God has planted deep in each child’s heart the natural desire to be like mom and dad. Good or bad, children many times grow up to be exactly like their parents. So, we must develop faith in our children.

Faith is developed in our children the same way faith is developed in us. They must hear the Word of God in such a way that it becomes rhema knowledge in their heart. How can they hear the Word? They must hear it at home. Yes, hearing the Word at children’s church is wonderful, but it must be confirmed in the home.

So, if you have children, be a faith parent. If you don’t have children, help develop faith in those who are in your sphere of influence. Believe the Word of God, speak the Word of God, and do the Word of God in your home and when you are with the children of loved ones, friends’ children, the neighbor’s kids, and so on, you will be well on the way to developing a faith child.

*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

Romans 10:17

## God's Mandate—Teach the Children

*These words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.*

Deuteronomy 6:6,7

We have a mandate from God and that mandate is this: we are commanded to diligently teach His Word to our children. Our children must hear and act on God's Word the same way that we do. But they will never do that unless they are taught.

We have a covenant with God concerning our children and our grandchildren. All parents have the natural, God-given ability to teach their children. In fact, our children will learn from us whether we want them to or not. They will say what we say and they will do what we do to the best of their ability in order to gain favor and love.

One recent Sunday morning between our worship services, I went into children's church to visit the grade school children. I tease them and they hug me. It's always a time of blessing for me. However, that Sunday as the head usher and I were leaving the room, one of the second graders turned and said, "Pastor Larry, my mom and dad think you need to get a new picture of you on that big sign on the highway. They think the picture makes you look like you're bald." I almost doubled over laughing. Trust me, children repeat what their parents say!

We've seen that Ephesians 5:1 says that we are to imitate God as children imitate their parents. It is a biblical principle. Our children will imitate us. If we are people of character and not double-minded, our children will try to be like us.

Likewise, if we smile and hug people in the church and then talk badly about them when we get into our car on our way home, our children will pick up on the double standard and they will feel that words carry no power. We must teach them the truth and the best way is to live what we teach.

*Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.*

Ephesians 5:1

## Seven Steps in Raising a Faith Child

God has placed within parents the natural ability to teach their children.

Christian parents must not only teach our children about the physical necessities of life, but we must also train them up so that they will walk in faith. The Word says in Proverbs 22:6 that if we train our children properly while they are children, then when they become older, they will not depart from their instruction.

Here are seven simple steps in training our children to be children of faith.

1) We must pray for our children.

Our prayers are more powerful concerning our children than anyone else's. We not only have spiritual authority, but we have the natural authority of a parent.

2) We must speak the Word over our children.

We are told to do this in the Bible.

> *"This is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the Lord, "from this time and forevermore."*
>
> Isaiah 59:21

3) We must speak the promise and not the problem.

It's tempting to speak the problem when we are dealing with children by saying things like, "When will you ever learn to…" Remember, there must be instruction without condemnation.

4) We must encourage our children with the Word.

Remember, Isaiah 54:13 says, "All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children." They must know we stand on the Word unconditionally in faith.

5) We must call those things that be not as though they were.

God did that when He spoke the world into existence and we are to act and think like Him.

> *God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.*
>
> Romans 4:17
>
> *For "who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 2:16

So, instead of making negative comments to our children, we can say something like: "You are intelligent because you have the mind of Christ." Or say, "You are

strong because the joy of the Lord is your strength." Or we can say, "You are delivered because the children of the righteous shall be delivered."

Remember, we cannot tell them they have the mind of Christ and act like they have the mind of the devil.

6) We must let them see faith in us.

As we live our natural life at work and at home, we should walk by faith in all we do. Our children will see our character. In fact, the Bible tells us that faith can be transmitted from one generation to the next.

> *When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.*
>
> 2 Timothy 1:57

7) We must never give up on our children.

We can hope in God and in His Word and walk by faith, not by sight as to the outcome of our children.

> *Thus says the Lord: "Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says the Lord, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope in your future, says the Lord, that your children shall come back to their own border."*
>
> Jeremiah 31:16,17

Giving up is not faith. Faith is not giving up.

# PAUL'S THORN

## Through Our Weaknesses

> *To keep me from being puffed up and too much elated by the exceeding greatness (preeminence) of these revelations, there was given me a thorn (a splinter) in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to rack and buffet and harass me, to keep me from being excessively exalted.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 12:7 amp

One of the greatest examples of God's grace in action is in Paul's life and the thorn in his flesh. We can see from this verse that the Word is very clear that Paul's thorn was from Satan. It was Satan—not God—who was trying to keep Paul from being too highly exalted by the awesomeness of what had been revealed to him!

At this point, I think we need to clarify a misconception that has been taught in the church for centuries. Satan knew because of Paul's dramatic conversion, healing, revelation knowledge, and the anointing that was so powerful on his life, that Paul was a major threat to the kingdom of darkness. Satan knew that he must use all of his resources to destroy this man and his ministry.

According to 2 Corinthians 12:7, Satan sent and assigned a messenger (fallen angel, demonic spirit) to torment Paul continually. Satan did not want Paul to be exalted in the ministry that laid the foundation for the church, so he tried to find a way to "buffet" him into quitting. Paul says, "Three times I called upon the Lord and besought Him about this and begged that it might depart from me" (2 Cor. 12:8 amp).Three different times, Paul pleaded and begged God to make it go away. God didn't ignore Paul. He just answered him and said:

> *My grace (My favor and loving-kindness and mercy) is enough for you…for My strength and power are made perfect (fulfilled and completed) and show themselves most effective in your weakness.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 12:9 amp

God knew that if the thorn, the messenger from Satan, was just taken away by Himself, then Paul would not understand and experience the concept of the power of grace working through Paul to strengthen him to do the supernatural. God also knew that when Paul overcame the thorn through God's grace and by God's strength, that the thorn would no longer have any effect on Paul.

If God took the messenger from Satan away, then Paul would have had to petition God every time he was attacked. If God empowered Paul to resist the devil by grace, then Paul would be continuously empowered and protected. Through this, Paul was strengthened in grace and authority.

When you are facing a situation you don't want to face, and the only solution you can see is for God to just "make it go away," realize that God's grace is there to enable you to overcome the situation, so that it no longer can affect you negatively. It will have no power over you.

God's grace and strength can empower you to overcome the evil one and his attacks: "So you, my son, be strong (strengthened inwardly) in the grace (spiritual blessing) that is [to be found only] in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2:1 amp).

# PEACE

## Supernatural Peace

Generally speaking, the world is in bad shape. When we turn on the news, we hear of wars, rapes, gang warfare, and terminal disease. Recently, one of the most watched television programs was an actual murder case. It's sad, but the world has nothing better to offer. That's the world.

As Christians, we should not be affected by the things around us. We should not let the things of the world, no matter how bad they seem to be, affect our peace.

Remember, the Bible says that God is light and in Him is no darkness; and then in Matthew 5:14, Jesus said that we who are Christians are the light of the world. We may be living in the world, but we are not of this world. We live by a different set of standards. And we have things available to us as Christians that the world does not have. One thing we have available is supernatural peace.

In John 14:27, Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Here Jesus is telling us that the world has peace. Let's be honest. Having your family together at home is more peaceful than having them scattered. Having your electric bill paid and knowing that the check will clear the bank is more peaceful than knowing you don't have the money to pay the bill and that the electricity could be shut off any day. The world does have a type of peace that is attainable through money and wise living.

But, Jesus also said that there is a supernatural peace, a peace that the world cannot give, that is only available from Him. The peace that Jesus gives does not depend on money or health. The peace of Jesus is supernatural. This peace doesn't come from having your electric bill paid. This peace is there whether the bill is paid or not. Everything in the world is irrelevant. This peace overrides all problems.

In Ephesians 2:17 the Bible says, "He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near." Not only did Jesus come and preach peace, but in verse 14 it tells us that, "He Himself is our peace."

When you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, the Bible says that you are born again. (John 3:3; Rom. 10:19.) The old man inside dies and you become a new creation. Old things pass away and all things become new. (2 Cor. 5:17.) Your spirit is reborn. You become a Christian.

Also, at this time of rebirth, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, takes up residence within you.

> *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of*

*God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

Galatians 2:20

So, here's the point. Jesus came to earth preaching peace. He is the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6), and according to Ephesians 2:14, He himself is our peace. The good news is, if you are a believer, He lives within you. How much more peace can you have available than that?

Romans 14:17 says, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

## The Hidden Power of Shalom

There was a lady Jesus healed who had an issue of blood. In other words, she had a female problem. She had this problem all of her life. However, she knew that if she could touch Jesus, she would be healed. (Mark 5:26–34.)

All through the New Testament, the people Jesus touched got healed. There was something about the point of contact. But the Scripture doesn't just say that woman only had a female problem; she had two problems. Usually we don't hear about the other problem she had. Here's what it was: she had spent all of her money on physicians and was financially broke.

When she touched the hem of Jesus' garment, she was healed. Immediately Jesus said, "Who touched Me?" (v. 30.) He felt the power go out of Him. The power for what? The power for healing. He felt that power (virtue) go out when that woman touched the hem of His garment. His disciples said, "What do you mean who touched You? We've got thousands of people pressing in on You. They are pressing all around us and You ask, 'Who touched Me?'" But Jesus knew that somebody had touched Him who had faith.

If you need to touch God, you can press in at a church, but you may not be pressing in with faith. There were many people pressing into the presence of Jesus, but only one woman pressed in with faith. When she did, Jesus turned and looked at her. She pulled back and Jesus said, "Daughter, your faith has made you well" (v. 34). Then He made a statement that is often overlooked. He said, "Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction," or "Shalom."

Shalom is a Hebrew word that sometimes we think just means "hello." But it means much more than that. We've talked about this word before, but we're going to look at it in depth here to understand its full meaning.

Remember, in Hebrew when you say shalom, what you mean is completeness. In other words, there is nothing incomplete.

Have you ever felt a little incomplete? Shalom means completeness and

wholeness in all areas.[42]

To prove it means all areas, the definition of shalom breaks down even further into peace and health. Some think shalom just means “peace,” yet it still means so much more. There is a certain kind of peace you can have by getting your bills paid, having a car, having payments caught up on the house and enough food to eat. The world has that certain kind of peace, but Jesus said, “I have come to give you peace (shalom), different than what the world has.” The peace from Jesus is completeness, wholeness, health, and prosperity.

What is the difference between health and healing? Healing requires a victory. Health is living in victory. There is no need in shalom. Shalom is walking in victory.

“Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health” (3 John 1:2 nasb). God’s perfect will is for us to walk in health and to be free from the need of healing. He wants us to walk in shalom.

When Jesus turned and looked at the woman who had an issue of blood and a financial problem, He said to her, “Shalom!” He didn’t say, “Shalom—almost.” He didn’t say, “One half shalom.” When Jesus said, “Shalom,” He knew the impact of that word.

I don’t know exactly how it happened, but I do know this. When Jesus said, “Shalom,” He was giving the lady confirmation that she was completely healed and whole physically and financially. That’s shalom!

Shalom is completeness, wholeness, peace, health, welfare, safety, soundness, tranquility, prosperity, fullness, perfectness, harmony, the absence of agitation, and the absence of discord.

## True Peace Comes from God

> *Better is a dry morsel with quietness, than a house full of feasting with strife.*
>
> Proverbs 17:1

Several years ago when my children were very young, our family lived about ten miles from the closest highway. The water to our home was supplied by a well, and all of the utilities depended upon electricity. In January and February, the temperature was always quite cold, but one year we had an ice storm that surpassed anything we had ever experienced before. All of the power lines in our area broke from the ice, which eliminated the heat and water at our house. Because we lived so far from our local town, our road was last on the list to be cleared of ice and snow. For almost a week, we were stranded.

We were blessed to have a fireplace in our home and plenty of wood. Even though the temperature was below zero outside, we were able to stay moderately warm with our fireplace and heavy clothing. The first few hours were exciting, but as we realized the severity of our situation, the next two days became intense. Without modern bathrooms, a microwave, a television, or any of the comforts we were accustomed to, tensions were high. But on the third day, we started adjusting to our circumstances. We found a puzzle and by candlelight, the family developed a closeness that hadn't existed before. For the next three days, our hearts connected and when the electricity returned at the end of the week, my children cried. It is true that a dry morsel with quietness is better than a house full of feasting with strife.

Before the 1980's, personal computers didn't exist. We were told that the computers of the future would ease the workload and give us more time off. Personal cell phones, laptops, and satellite technology are being developed at such a pace that the products in the store are outdated before they are sold. And today, the average person is working more hours than previous generations. Suicides and bankruptcies are at an all-time high. The divorce rate is escalating and young adults are struggling more than ever before trying to find out who they are. With all of our progress, man has developed everything except peace. Why is this? The answer is quite simple. True peace only comes from God.

Jesus came to earth to give us peace. But the peace He had was different than the peace the world has. His peace is not dependent upon where we live or what we have. His peace is based on our faith in God, and it is available to everyone who is born again and will receive it:

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

So today, let me ask you this question. With all of the advancements in technology that you experience in your daily life, with all of the things that you may be taking for granted that would have been considered science fiction by your grandfather, do you have any more peace?

Hebrews 4:9 says, "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God."

Do not be deceived. Peace and rest will never be attained by the acquisition of material things. But true peace and rest is available for all who will receive it. And the key to unlock it is—faith.

## I Don't Care

Some people have everything. But I don't. I don't have a care and I don't want

one!

In Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary, the main definition for care is "to be anxious," and the variations of the definition all have to do with a degree of anxiety.[43] But as Christians, we are told in Philippians 4:6 that we should be anxious for nothing.

We know there are certain things that are always sin—pride, adultery, covetousness, and fornication, for instance. There is no such thing as good adultery and bad adultery. Adultery is always sin. There is no such thing as good pride and bad pride. Pride is always sin. I have heard it taught that care is always sin. But how can that be when 1 Peter 5:7 tells us God cares for us and God does not sin?

The reality is the care we cast upon Him (merimna)[44] is different from the care (melo)[45] He has for us. The synonyms for the care we are to cast upon Him are: affliction, aggravation, alarm, anguish, anxiety, distress, encumbrance, fear, handicap, hindrance, hardship, oppression, pressure, sorrow, stew, strain, stress, sweat, tribulation, trouble, unhappiness, vexation, woe, and worry. As a Christian, you cannot walk in this type of care.

Every definition of this word (merimna), which is only used six times in the New Testament, is anti-faith. Three of the Scripture references talk about how this type of care will choke the Word and make the Word and the one who has it unfruitful. (Matt. 13:22; Mark 4:19; Luke 8:14.) Walking in care can literally destroy your ministry, your health, and your family. On the other hand, the care that God has for us (melo) simply indicates that we matter to Him.

In the current economic crisis, we must take all of our anxieties, stress, and worry and cast that care upon the Lord. We must continue to live our lives from a position of faith and give no entrance to the cares of the world. Remember, the cares of the world choke the Word and we are Word people.

During the time of Isaac, the economy was in total devastation. There was a famine in the land. But Isaac sowed in this time of famine and became so prosperous that he was envied by the Philistines. The Bible tells us that he harvested a hundredfold even though his sowing was done during a time of economic crisis. (Gen. 26:12.)

Another time of terrible famine was during the Great Depression of the 1930s when countless people lost their life savings. But what has often gone unreported is this. Many millionaires were made at the same time. There is no less or no more wealth in the earth today than there was a year ago. It's only in different places. The difference between Isaac and the others of his day is that he would

not allow the conditions of the world to affect his determination to sow and even though there was poverty all around him, he became exceedingly wealthy because he did not abandon the principle of sowing and reaping.

As believers in these last days, we must be examples. Instead of drawing back because things look bad, we must continue in faith and cast all of our fear and anxiety upon God. The result will be great victory and increase when it looks like failure.

When your back is against the wall and it looks like imminent defeat, God has a better plan. It's called imminent victory.

Scripture References:

Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful. (Matthew 13:22)

And the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. (Mark 4:19)

Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. (Luke 8:14)

1 Peter 5:7 (in different versions):

Give all your worries to him, because he cares about you. (ncv)

Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about what happens to you. (nlt)

Casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you. (nasb)

## Seven Keys to a Life of Peace

> *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*
>
> Romans 5:1

I understand that formulas and step plans are not always the answer to the problems we have in life. But sometimes they can define and illuminate issues. With that in mind, here are seven keys to a life of peace.

1) You must know who you are.

As a Christian, you must know that you were made righteous at the moment you became a Christian and you must know that it was the blood of Jesus that cleansed you from all the unrighteousness in your life. Unless you know who you are, you are susceptible to the lies of Satan. He tries to confuse and make

you think you are weak. Jesus said, “You are the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14).

2) You must know what the world is.

You must be able to clearly define the difference between right and wrong. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 2:11 that we should not be ignorant of the devil’s devices; otherwise, he could take advantage of us. John 10:10 clearly defines the source of good and evil.

3) You must know what your goal is.

You must be consistent with your personality and with your vision. You cannot waver as you head toward the calling that God has placed on your life. The only way you lose is if you give up.

4) You must not compromise your life.

Compromise for the Christian is the kiss of death to your testimony. The world will sit quietly by as you do the work of the ministry, but will leap to their feet and point their fingers if you compromise.

5) You must always be in faith.

Walking in faith will make you fearless. You must walk in victory and faith is the key.

6) You must forgive and love.

Faith will not work without love and love will not function without forgiveness. Forgiveness doesn’t mean compromise or condoning an evil act.

7) You must acknowledge what Jesus has done and rest in His work.

In John 16:33 Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” Since Jesus has overcome the world, we can rest in peace with His victory.

# PHYSICAL FITNESS

## Spiritual Dieting

The world is obsessed with physical fitness. You can turn on the TV any time of day or night and you will find people bending, stretching, or twisting their bodies in different forms of exercise. Some have elevated exercise and physical fitness to religion status. Yoga and Far Eastern religions teach their message through transcendental physical exercise.

It seems that every conceivable machine has been developed to help men and women lose weight and look trim. Gymnastic equipment, springs, balls, and even the Gut-Be-Gone body shaper are leaping off the shelves as the obsession with the body continues.

At the same time, our government tells us and our own observations reveal that obesity is at an all-time high in America. In a recent cartoon from Europe, several people from various nations were depicted in stereotype. The Irishman stood with his bagpipes. The Russian stood with his fur hat. The Scottish man was in his kilt, the Arab in his turban, and the American had a pot belly with a cigar in his mouth.

What's the problem? Why are we obsessed with health, all the while becoming an obese nation? I believe the answer is not physical, but spiritual. Jesus said in Matthew 16:26 that there is no profit in gaining the world if you lose your soul. The key to physical fitness is spiritual fitness.

Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." The flesh seeks after itself. The flesh desires to feed and pamper itself with no regard for the spirit. When the flesh is left alone to take care of itself, it will become out of control. Jesus said in John 6:63 that it is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing. Where, then, is our deliverance? How can we get the flesh under control?

Galatians 5:23 tells us that a part of the fruit of the Spirit is self-control. The only way to control the flesh is to walk in the Spirit.

Try this. The next time you desire something in the flesh and your soul has trouble deciding if it is right or wrong, instead of guessing, pray in the Spirit and get quiet before God and listen in your heart. The Holy Spirit will guide you into all truth. (John 16:13.)

This doesn't mean that you will never have a hot dog or ice cream cone the rest of your life. But it is the Spirit that gives life and the flesh profits nothing. Follow the Spirit, ignore the flesh, and you will become spiritually and physically fit.

# POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

## God Is Not Politically Correct

God has not changed. The things He disapproved of during the time of Noah,

Abraham, Moses, and Paul, He still disapproves of today. God is not an evolving creature who changes His character depending upon His environment. God's Word always has been and will always be true.

Growing up in the United States of America, I have become accustomed to democracy. We vote on everything. In America, school leaders, community leaders, state leaders, and national leaders are all in their elected positions because they were the most popular. Americans tend to think that if something is popular, it's right.

When it comes to character, righteousness, and the spiritual things of God, nothing could be further from the truth. God's kingdom is not a democracy.

Everything God created was created by and for His Son, Jesus. We were created to fellowship with Him. It may come as a shock to some people, but in the kingdom of God, God is the King. We don't vote on, debate, or argue the rules. Our duty is to willingly obey the rules of the King.

The good news is, God is a good God and He rewards those who believe in Him and receive His Son by faith, with eternal life and a multitude of good gifts. God is the God of love. Remember, God is love. He is a good God. He is just. And He is light. However, God is not politically correct nor will He ever be.

So the point is this. When you come to the place of decision in your life on any subject, never make your decision because of what is politically correct. Make your decision based on what the Word of God says. Only then will you choose correctly.

Scripture References:

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth. (Philippians 2:9–10)

He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 John 4:8)

This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:5)

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. (James 1:17)

God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day. (Psalm 7:11)

# POVERTY

## Freedom from Disease and Poverty

Galatians 3:13 says, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law.” But what does it mean to be redeemed from the curse of the law?

By the death and resurrection of Jesus, He paid the price for you and for me. He became the sacrifice for our sins. He died so that we could live. He bore our sicknesses so we could have health. He redeemed us from the curse of the law of sin and death.

The law as described in the New Testament is usually considered to be the Pentateuch, or more clearly the first five books of the Bible. In these first five books—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—the curse or punishment for breaking God’s law is broken down into three basic categories.

1) The curse of spiritual death

2) The curse of sickness and disease

3) The curse of poverty

In Deuteronomy 28:15, the Bible tells us about these curses, saying,

> *“It shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you.”*

Then it lists curses all the way to verse 60—forty-five verses of sicknesses and financial disasters that would happen if the law was not kept. In verse 61, the list concludes by saying that not only would these things that were listed happen, but any sickness, disease, or catastrophe that was not listed would happen also.

In other words, not keeping the law was disastrous. But even worse, it was nearly impossible to keep the law. So, poverty, sickness, and spiritual death were virtually assured. But today, I have good news. When it seemed like there was no hope, God made a way. And that’s just like God. He always makes a way of escape for those who seek Him.

Jesus became our Redeemer. He made a way of escape from poverty, sickness, and spiritual death. However, some Christians do not understand that we have been redeemed from the curse of the law. They accept sickness and poverty as part of the Christian lifestyle. This should not be. We have been set free from the curse of the law. We need to start acting like it.

When you take a coupon to the grocery store, you use it instead of using money. In other words, you redeem the coupon. It takes the place of your money. Your money becomes redeemed because the coupon was the redeemer. Well, that’s what Jesus did.

We had a debt. That debt was the curse of the law. But the problem was that we could not pay the debt. It required a perfect sacrifice. It required a sacrifice that was pure before God. We were not pure. Our debt was impossible to pay.

But then Jesus came to earth as a man and died in our place. He took stripes on His body for our sicknesses. He redeemed us. He paid the debt we could not pay.

When we become a Christian, we have health and prosperity available. We don't have to be diseased and in poverty. Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law.

# POWER OF GOD (The)

## Receive the Glory

It is impossible for God to lie. What He has said in His Word is true. What He has prophesied in His Word has happened or will happen. There is nothing that can stop it. When He says the Jews will inherit Jerusalem and the land of Israel, it will happen. No one can stand in the way of the Jews having Israel.

If God's Word says that Jesus is coming back at the appointed time, then Jesus is coming back at the appointed time. If you are not right with God, you are going to get left. You are either with God or without God, but nothing will prevent Him from doing what He prophesied He will do.

The Scripture says that the whole earth will be filled with God's glory. (Num. 14:21.) What does that mean? If you are with God, that is going to be a wonderful thing. But if you are not with God, it won't be such a fun thing.

In Acts 5:1–11, the presence of God entered into the room where Peter and the apostles were. The power of God uplifted and sustained and encouraged Peter and the apostles, but Ananias and Sapphira died. Did God kill them? No, God did not kill them. Did the power of God kill them? No. Did the glory of God kill them? No. God is a good God who brings us life. It's the enemy who seeks to steal our life. As Christians, the anointing protects us from the enemy. I can warn you about a mousetrap and tell you that if you touch the trap, it will snap onto your finger and your finger is going to really hurt. You might say, "I don't know if that is true or not." So you find the mousetrap and stick your finger on the little piece of cheese. Snap!

You might then say, "Why did you make that mousetrap hurt me?" I would say, "I didn't do it. I warned you about it. I told you the power was there to hurt you. I told you to stay away from the thing that will hurt you, but you chose to stick your finger in the mousetrap."

That’s the way it is with the power of God. God does not want us to be hurt. He lets us know that there is responsibility on our part to be right with God if we are going to be in His presence. There is power in His presence—it is wonderful power when we are in good standing.

The Scripture says that we are to walk in faith and we are to walk in the glory. (2 Cor. 5:7; Rom. 6:4.) We’re in the last of the last days before the return of Jesus and the glory of God is on the earth.

The Bible says the whole earth is filled with His glory. (Hab. 2:14.) As Christians, we have the Spirit of God living inside of us but we must yield ourselves to seeking Him. In the same way that we receive or reject salvation, we can receive or reject walking in the fullness of His presence. A Christian who is totally yielded to God by seeking first His kingdom and His righteousness, will receive God’s goodness.

Remember the glory of God is His goodness and all good things come from Him. (James 1:17.)

Allow the anointing and glory of God to be in your daily living. Abide in the Word and walk in the Spirit. Then God’s supernatural will become natural in your life.

# PRAYER

## Pray the Promise, Not the Process

My background is a business background. Even though I was licensed and ordained as a Southern Baptist minister as a young man, in the decades since, I have been involved in many business ventures. Everything from retail stores, marinas, manufacturing, banking, and even oil wells have played a part in my business life. Currently, everything is going very well. Even though my life is consumed completely with ministry, I still have my thumb on the pulse of the business world.

Isaiah 48:17 says that God teaches His people to profit and He leads them in the proper direction. I have always believed this verse, but during my days in the business world, many times I would pray the procedure instead of the promise. Here’s what I mean.

Many years ago, I found myself in a devastating business situation. My back was against the wall and it looked like there was no way out. In fact, things looked so bad that I couldn’t even see how God could deliver me. I felt like I was locked in

a room that didn't even have a door.

When it looked like all was lost, seemingly out of nowhere a Christian businessman came along and offered a business deal that would completely bring me out of the financial pit I was in. The deal sounded good, it looked good, it felt good, and I needed it. It was my only hope!

As a Christian, I knew I needed to pray and I prayed daily that this business deal would go through because I saw it as my only way out. So I prayed day and night. Then all of a sudden, the entire business deal collapsed. I cried out to God, "Why did You let this happen to me? I needed this business transaction." In the silence, I finally listened to God. He spoke to my heart and said, "I didn't block your deliverance. I saved you from destruction."

Later the right deal came along and I was not only delivered from destruction, but also put into a better position financially than ever before. A few years later, I learned that the "Christian" businessman, who I thought was my salvation, was actually a crook who preyed on innocent Christians in their time of peril. God had blocked the destruction and made a way of deliverance.

We must pray God's promises without telling Him how to fulfill them. He makes the promises and provides the process. Our responsibility is to believe in Him. Our trust must be in His promise without yielding to the fear and temptation to tell Him how to do His work.

> *For we walk by faith, not by sight.*
>
> 2 Corinthians 5:7

## When God Doesn't Answer Our Prayers

> *Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.*
>
> 1 John 5:14,15

As Christians, when we pray, there are several things we should know. Too often Christians pray for things that, in reality, God does not want for them. And sometimes God has things for us that we don't receive because we don't ask. According to the Bible in the book of James, sometimes we ask God for something that is according to His will, but we still don't receive it because we ask with the wrong motives. (James 4:3.) When we pray, we must pray the will of God and pray with the right motives.

Several years ago, I heard of a girl who wanted to marry a certain man. He

attended her church and every Sunday she would see him and think to herself, That's the man I want to marry. She was in love and she had spotted her man.

One Sunday, the minister of her church preached a sermon on getting your prayers answered. It was a good sermon. He used Mark 11:24 as his text where it says, "Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."Later in the same message, the minister said we must confess God's Word and act on it in order for it to be profitable. He said that if we speak and act on what we believe, we will receive.

He went ahead and preached the message in balance, but the only thing the young lady heard was "whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them and you will have them." She remembered he said to speak and act, so she devised a plan. When the service was over she went to the back of the church, pointed her finger in the young man's face and said, "I stand on the Word of God and believe that whatever I want, I will have. And what I want is you!"The startled young man didn't know what to say, but as soon as he figured out what was going on he said, "I'm sorry, lady, I'm married."

The young girl was devastated. Had the minister lied to her? Was God's Word not true? What had happened? The young girl actually quit going to church because she felt the Word of God wasn't true and didn't work.

This may seem like an extreme case, but unfortunately many Christians are in the same situation. They ask God for something and when it doesn't come to pass, they blame God.

The fact is we can't get upset with God. He has made promises to those who believe in His Son, Jesus. He gave those promises in His Word, the Holy Bible. But we must know exactly what He promised and all the conditions.

A parent may promise an ice cream cone to his child if they clean their room. The ice cream cone was promised, but only if the room is cleaned. The child who has not cleaned his or her room cannot blame the parent for not having an ice cream cone. The conditions must first be met.

When we pray, we must ask for things that are God's will. We can know His will by reading His Word. Remember, 1 John 5:14 says, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." And if it is something the Word does not specifically address, according to Romans 8:26, we can pray in the Spirit and the Spirit will reveal to us what we need to know.

## The Spirit Reveals Mysteries

A few years ago, I heard a minister preach a great sermon. He taught on 1 Corinthians 2:9 where it says,“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

The theme of his message was that the things that God has prepared for His people are so unbelievable that no one would be able to comprehend them. He went on to say that there is just no way that the mind of man can know what God has prepared for His children. The things of God were just too deep.

Evidently, when the minister was studying for his sermon, he never read the next verse. Verse 10 says, “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.” That minister preached a nice sermon, but it wasn’t true. God does reveal the things that He has prepared for those who love Him. But how does He do it? According to the Bible, He reveals them to us through His Spirit.

> *For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 2: 11–14

There is a problem when we try to understand the spiritual things of God with the natural mind of man. Comparing spiritual things to natural things, according to the Scripture we just read, makes the things of God seem like foolishness. The natural man cannot spiritually discern the things of God. This is why we must worship God in spirit and truth. This is why we must walk in the Spirit and this is why we must pray in the Spirit.

In 1 Corinthians 14, the apostle Paul talked about praying in the Spirit. He wrote a letter to the Corinthian church and here is his conclusion on the matter.

> *What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 14:15

What was Paul getting at? Well, he was trying to impress upon us that we need

balance in our prayer life. We must pray in the understanding. In other words, pray in our natural language, the things we know to pray. And we must pray in the Spirit. When we pray in the Spirit, according to 1 Corinthians 14:2, the Spirit speaks mysteries, or revelation. Would you like to have the mysteries in your life revealed? Then you must pray in the Spirit.

In John 4:24 Jesus said, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” So, if you worship God in the Spirit, if you will move into true worship, then according to God’s Word, your spiritual eyes will see and your spiritual ears will hear what God has laid up for those who love Him.

## Praying in Faith

Sometimes we receive letters from people who say that they have prayed and prayed but have not received an answer from God. Why would someone pray and not get an answer from Him? Does God favor some people over others? Is He a respecter of persons? Does He only answer the prayers of the important people? Why does it seem that some prayers don’t get answered?

In James 1:5, the Bible says that if anyone lacks wisdom then all they have to do is to ask God, who gives to all liberally, and He will give them wisdom. But it goes on to say that when we ask God for something, we must ask Him in faith. Verse 7 says that if we don’t ask in faith, then we should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. To ask in faith means to believe God regardless of what we see. If God says He will heal, if God says He will provide, if God says He will supply, then asking in faith means we believe Him so completely that in our minds and mouths, it has already been accomplished.

When we pray, if we expect to receive what we are praying for, we must pray in faith. We must believe that we have received what we have requested. We must believe that God has done what He said He would do in His Word. And not only must we believe Him, but we must act on that belief. To pray in faith means that we are not affected by what we see. Remember, we are to walk by faith and not by sight. (1 Cor. 5:7.)

Praying in faith produces faith words. We need to speak God’s promise and not the problem. Instead of talking about how things look, talk about what God has promised. Quote His Word. Pray in faith. And, according to Jesus, you will receive your request.

For example, if we have a physical need, we should take God’s Word and believe it. What did He say in His Word about sickness? In Psalm 103:3, for instance, the Bible says that God is the one who heals all our diseases. Is God’s

Word true or is it a lie? Does God heal our diseases or doesn't He? Do we believe the Word or do we believe the world? Many people never see the miracle power of God because they believe what they see instead of what God said.

Here's the point. When we have a request, we can petition God in prayer and He will meet our needs. But according to the Bible, He only answers our petitions when we pray in faith.

## Will You Pray for Me?

As a pastor, I see people in the church requesting prayer from others as they greet each other or pass by. Sometimes it may seem very casual, but when someone takes your hand and says, "Please pray for my family. We're going through a tough time" and you say, "I will," you must follow through on your promise.

Asking for prayer or saying you will pray should not become a Christian cliché. When someone asks for prayer and you say you will pray, you must pray. If you don't, you are a liar and have allowed an opportunity to minister to pass by.

You may say, "I don't know enough about the situation to pray. How can I pray God's will for their life when I don't know much about their life?" Well, I'm glad you asked and here's your answer.

First, we've seen that according to 1 John 5:14, if we pray God's will, He hears us. Verse 15 says that when He hears us, we have the petition that we have asked of Him.

Of course, we must pray His will. According to Romans 8:26, when we don't know what to pray for, we should pray in the Spirit. And verse 27 says that when we pray in the Spirit, we are praying the will of God.

So the next time someone says, "Please pray for me. I'm going through a bad time," you can reply with a definite, "Yes, I will!" Then, pray in the Spirit and you will be praying God's will and you will know by praying His will that He heard you. And when He hears you, you receive your request.

## How to Pray for Your Enemy

A few years ago, an elderly lady contacted me and told me a story about how a man had cheated her out of a large sum of money. After completing the story in great detail, she asked me what I thought she should do.

I explained to this Christian lady that according to the Word, she was commanded to pray for her enemies. (Matt. 5:43–48.) She immediately bowed her head and began to pray and her prayer went something like this. "Lord, You

know that this man hurt me and he stole from me. So in the name of Jesus, I curse his finances and all that he possesses. May his well run dry and I send forth destruction," and she would have gone on and on if I hadn't interrupted her.

I immediately looked up, grabbed the woman by the hand and sternly said, "Stop!" She replied, "Why? I was only doing what the Bible said. I was praying for my enemy." It took a few minutes in the Word to explain to this dear saint that she wasn't praying for her enemy, she was attempting to place curses upon him and that's not what Jesus said to do.

In Luke 6:28 Jesus said, "Bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you." He did not say to curse and He did not to say to pray against. He said to bless and pray for. Then He goes on to say in verses 32 and 33 that if you only love those who love you, that you are no different than sinners in the world, because even sinners love those who love them.

In verse 36 He says, "Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful." In verse 37, He goes on to say, "Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."

There will be a time of judging and there will be a time of punishment. There will be a payday someday. But we are neither the judge nor the executioner. While it is true we should never allow ourselves to be abused, that does not give us the right to execute judgment and attempt to curse and condemn our enemies. That is exactly the opposite of what our Lord and Savior told us to do.

When someone comes against you, remember this. We are to be imitators of our Lord and John 3:17 says that God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn the world. As believers, we are to be the ones who bless and not the ones who curse. God is a God of justice and He is our Defender.

# PRAYER OF AGREEMENT

## Division Hinders Our Prayers

As Christians, we need to be in agreement—we must be in agreement with God, with the Word, and with each other.

In Matthew 18:19, Jesus said, "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven."

There is power in agreement and according to Jesus, if we ask God the Father

concerning anything, it will be done. Now, I know that when we read God's Word, we must take the sum of the Scriptures in balance. And here's what I mean.

If your child has a messy room, you could say this: "If you clean up your room, I will be pleased. And then, if you want to go to the park to play, all you have to do is ask me and I will take you."

Does this mean that you will take the child to the park if he or she asks? Yes, of course you will. You gave your word—but only if the child does what you ask. The child must clean the room first. If this child asks to go to the park and you go to the room and find it messy, you will not be pleased and the trip is off. Only when the conditions are met will you do what you said you would do.

This is the way it is with God. He has filled His Word full of promises. These promises are for you and for me. He has given us hope and confidence that He will meet our needs. However, we cannot forget the requirements.

Now, I know that we are living in a time of grace and that we do not deserve the salvation that has been given to us. But, even though the salvation is a free gift, we must still meet certain requirements.

Is salvation and everlasting life for everyone? Yes. But, will everyone be saved and have everlasting life? No, because there are requirements. We must believe in our hearts and we must confess with our mouths.

This is the way the entire Word of God is. So when we read Matthew 18:19 about two of us agreeing on anything we ask and then it will be done by God, we must know that Jesus also made this promise conditional, and the main condition is agreement.

Satan does not want us to agree with each other. First of all, He knows that when we as Christians do not agree with the Word of God, it leaves us without faith and when we don't agree with each other, it leads to division in the church. If Satan can get Christians to disagree, then he has weakened the prayer power of the church. He accomplishes this through strife, quarrels, and hatred.

Proverbs 10:12 says, "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers a multitude of sins." And Proverbs 16:28 says, "A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends."

God wants us unified and in agreement. Satan wants to divide us and make us ineffective. So, let's agree. As the Church, let's walk in love and understanding. Let's walk in the power of agreement and our prayers will be answered.

# PRIDE

## Comparison Involves Pride

Paul warned us not to compare ourselves with one another because comparison involves pride. Then, in speaking to his spiritual son, Timothy, Paul says:

> *Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty [high-minded], nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us all things richly to enjoy.*
>
> 1 Timothy 6:17 explanation mine

Paul cautioned Timothy about becoming high-minded and trusting in riches. Instead, he exhorted him to think soberly about himself, trusting in God alone. When anyone begins to think that a position of prominence is owed to them because they have worked harder or longer, they are exalting themselves above others—which is what this scripture warns against.

For example, my wife and I attended a ministers' conference where a very well-known minister walked up to the front of the church, looking for a chair reserved with his name on it. When he didn't find it, he asked to speak with the head usher. After they had finished talking, the minister turned and left the meeting—apparently there wasn't a seat reserved for him. Regardless of how many television stations you are on, the church doesn't need strife, contention, and pride sitting on the front row.

The word "pride" simply means high-mindedness. In other words, high-minded people have a higher opinion of themselves than they ought to. Even if someone is greatly talented, is an outstanding vocalist, excellent on the keyboard, or an exceptional administrator, for instance, it doesn't mean that they have arrived at a place where they no longer need to hear the Word of God. Just because someone does a good job doesn't mean that he or she is better than someone else. Considering yourself better than someone else, for any reason, is high-mindedness.

Pride, envy, and offense are the kiss of death for any church that will allow it inside their congregation. Long-standing church members who think that they should have greater privileges are demonstrating pride. Just because you have been in a church from the beginning doesn't mean that you can run the church. These people exalt themselves into a dangerous place, and they can literally stifle the growth of the church by excluding people.

What many people don't understand is that there are good reasons for reserving

seats. For instance, a seat might be reserved for the person who displays the overhead projector during a worship service. Other seats might be reserved for a person the pastor may need during the meeting, like a worship leader. Ushers usually have a reserved seat on the aisle so they can get up without disturbing those around them.

However, something is drastically wrong with the motives of a person whose goal is to be an usher in order to get a better seat. People who think that way are operating in envy, strife, and contention. They come to destroy the work of God. That's why many churches reach a membership of around 250, level off, and then never grow anymore. God cannot work in a church where people have bad motives.

If you really want to do all you can for God and you feel that God is calling you to move to a higher level of living, then petty issues must be pushed aside to allow the people who are coming in at the eleventh hour to do what God has called them to do. Remember, God's kingdom is not based on seniority.

# PROCRASTINATION

## We Can't Wait Until the Test to Study

When I was in school, there were two groups of students that made pretty good grades, but there was a major difference in the way they got them. One group was diligent. These students went to school to learn something. They spent their time studying to learn and to get a good education. Sure they studied for the tests, but that wasn't the only time they studied. They kept a steady pace all through school. They grew in knowledge and confidence. They were good students.

The other group of students also made good grades; however, their lifestyle was different. Most of their time was spent goofing around. They went to class just enough to keep from being dropped. They studied just enough to get by with the daily work. And when a test came, they panicked and crammed for the tests. If they couldn't learn enough by studying at the last minute, they found someone who had taken the test earlier and they cheated. They always seemed to get by.

After graduation, when these people showed up on the job, the diligence (or lack of diligence) in study came to light. Even with the diploma, the ones who didn't have knowledge soon were exposed.

Many Christians approach their study of the Word of God like the lax students. They attend church, own a Bible and talk the right jargon, but only do enough to get by and stay accepted within the group.

This can be deadly. Satan is ruthless. He doesn't have any mercy and takes joy in destroying the lives of weak Christians.

We can't let Satan attack our lives, and then at the last minute try to study spiritually by reading a few verses and praying under pressure. Any time a person reads God's Word and applies it to his life, it is good. But usually when your home is attacked, it's too late to cram. When you know you're going to war, you don't wait for the invasion to disassemble your rifle and clean it. You need to be ready for battle before the battle.

If our spiritual muscles aren't built up before the attack, we may find the attack more than we had expected. Be prepared. Build your faith daily. Then, when the attack comes, your shield of faith will protect you.

So here's the point. We must walk by faith each and every day. We cannot live like the world six days a week and then put in our hour and a half and our dollar and a half on Sunday and expect to be victorious the other six days. We must daily walk in faith. Walking in faith is a lifestyle. Remember, 2 Corinthians 5:7 says, "For we walk by faith, not by sight."

Everything we do, everything we seek to accomplish each day must be connected to our faith in God's Word. Only through believing God can we be set free of the pressures of daily life.

Some Christians try to solve everything in life by their own power and to an extent, some problems can be solved using our natural learned knowledge. But some things can only be overcome by faith in God.

It doesn't matter how intelligent you are, how wealthy you are, or how much influence you have when Satan attacks you and your family. When attacks come from the spirit realm, we must have our shield of faith to protect us and we must already have put it on by continually building up ourselves in our "most holy faith" (Eph. 6:16; Jude 1:20). The natural man is helpless in these cases.

# PROPHECY

## Exposing False Prophets

In Matthew 7:15, Jesus said, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in

sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits." And in verse 20 He says again, "Therefore by their fruits you will know them."

Many times, the Bible warns us of false prophets. God warns us because He loves us and He does not want us to be led away by false teaching and the greed of men. He wants us to only know the truth and to only listen to His true prophets.

It may not seem important to some, in the day that we live in, to be concerned with false prophets. After all how can they hurt us? How can false prophets and false teachers hurt a Christian?

Some people think false prophets are those who cause their followers to shave their heads and commit murders. There are those who think false prophets are those who gather together their followers and drink poisoned Kool-aid. Others think that leaders who teach their followers to store guns and food for the great war are the false prophets mentioned in the Bible. Well, they may be false leaders and they may use the name of Jesus, but they are not exactly the ones Jesus is referring to here in Matthew 7.

In the last days, there will be many false prophets, apostles, teachers, and brethren, and they will be led by their master, Satan. In 2 Corinthians 11:13–14, we are given some insight into their method of operation.

> *For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.*

Second Peter 2:1 is another verse that sheds some light on false prophets, saying,

> *There were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.*

Many other scriptures refer to these counterfeit people of God, but here are two points that are extremely important.

1) These false prophets and false teachers will not appear to be false.

Second Corinthians 11:13 says that these leaders will appear to be righteous individuals who appear to radiate the light of Jesus. They will be so camouflaged that many will follow them. But that should not be.

Jesus said that His sheep would know His voice and another they will not follow. (John 10:3–5, 27.)We need to listen to the voice of Jesus daily (in our hearts) as He speaks to us through the voice of His Holy Spirit. Then when the false prophet comes along stealing, killing and destroying, we will not be led astray because we will know that the voice is another voice and not the voice of the Great Shepherd, Jesus. (v. 10.)

2) They will teach false doctrine.

Without the true Word of God being taught, faith will not grow. With undeveloped faith we will not be as effective in our witnessing and we will not be walking in the promises of God. Instead, we will be walking in the problems and the ways of the world. And that's what Satan wants for you and me.

Let me give you a word of caution. Be aware that false prophets, teachers, and apostles are in the world. But don't get goofy and go on a false prophet hunt. Be aware of the negative, but walk in the positive.

## A Checklist for Judging Prophecy

> *Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith.*
>
> Romans 12:6

Some people have difficulty understanding prophecy. Years ago, there was a lady who attended a denominational church that did not believe in the gifts of the Spirit. But she started seeking the fullness of God. She started reading material that talked about people getting a word from the Lord.

One day I was talking with her and she said that after much prayer, that she had received a word from God. After asking her what the word was, she replied, "The word I received from God was 'pineapple.'" Well, according to God's Word, all prophecy must be judged—"Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge" (1 Cor. 14:29)—and I judged this "word" a little "fruity."

Even though prophecy differs, it still must be judged. Here are three main criteria for judging prophecy.

1) Does it bring glory to Jesus?

> *I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."*
>
> Revelation 19:10

All prophecy must lift up and exalt Jesus. Any prophecy that lifts up a person or an organization above Jesus is not of God. A false prophecy will always try to

divert the glory, the honor, and the attention to another individual or group.

> *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.*
>
> 1 John 4:1–3

Prophecies should never be flatteries or motivated by ulterior motives. The character of a prophet will reflect Jesus. “You will know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:16).

2) Does it agree with God’s Word?

The apostle Peter explained how prophecy is derived. He said, “For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). Deuteronomy 13:1–5 tells us that we should never believe a prophecy because of a sign only. Deuteronomy 18:20–22 tells us that a true prophecy will always come to pass, because God does not lie.

3) Does it produce liberty or bondage?

Prophecies are given through the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Ask yourself this question after hearing a prophecy: How does it feel in my spirit? Does it agree with the anointing in me?

> *It shall come to pass in that day that his burden will be taken away from your shoulder, and his yoke from your neck, and the yoke will be destroyed because of the anointing oil.*
>
> Isaiah 10:27

A prophecy from God will always produce liberty because it is soaked in love.

> *Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 13:2

# PROSPERITY

## The Goodness of God’s Glory

> *For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.*
>
> Ephesians 3:14–16

There is a key to the glory of God that we so often miss. The key is this: The glory of God is the goodness of God.

When Moses wanted to see the glory of God, God said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you" (Ex. 33:19). The Scripture says that Moses saw the goodness of God. Then later Moses saw the glory of God pass by him. (Ex. 34:6.) That lets us know that the goodness of God is the glory of God.

All the good things that God has for you are in His glory. When a king walks out in his kingly robe with his jewels and crown, surrounded by his servants, people say, "Here comes the king in all of his glory." What do they mean? They are referring to his abundance.

We saw earlier that the Hebrew word for glory is chavod, and that the word chavod means weightiness; that which is substantial or heavy; glory; honor; splendor; power; wealth; authority; magnificence; fame; dignity; riches and excellency. The glory of God is goodness. What did Moses see go by? When he saw the glory of God go by he saw God in all of His goodness.

Jesus talked about the goodness of God, saying, "No one is good but One, that is, God" (Matt. 19:17). The devil, however, wants everyone to think God is not good. Remember, in John 8:44 Jesus said the devil is a liar. The devil always has been and always will be a liar. And he has lied to the Church. If Satan can get us to believe his lies, he can destroy God's work in us.

For instance, much of the Church has believed that in order to be holy, glorious, and sanctified, we must be poor. They may not say it like that, but that is the mentality that has been in many people of the Church.

That thought is not true! It is from the devil—who is a liar! God is good, and He wants to give us abundance.

When we think about the things that God has for us, we don't want to limit God. It's time for no more limits. It's time to take away the bondage that we have had.

God is the God who prospers us. He's not the one who makes us poor. Satan is the one who makes us poor. Jesus says in John 10:10, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly." God is not the one who makes us sick. He says in Psalm 103:3 that it is the Lord who heals all our

diseases. He's not the one who beats us down. Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted, to restore sight to the blind, and to preach the good news to the poor. (Luke 4:18.)

What is good news to somebody who is poor? It is that you don't have to stay poor!

God is the God of abundance. He's the God of prosperity. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and God will impart His will for your life. (Matt. 6:33.) Submit to Him and His plan. His plan is abundance for you.

## God's Promise of Prosperity

God's plan for each and every believer is prosperity. Even though there are those who are opposed to the prosperity message, it still does not deny the reality of God's Word. Let's look at some basic biblical truths concerning prosperity.

1) God desires for us to prosper.

> *Let them shout for joy and be glad, who favor my righteous cause; and let them say continually, "Let the Lord be magnified, who has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant."*
>
> Psalm 35:27

2) God teaches us to profit.

> *Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way you should go."*
>
> Isaiah 48:17

3) Receiving is the result of giving and God wants us to give.

> *Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.*
>
> Luke 6:38

4) God adds things to us when we seek first His kingdom.

> *Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*
>
> Matthew 6:33

5) We are commanded to tithe on our increase. Therefore, increase must be of God.

> *Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will*

*overflow with new wine.*

Proverbs 3:9,10

6) God empowers us to get wealth.

*You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.*

Deuteronomy 8:18

7) God gives us all things that pertain to life.

*As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

2 Peter 1:3,4

8) God's blessing is riches without sorrow.

*The blessing of the Lord makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it.*

Proverbs 10:22

9) God supplies all our needs according to His riches.

*My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 4:19

10) Jesus delivered us from poverty.

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.*

2 Corinthians 8:9

There are hundreds of references in the Word of God that clearly tell us that prosperity should be the lifestyle of every believer. Just like salvation, we receive prosperity by grace, the awesome power of God. But it is through faith that it is activated. Faith is the catalyst that activates the promise of prosperity in God's Word in your life. Remember, faith is hearing, believing, speaking, and acting on God's promises.

## Pressing Into the Land of More than Enough

In Matthew 6:31–33, Jesus promised that our needs would be met.

*"Therefore, do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we*

*drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things [What things? What you eat, what you drink, what you wear] the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things [What things? The things you need] will be added to you."*

explanation mine

Most people have needs in their lives. The only reason we would need something is because we lack something. God wants us to attack the lack in our lives. He does not want us to be living in the "land of not enough." He wants us to be living in the "land of more than enough." He wants us to be living in the "land of abundance." That's what God wants for us.

Christians want that too. I don't want to be living in the "land of needing my needs met." I want to be living in the "land of more than enough." I want to be living in the "land of abundance." I'm sure you do too!

We can live in the "land of not enough," "just enough," or "more than enough." During the time the Hebrews were in Egypt in captivity, they were living in the "land of not enough." When you are a slave to something, you are living in the "land of not enough." If you are a slave to sickness in your body, you are living in the "land of not enough." If you are a slave to the payment book or the credit card company, you are living in the "land of not enough." If you owe somebody anything, you are living in the "land of not enough." You do not have your needs met. This is not meant as a condemnation. However, if you owe money to anyone, you are living in the "land of not enough."

God wanted the Hebrews to move out of the "land of not enough." He wanted to get them over into the land that was flowing with milk and honey. He wanted them to live in the "land of more than enough," in abundance and overflow. That's where He wanted them to be. He wanted them to live in His glory. But they were stuck in the "land of not enough." Then, as they started to go to the "land of more than enough," they got stuck in the "land of just enough."

When they were in the wilderness, they had food, but only enough for one day. They did not have enough for tomorrow or the next day. They couldn't store it up, because it would rot. Remember the story of the manna? They couldn't store it. They had just enough for one day at a time. That's the area of having your needs met. They had shelter and they had food and water. Their clothes wouldn't wear out. They had enough to get by. They had "just enough." That's the "land of just enough." Some Christians have moved out of poverty and settled into the land of just enough. Because they have their needs met, they think they're living

in abundance. They think they are prosperous. But they aren't. They have "just enough."

God wants us to move from the area of being in need, and move through the area of enough and beyond that into the area of true prosperity. He wants us to press through to where we can pray and believe for our dream. Beyond that, He wants us to press through to where we can live in divine health, divine prosperity, and live walking in the glory of God—the place where we give no thought to our needs. As long as the devil can keep us caught up in the area of "we need our needs met," then we are not going to be thinking about the abundance of God and the ministry of God because we are going to be so caught up with thinking about the bill that is due.

How much time do you spend in a day thinking about, working toward, and figuring out how you are going to get your bills paid? How much time do you spend going to the doctor? How much time and money and resources do you spend taking care and trying to get up to the level of just getting your needs met? Let's learn how to press past the "land of not enough" into the place where God wants us to be—the "land of more than enough."

Never seek to just get by, but always press in for all that God has for you.

## Support the End-Time Harvest

We know that in these end times, God has a plan for a great and mighty Church —for the body of Christ to raise up and be prosperous, to be doing the things of Jesus, to be doing the things of the gospel, and to be winning souls for the Lord across the nation and around the world. We know from Scripture that this is going to happen.

Jesus said there would be a time when the fields would be white (ripe) with harvest, when He would send us out to reap. (John 4:35–38.) That time is here. After the harvest is complete, those in Christ will be caught up to be together with Him in the air. (1 Thess. 4:17.) But just before Jesus returns to gather us up, there will be a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit and a great harvest.

It takes prosperity to send missionaries around the world. These missionaries do not fly on any airline for free. They must buy their tickets. If they have the tickets, they go. If they don't have the tickets, they don't go. God will bless His Church in order for the Church to do the things the Church needs to do. It takes prosperity to do the work of the gospel worldwide.

The devil wants us to believe that prosperity is not for us. He wants us to take an oath of poverty. Prosperity is taking place in the Church and the devil hates it.

He hates it because he can see that the prosperity of the saints is producing missionaries. The prosperity is producing church buildings. Prosperity is producing TV and radio stations. Radio and television time is not free. The people selling it require money. When we give them the money, they give us the time. When we put the gospel on radio and television and lives get changed, the devil hates it and it makes him really mad.

Satan wants to destroy your ability to use the prosperity that God gives you. Wealth without wisdom is worthless. Second Corinthians 2:11 says, “Lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.” God does not want us to be ignorant about the devil’s plan of attack toward us.

Satan wants to foil the end-time harvest. He is attempting to convince the Church that prosperity is not of God.

Don’t believe the lie. Receive prosperity and support the end-time harvest.

## Prosperity Is Freedom

In Luke 4, Jesus came to His hometown of Nazareth. He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah, He opened it, and began to read:

> *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”*
>
> Luke 4:18,19

After reading this from Isaiah, Jesus closed the book, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. Everyone’s eyes in the synagogue were fixed on Him.

Then Jesus said, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (v. 21.) When Jesus made this statement, He made it very clear why He was anointed.

First of all, He was anointed to preach the gospel to the poor. What is the gospel? The gospel is good news! Jesus came to preach good news to the poor. Now, what do you think that good news was? Was it that they were to always be poor and without hope? No, that is not good news.

The good news was that even though they didn’t have much, even though they were a nation held captive by the Romans, they could be set free from poverty. They could have their needs met. In Matthew 6:33, Jesus even shared how that could be accomplished. While talking about earthly possessions, He said, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be

added to you." Notice, He said, "shall be added to you."

I know that in some religious circles it seems poverty is next to godliness. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus did not come to make the poor poorer. He did not come to keep the poor, poor. He came to set the captives free.

Prosperity is a concept Jesus taught and it was something He wanted to give, not something He wanted to take away.

In Luke 6:38, Jesus said,

> *"Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."*

Several times Jesus said that He did not say anything unless the Father instructed Him to say it. (John 8:28, for instance.) So, it must be the will of the Father for His children to prosper.

Now, prosperity is not necessarily money. I know of people who are very prosperous and they do not have a large bank account. However, God's will is for us to have our needs met. And if a lack of money is going to cause the electric or gas company to end your service and make your family go without heat in your home, then money to pay the bill is a need.

Jesus said that He would meet our needs, but let's put balance in here. He did give conditions. We can see this in the two verses we read earlier. Matthew 6:33 said we need to seek God's kingdom first. And Luke 6:38 said that in order to receive, we had to give. We need to remember these things and not think of prosperity as a heavenly lottery ticket.

Remember, Jesus came to set you free from everything that is a bondage. Poverty is bondage. Prosperity is freedom. Prosperity is God's will for you.

## Money Is an Amplifier

We've seen from Scripture that the devil is a liar. The only way he can destroy God's work in us is to get us to believe his lies. For years, much of the church has believed that in order to be holy and in order to be humble, in order to glorious and sanctified, we must be poor.

Satan will cause fear to rise up in people if you start mentioning the word money in a church. The reason is that many have been taught that money will corrupt you, that money will give you bad character. That is a lie! Money is nothing more than an amplifier.

If a man, who doesn't have a whole lot of money, is taking a woman to a cheap motel and committing adultery, lots of money or lack of money won't change his

character. If this same man gets rich, the only thing that will change is he will fly the woman to a tropical island resort and commit adultery in an expensive hotel. It's not going to change his bad character. Money doesn't change your character. It just amplifies your character.

If you are a good person and you don't have much money, but you are giving one or two dollars to the poor and all of a sudden you get a bunch of money, it's going to amplify your character and you will give thousands of dollars to the poor. Money amplifies the character that is already within you. It doesn't change your character. We've used that as an excuse for too long.

The Bible never says money will corrupt you. We have all heard that the Bible says money is the root of all evil. But that is not what it says! The Bible says, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim. 6:10). You trace it out and you'll find the love of money is what is behind pornography, murder, and gambling. That love of money is what's behind every sin that there is. The love of money may be a root of all kinds of evil—but it's not the money that's evil.

God said through the prophet Habakkuk, "Look among the nations and watch—be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you would not believe, though it were told you" (Hab. 1:5). This scripture lets us know something important. God is getting ready to do a work in these last days in His Church that is so astonishing, so phenomenal, that some of us will not believe it even after it is told to us because it is something that will just set us ablaze with the glory of God. We have to be ready. People are going to be drawn to the glory of God. They are not going to be drawn to a beat down, wimpy church.

Many Christians have the door closed when it comes to prosperity in their lives. Don't let yourself become accustomed to believing that things are never going to get any better. We must start living in the overflow. The person who fears (honors, respects, esteems) God lives in prosperity.

> *Who is the man that fears the Lord? Him shall He teach in the way He chooses. He himself shall dwell in prosperity, and his descendants shall inherit the earth.*
>
> Psalm 25:12,13

Who is to inherit the earth? You and me! We are the descendants. We are the ones who inherit.

Remember, God enjoys our prosperity.

> *Let them shout for joy and be glad, who favor My righteous cause; and let them say continually, "Let the Lord be magnified, who has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant."*

Psalm 35:27

This verse doesn't say that God has pleasure in the poverty of His servant, but pleasure in the prosperity of His servant. This is not just talking about money. It is talking about living in the overflow of God's goodness and His abundance!

> *Then it shall be to Me a name of joy, a praise, and an honor before all nations of the earth, who shall hear all the good that I do to them; they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness (the glory) and all the prosperity that I provide for it.*
>
> Jeremiah 33:9

You may say, "Well, that's for Israel, not us." That is wrong thinking! Galatians 3:29 says, "If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." We are the inheritors of the promises.

That is good news! Let's live in the overflow that God desires for us. Let's live where God wants us to live.

## Speak Prosperity

When you don't know who you are or what you have, you can be easily manipulated and deceived. As a Christian, you must know that you have been saved, you must know you have been healed, and you must know that you have been given a rich supply.

It's a good feeling to have extra money at the end of the month, but a lot of Christians have extra month at the end of the money. Poverty is not a sin, but it is a curse and a problem that many live with.

One thing I have discovered over the years is that when a person is in financial trouble, the answer is not more money. If a person lives with a poverty mentality, money will only be a temporary solution to a long-term need. We must understand this. If we keep doing what we've always done, then we will continue to have what we've always had. And nothing is going to change until something changes.

Jesus said in Mark 9:23, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." It is possible to break free of the poverty mind-set and walk in the prosperity that God has planned for His people. God's plan for you is health, wisdom, and prosperity with the complete absence of sickness or lack.

But how can we change our thinking? How can we break years of wrong thoughts and actions? Actually, the answer to that is quite simple. Jesus said in John 8:31–32 that if we would continue in His Word daily, then we would understand the truth and the result of hearing, understanding, and acting upon

His truth would be freedom.

Prosperity is freedom. Poverty is bondage. The choice is ours. Jesus said that our words would be the determining factor in whether we are justified or condemned. (Matt. 12:37.) Also, we are told in Proverbs 18:21 that life and death are in the power of the tongue. What we say is extremely important. It can determine whether we live in prosperity or whether we live in poverty.

How do we know what to say? We look to God's Word and say what He says.

## God's Children Are Not Beggars

> *Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock?*
>
> 1 Corinthians 9:7

Years ago while working at a retail store, I had one of the local pastors stop by to do some shopping. He spent a long time looking at the products, examining the packages and looking at the price tags. Then, after choosing the items he wanted to purchase, he approached me and asked for a discount. He said, "I need all the help I can get because I am just a poor preacher." In an attempt to be funny, I said, "I know you are. I've heard you preach!" He laughed, but he still wanted a discount.

A few weeks later, I was visiting a friend who played the guitar on our church worship team. My friend worked as an assistant to the local veterinarian. His job was to assist in keeping the animals under control until the doctor could get to them. Also, his function was to collect payment after the doctor had finished.

On this particular afternoon, a local minister brought his dog in to get its leg fixed. The pastor had backed over his dog's leg with his automobile. He was in a panic when he brought the dog to the doctor's office and was very insistent that the dog be fixed immediately. He pushed his way ahead of everyone and the doctor graciously fixed the dog's leg while everyone else in the waiting room backed up one slot.

When the doggy repair was over, the pastor picked up his dog, told the doctor thank you, and started to walk out the door. My friend said, "Pastor, would you like to pay your bill now or would you like for me to bill you?" The pastor looked back with great indignation and said, "Why should I have to pay anything? I am a man of God!" No doubt, every Christian in the room was embarrassed. This "man of God" had just proven to the world that they were right in what they thought. He had become one more example of the way the

world sees Christians.

As Christians, we should be the example to the world of what prosperity really is. We must seek God's Word and walk in His knowledge concerning our finances.

Remember, Matthew 6:33 says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." God's plan was never for His children to be beggars. God's plan is to prosper His people.

# PURPOSE

## Understanding Mysteries

> *Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith.*
>
> Romans 16:25,26

God has kept secrets for us, not from us. He's kept the mysteries and now, He is revealing these mysteries to us. It's called progressive revelation. As we get closer and closer to the time when Jesus comes back to get His Church, we are going to have more and more revelation of these mysteries. It is going to continue.

Of course, the mysteries of God cannot be fully comprehended by the reasoning of carnal men. In this passage in Romans 16, Paul is saying that Gentiles cannot clearly understand the depth of the revelation of the Word of God. "But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14).

There are many things God has kept secret for us and it is our responsibility to obtain these secrets. Once we understand them, they are ours. We can claim them.

What kind of mysteries are we talking about? How to do something. When to do it. Where to do it. What is it you need to do in your life? What has God given you to do? What is the job that is set before you? What is the direction of your life? Do you ever just wonder about a lot of those things sometimes? It's a mystery, but God wants to reveal the answer to the mystery to you. How are we

going to get buildings paid for? It's a mystery. Our brains sometimes go into a cramp trying to think about it. It's a mystery, but God has the answers for us.

If we want God to give us those secrets, then we have to know where He keeps them hidden for us. Jesus told us about it in Matthew 6:6:

> *"But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."*

Go into the secret place of your prayer closet. That doesn't have to be with the brooms and the mops. It is where you go to get alone with God and to get into His presence.

Psalm 91:1 says, "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." If you are under His shadow, you are in His presence. So the secret place is in the presence of God. That's where you are going to get the answers to the mysteries. That's where you are going to get the secret things of God revealed to you.

I want to tell you something about the presence of God, the secret place. There are no limits in the secret place. God will take you beyond what you can ask or think. (Eph. 3:20.) When you spend time in the secret place in the presence of God, He will reveal His secrets to you. You have to make a quality decision to practice that each day. Practice spending time in His presence.

> *'I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the Lord, who call you by your name, am the God of Israel.'*
>
> Isaiah 45:3

I believe that this verse has a two-fold meaning. First of all, in the last days God is going to transfer the wealth from the wicked so that we will receive the treasures of darkness and the hidden riches of the secret places. (Prov. 13:22; Isa. 45:3.) And secondly, when God is referring to the hidden riches of the secret places, He is talking about the mysteries of the kingdom—the secret things that He has hidden for us for this day and time.

The secret place is an awesome place. You can go in there discouraged and come out uplifted. You can go in there confused and come out of there not confused any more. You can know exactly what you should be doing. Go there depressed, and come out full of joy. Spending time in the secret place is vital. We need to get an established heart. Psalm 112:8 says that the man or woman who learns to trust the Lord has an established heart. We need to learn to rely on Him and move when He speaks. He wants to take us to levels where we have never been

before. But we must have a teachable spirit.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:4, “My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” Real power is the ability in your life to rearrange and change things—knowing what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. If the power of God is going to work in our lives, we need to be affected by change that the power of God will bring to us. The Holy Ghost was given to us for a purpose. God is a purposeful God. We need to get back to the purpose God has for us.

# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

## Why Is God Taking So Long?

Last week a lady approached me after church and reminded me of what she had been praying and believing for. After rehearsing again the problem in her life, and reminding me of all the times she had prayed, she asked me, “Why is it taking God so long to answer my prayer?” Her question is not at all uncommon. Many Christians seem frustrated with God because their prayers don’t seem to be answered when they want them to be.

As Bible-believing faith people, we should know that God is always on time. As humans living on this earth, we are restricted to the three dimensional world that we live in and we have a tendency to think that God is also restricted to this dimension. God is a multidimensional God and is not restricted by time or space.

While on a flight recently, I read an interesting article in a magazine. A group of scientists and mathematicians stated that they could mathematically prove that an atom on this earth could also be light years away in another galaxy. They didn’t say that the atom on earth and the atom in the remote galaxy were identical. They said they were the exact same atom in two different places, light years apart, at the same time. In man’s natural mind, this seems impossible, although God’s Word speaks of it frequently.

The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead dwells in us. (Rom. 8:11.) Every Christian has the fullness of God’s Holy Spirit in them—not a piece of God, but the fullness of God residing in them. A Christian is the temple of the Holy Spirit, not the temple for a portion of the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19–20.) God is all-powerful and operates in dimensions, power, and speed beyond anything we could even think with our natural minds. That’s the nature of our God.

As faith people, we must submit our requests to God and then trust that He is

more than able to do the supernatural. When we question His timing, we are questioning His knowledge, understanding, and ability to meet our need and that is not faith! So the next time the thought creeps into your mind wondering why God is taking so long, cast it down. (2 Cor. 10:5.) Stay in faith and submit to God's timing and you will receive—in due season, if you don't give up. (Gal. 6:9.)

## How Should I Pray?

One question that is common when there is a need for prayer is this: "How should I pray?" That is a good question, but it is also an easy one to answer. When we pray, we should always pray God's will, which is His Word, and we should pray in the Spirit.

When Jesus was here on the earth, He said something that shows us how to pray:

> *"I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak."*
>
> John 12:49,50

Jesus himself tells us here that He only said what the Father told Him to say.

When we pray, we need to pray the Word of God because the Word is the Father's thoughts, words, and will about everything. (2 Tim. 3:16–17.) Too many Christians are out there praying for things to happen in their lives that are totally against God's will for them.

If we want God to hear us when we pray, we must know His will. The only way to know His will is to know His Word. Only then will we know how to pray effectively.

Once a man told me that his son and daughter-in-law were having problems in their marriage. He said that they were both raised in Christian families and claimed to be Christians. They had a child and for a while, seemed to have a happy family.

But then something happened and now it looked like they might get a divorce. Then he asked me this question. "How should I pray? Should I pray that they separate and each find someone who will make them happy or should I pray that they stay together?"

I told this man to get out his Bible and see what God said about it, then pray the Word. A few days later he told me that he had direction in his prayers now. He knew God's will was not divorce.

In the same way, when we get sick, we must pray the will of God. I've heard well-meaning Christians pray that the sick person wouldn't be in too much pain if they die. Don't pray for me that way! Keep those people away from me. Wouldn't it be better to pray God's Word? For instance, James 5:14 says,

> *Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up.*

Praying God's will in faith brings life. If you don't pray the will of God in faith, you're wasting your time. The Bible talks about praying the will of God and the results in 1 John 5:14–15:

> *This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.*

If you want to pray God's will and can't find it in the Word, then pray in the Spirit.

> *Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*
>
> Romans 8:26

So, it's this way. Pray the Word or pray in the Spirit. Either way, you will be praying the will of God and He will hear you. And when God hears His will being prayed, He acts on His Word.

## How Do I Know If It's God?

> *God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 14:33

As a pastor, I continually have people bringing problems and circumstances to me for counsel. Usually, after they have taken some time to explain the situation, they will give the solution that they feel they have for the problem. Then they look at me and say, "Is that what I am supposed to do? Do you think God gave me this answer? How can I know if I heard from God, or could it be the devil trying to trick me?"

The answer here actually is quite simple. Follow peace. Over the years I have discovered that God always works through love, goodness, and peace.

When Loretta and I were first married, a man approached me about buying into

an oil well. I was so excited. I had plans of being an oil tycoon. I read about oil. I studied about the oil industry. Only two things stood between me and the investment—money and Loretta.

Something didn't seem right deep inside, but the mental thrill of being a millionaire overpowered me. I sold my new Camaro and talked Loretta into allowing me to make this venture. In a few short months, the oil man left town with my money and I was faced with two major tasks. First, I had to swallow my pride and ask Loretta and God to forgive me. Secondly, I had to buy another car because I had no transportation.

All of this could have been resolved if I would have just allowed myself to be led by the Spirit and followed peace. Instead, I was head-led and ended up being a "lead head." I learned my lesson.

So the next time you are wondering if something is of God or not, ask yourself these questions: "Do I feel inner peace?" and "Am I being led by the Spirit?" If you can answer those questions honestly, you have your answer.

> *I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.*
>
> Galatians 5:16

# RECEIVING

## Learning to Receive

> *For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.*
>
> Romans 5:17-18

Righteousness is a free gift. We are made righteous when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. The Bible tells us that His blood cleanses us from all unrighteousness. But in order to have this righteousness, we must receive it. Receiving is an important attribute and we must know how to receive in order to be saved, and in order to have God's promises working in our lives. Most of my life, I have paid for my meals at the restaurants. It didn't seem to matter if I was by myself or if I had the entire Brady Bunch with me, I paid. If I went out to eat with someone who was poor, I had compassion because they possibly didn't

have any money. So I paid. If I went out with somebody who was rich, I wanted them to know that I was just as rich as they were, so I paid. I couldn't receive a free meal because I wouldn't receive a free meal. After a few years, I got the reputation of being the guy who paid. Then everyone invited me out to eat. I began to wonder if I was so popular because everybody knew as long as I came along, they got a free meal. God has a word that describes this entire situation. The word is pride.

Since then, I have made it a goal to eliminate pride in my life. I have discovered there is no such thing as good pride. Pride will keep you from receiving God's best for your life. I still like to pay the bill when I go out to eat with friends, but now it is not pride. I just love to bless people! It may look the same to others, but now my heart is different. Occasionally, I let someone else pay. I have decided to not allow pride to stand in the way of receiving God's best, or a free meal.

> *And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification.*
>
> Romans 5:16

# REDEEMED FROM THE CURSE OF THE LAW

## Reject the Curse

I have exciting news for you. Jesus has redeemed us from the full curse of the law – not just part of it, but all of it! Let me explain.

The curse of the law, as described in Deuteronomy chapter 28, involved three things: 1) death, 2) sickness and disease, and 3) poverty. Jesus paid the price in full so that we could exchange the curse for the blessing. Instead of 1) death, 2) sickness and disease, and 3) poverty, He wants us to have 1) life, 2) health and healing, and 3) prosperity. Of course, the thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10), but that is totally irrelevant. It doesn't matter. The price has been paid. We have been redeemed from the curse.

We were redeemed by Jesus taking on the fullness of the curse so that we could walk in the fullness of the blessing. He substituted Himself for each of the three parts of the curse and through His substitution, He became our propitiation and redeemed us from the curse. He paid the price we could not pay. He did what we

could not do. He completed what we could not complete.

But how did He do this? He became our substitute for the first third of the curse. He died so that we could live. He took on death on the cross so that we could take on life for eternity. When we receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior, death is no longer in our future, because our old man was crucified on the cross with Jesus.

Jesus also substituted Himself for the second third of the curse. According to Isaiah 53 and 1 Peter 2:24, He sacrificed His body, He took on our infirmities, He took on our pain so that we could walk in the fullness of health and healing. By the stripes He received on His back, we were healed.

Likewise, Jesus took on the last one third of the curse. According to 2 Corinthians 8:9, even though He was rich, He became poor so that we, through His poverty, might become rich. Jesus, the King of kings, was the one who had gold and precious spices delivered to Him as a child, the one who had a treasurer, and the one who owned clothing so valuable it was not divided at His death. This same Jesus was stripped of all His earthly wealth, hung naked on a cross in poverty, and was buried in a borrowed grave. This same Jesus took on the curse of poverty that paid the price for our prosperity.

I am always amused when someone asks me if I am one of those “health and wealth” preachers. What is the alternative? Do they really want to follow and listen to a “sickness and poverty” preacher? Or do they want to receive the blessing of God? Of course, we all want the blessing!

While I do not feel that borrowing money is a sin, it is definitely under the curse. The Word says that we are to be the lenders and we shall not borrow. We are to be above and not beneath. We are to be the head and not the tail.

When you return from a few days away from home and your little dog runs into the yard to greet you at your car, what do you do? I have seen people pick up their little dogs and rub their faces together, letting the little puppy lick them over and over. Have you noticed that when the dog is picked up, it is always the head that gets all the attention? The tail goes unnoticed. In fact it is completely avoided. No one wants to have a relationship with the tail. It is the head that is honored. We are to be the head and not the tail. We are to be the lenders and not the borrowers. We are children of the King, and heirs of His promise. We are not beggars. We must walk in the blessing.

Every Christian believes that Jesus died for their sins and they walk in the blessing of eternal life. Some believe that He bore our sicknesses for our healing, but sadly even fewer believe that He became poor so we could be rich.

Once I heard a preacher say that Jesus became poor spiritually. How absurd! Jesus said, “If you have seen Me you have seen the Father for the Father and I are one.” God, who spoke the universe into existence, has never been, is not, and will never be poor spiritually. That is impossible. Jesus became poor financially and paid the price to redeem us from poverty and by faith we can receive prosperity.

The Bible tells us that as a man thinks, so is he. God wants us to think the fullness of the blessing. He wants us to quit thinking the curse (death, sickness, and poverty) and start thinking the blessing (life, health, and prosperity). When your back is against the wall financially, don’t think “borrow.” You cannot borrow your way out of debt. It only takes you deeper into the snare of the curse. However, you can give yourself into the blessing.

All through the Bible, we see this theme. If you take care of God’s house, He will take care of your house. Your road to prosperity and out of the bondage of the curse of poverty and debt is through seeking His kingdom first. Only when we believe His Word and act on what we believe will the curse of poverty be broken.

Statistics tell us that ninety-seven percent of all Christians are in debt. The first step in getting out of the pit of debt is to quit digging. When a person digs with a shovel, they are constantly looking down. God will take you out of the pit, but first you must put away the shovel, and start looking up.

Satan is a liar and sadly, too many Christians have believed his lie instead of the truth. Satan says, “If you don’t borrow, you’ll never have a house.” Satan says, “The only way you can own a car is through debt.” Many Christians buy their food with a credit card. All the while Satan tightens the noose, bringing them further into bondage. The truth is, you can have a better house, a better car, and a better life by not paying the usury of the Babylonian system.

Jesus paid the price, but our receiving is directly connected to our actions that result from the belief in our heart. In your thinking, get debt and borrowing moved to the curse side of the ledger. Quit rejoicing when you get a loan. Recognize the curse for what it is. Reject what Jesus defeated. Walk in the victory of the blessing. You are the head and not the tail.

# RELATIONSHIPS

## Wisdom for Healthy Relationships

It takes less time, effort, equipment, and planning to remove a small tree than it does a large one. A sapling is easier to cut down than a mighty oak tree.

Several years ago, my wife, Loretta and I lived on a point overlooking the Lake of the Ozarks. The view was great. However, the view straight out over the lake was blocked by a tall, full-sized oak tree.

Even though I had a wonderful view to the left and right, I wanted to look straight ahead, so I decided to remove the tree all by myself. After all, I was a man with a chainsaw in a red and black plaid flannel shirt. No tree was too big for me.

The tree appeared to be slightly leaning toward the lake, away from the house. I soon discovered that things are not always as they appear. I can only imagine what Loretta was thinking when she looked out the window and saw me trying to hold back the tree from falling on the house. I had cut the wedge properly, but somehow my new Craftsman chainsaw was wedged between the trunk and the tree. It was the only thing that was preventing my A-frame roof from becoming a V-frame roof.

After several hours and much help, the tree toppled in the right direction. The house was saved, but my macho male ego was crushed.

God delivered me and my house that day, but several valuable lessons were learned.

1) Always consult with your spouse (if you're married) or a trusted person in your life before doing something you've never done.

2) Don't overestimate your abilities.

3) Eliminate "trees" that you know will be a problem while they are still small. The longer you put it off, the more you have to deal with.

God intends for our relationships to be full of life, but for many of us there are hurts and offenses that date years into the past. As a pastor, I have discovered that a relationship going bad is easier to heal than a relationship gone bad.

I encourage you today to not allow small hurts and offenses to grow. Maintaining relationships with a spouse, friends, or family members is a consistent daily work. If we would only walk in the fruit of the Spirit as the Bible instructs, then the saplings will never become mighty oaks.

> *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.*
>
> Galatians 5:22,23

## What Is Holding Your Relationship Together?

> *Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.*
>
> Ecclesiastes 4:9–12

This Scripture passage is one that is used many times in weddings. The threefold cord in the marriage is the husband, the wife, and the Holy Spirit.

Every relationship you have has one invisible partner and that's the cord that ties the relationship together. Whether it's a marriage relationship, a church relationship, a friendship, or a business partnership, there is an invisible force that is the third cord that binds them together. If the partners are in agreement with the principles of God and have allowed the relationship to be based on God's Word, then that third cord in the relationship will be the Holy Spirit. This opens the door for blessings from God.

Sadly, not all relationships are bound together by God. It's amazing what ties some people together. Recently a lady was telling me about a long-time friendship that she had with a neighbor. Her neighbor was moving to another state and she was concerned that this would terminate the relationship.

I asked her what it was that she and her friend had in common, only to hear the surprising response. She said, "Once a week we get together and have tea and we discuss what's happened recently in the life of 'John Doe.' We've been doing this for years. It's our own personal soap opera." When I asked her why they always talked about "John Doe," she replied, "That's easy. We both have a mutual hatred for him. He has hurt us both and we enjoy discussing his failures."It's sad, but the third cord that held these two ladies together in their friendship was a spirit of hatred. Unfortunately, that is the basis for some relationships. Others are tied together by unforgiveness or rebellion. This should not be.

Every relationship worth having should be bound by the Spirit of God. And then instead of the relationship being a weight that will lead to destruction, it will allow the two to withstand evil and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

A relationship based on godly principles and sealed by the binding of the Holy Spirit will be refreshing, peaceful, and never burdensome.

## Developing a Relationship with the Father

We need to develop a relationship with God. We must have regular prayer, Bible study, and conversation with Him so we can know Him, not just know about Him, and so we can say the things He says.

Anytime we have a poor confession, anytime we say something that is contrary to the Word of God, what we really are doing is calling God a liar. Anytime that we say, “I don’t think it’s God’s will that I be healed,” or “I don’t think it’s God’s will that I be prosperous,” we are calling God a liar.

If God says something and you say something that is different, one of you has got to be a liar. Do you understand that? If you say something and God says something and they don’t line up, one is telling the truth and one is telling a lie. Who do you think is lying? Either God tells the truth and we say what God says and we are truth tellers too; or God tells the truth and we don’t agree with Him and we are liars. Those are the only two options.

It is impossible for God to lie. God does not change. If He says He’s the Lord our God who heals us, then He is the source of our healing. (Ex. 15:26.) If He says He takes pleasure in the prosperity of the saints, then He wants us to be prosperous. (Ps. 35:27; 3 John 2.) If He says to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and He’ll supply all our needs, then He will supply all our needs if we seek Him and His righteousness first. (Matt. 6:33.) Anything else is a lie. We must make our confession align with His confession.

If our words align with God’s Word, then we unlock revelation knowledge and receive our request. (1 John 5:14,15.)

We must expect the same results in our lives that Christians had in the book of Acts. They were doing something that a lot of people aren’t doing today. They repented. Repentance involves renunciation of evil and a reversal. You’ve got to renounce the things of evil and turn around 180 degrees and start moving in the other direction.

There must be submission in your life. You must be submissive to God and have a teachable spirit. Christians must be teachable. You will receive revelation knowledge of the Word of God if you have a teachable spirit or a submissive heart.

God wants to have a relationship with us. For our relationship with Him to grow, we must not call Him a liar. We must be like Jesus and only say and do what the Father speaks. (John 8:28.)

Remember, faith is hearing God’s Word, believing God’s Word, speaking God’s

Word, and doing God's Word.

> *He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.*
>
> John 14:21

## Seeking the Favor of the Father

> *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 11:1

Every generation has its subculture. A few weeks ago, I was looking through some old photographs from the turn of the century that were taken at a presidential gathering. The men were dressed in suits and the ladies in dresses. Although they had on their very best to impress the leaders of our government and each other, they looked relatively normal.

Outside of the building there was a protest going on by what I call a subculture group. These people were wearing the "in" styles of the day. The men were wearing slacks with bands below their knees, long chains, wide lapels, strange hairdos and hats. The women were equally as bizarre. I'm sure they thought they were in the new wave of society. However, that style only lasted for three or four years and then a new subculture style came along.

Today is no different. But there is a trend that I find rather disturbing. Many churches, in order to be relevant, are catering to and trying to attract the temporary subcultures of our day. There is a great danger in this. Subcultures are subject to the current political thinking, superstar dress code, and are influenced by a type of popularity hero worship. If the most popular contemporary person of our day started dressing in a bizarre manner, it would only be a matter of days before that form of dress would be sold in the department stores. But likewise, in time, it would fade away.

It is important that we not ignore subcultures. We should have ministries within the church that reach out to every ethnic group and culture in the community. We must truly be seeker sensitive and not reject anyone because of their style. While some churches and ministries may specialize in a certain theme or style, the universal Church must never lose the understanding that we are created in God's image, and we will become like Him. During the great awakenings and revivals of the past century, the world was drawn to a holy God by holy men and women who simply preached the truth.

God's Word never changes. God does not change. Jesus does not change and the

Holy Spirit does not change. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are for the same purpose now that they were in the first century. In an attempt to be relevant to man, some Christians have crossed the line. In the quest to become relevant, many have fallen into political correctness. We must become relevant to God and then we will be automatically relevant to man.

The power and gifts of the Holy Spirit, which produce the miracle power of God, will change lives and set people free. Of course, we must be sensitive to the needs of people. Of course, we must be relevant to our community. Yes, we must present ourselves in a way that does not make the world feel condemned. However, we cannot do this at the expense of excluding the Holy Spirit from our services and looking and acting like the world.

Years ago at a ministers' conference, the statement was made that shepherds (pastors) should smell like their sheep. But sometimes, I've noticed that some pastors wallow in the sheep pen so much that instead of smelling like sheep, they smell like sheep dung.

The point is this. Instead of pastors gathering all the problems of the people and taking their problems to God and saying, "God, here are my people's problems," pastors should instead go and spend time with the Father and meditate on His Word and take His Word to the people. Again, rather than solely representing the people to God, we must represent God to the people. When people get around me, I want to smell like the Father!

Water flowing from the peak of the mountain is always pure. James 1:17 tells us that the perfect gifts come from above. The Father and His Word are consistent and do not change through all generations. People, customs, and cultures change, but salvation, faith, and grace do not. We should never change the Word in order to please people.

In the early years of the church, the apostle Paul asked this question, "Am I trying to win the favor of men, or of God?" (Gal. 1:10 amp). And that is my question to the church today. Are we seeking the favor of God or the favor of people?

Scripture Reference:

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)

# RELIGION

## True Religion

Some people call themselves religious, but are they really? To some, being religious means that they attend church regularly. To others, it means that they are simply a follower of Jesus. And to some, it means simply that a person appears to be very spiritual. Interestingly though, the Bible gives a different definition of what pure religion really is.

James, the brother of Jesus and the pastor of the church in Jerusalem, wrote this. He said,

> *Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*
>
> James 1:27

It is time for the Church to quit playing church and start getting religious—truly religious. Over the years, the word religious has become a negative word, mainly because of people who say they are religious and are not. In order to walk in pure religion before God, who is our Father, James 1:27 says that people must specifically do two things.

Number one, we must think beyond our own needs and help those who cannot help themselves. We must reach out and actually be a physical benefit to orphans and the widows in the church.

Recently I heard about a group of Christian men who got together and purchased an automobile for a widow in their church. I know of several families who have taken orphans into their homes, fed and clothed them, and treated them as their own children. According to the Bible, this is true religion and it is good. Helping the orphans and widows is a good thing, but there is more.

The second part of true religion is to keep oneself unspotted from the world. While praying, Jesus told the Father that He knew His disciples and all of those who would follow Him were in the world. (John 17:11.) Then He said something very interesting. He asked His Father to not take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil in it. (v.15.) He went on to say that even though we may be in the world, we are not of the world. (v. 16.) The responsibility to remain unspotted is ours. We are the ones who ultimately operate in the power of grace to keep ourselves clean and holy.

Today I want to encourage you to be truly religious. First, give your home church a call (if you don’t have one, make it a priority to get one). Find out if they have a program where they help orphans and widows within your church.

Give into that program with your money or time. Your obedience in helping others in need will bring blessing into your life.

Secondly, clean up your life. Get into God's Word and discover how a Christian should live and then live that way. Actually, it's quite simple. God has already figured it out for you and given you His grace to help you. (2 Cor. 12:9.)

I don't do much counseling, but when I do, my counseling sessions are very short. Usually I look at the person and say, "Do you know what the Bible says to do?" They usually nod yes. Then I ask them, "Do you know what the Bible says not to do?" Again I usually receive an affirmative response. Then I say, "Okay. Then do what the Bible says to do and don't do what it says not to do and all your problems are solved."

The bottom line is this: True religion is a good thing and it is a God thing. It involves two elements—helping others and living a clean, "unspotted" life. So today, I encourage you to be truly religious.

# RENEWING THE MIND

## You Can't Live Without Daily Bread

Jesus talked about bread several times. In John 6:35, He told us, "I am the bread of life." Again, in Matthew 6:11 He said, "Give us this day our daily bread." That doesn't just mean our physical bread. That means our spiritual bread. We must have the daily renewing of our mind by the Word of God.

We must have the Word of God daily. We need to renew our mind with Jesus. We need to renew our mind with the Messiah. We need to renew our mind with the Word of God every single day.

Do we renew our mind with Jesus or do we renew our mind with the Word of God or do we renew our mind with Christ? The answer is all of the above. There is no difference. When we talk about the Word of God, we are talking about Jesus. (John 1:1,14.) That's why when you say something in the name of Jesus, there is so much power. When you say, "in the name of Jesus," you are invoking all of the words that God has spoken. Every word that has been spoken from the mouth of God can be summed up into one word: Jesus.

When you speak to a demon and you say, "In the name of Jesus be gone," you are not just saying the name of a man. You're not just saying the name of God. You're saying "in the name of the Word of God." You're speaking all of the Bible promises, and the entire covenant and all of the blood. You're saying

everything in the Word in one word. You're saying power. You're moving power when you say the name of Jesus because you are saying the Word of God. We live by the name of Jesus. We live by the Word of God.

In Mark 14:24 Jesus said, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which was shed for many." It was shed for everybody. Did everybody get it? No, only those who believe received the blood of the New Covenant. In Luke 24:30 it says, "Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them."

Luke continued in verse 31, saying, "Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight." How did they know it was Jesus? Because they recognized that when He gave that bread and broke it, that He was the bread. He was doing that as representative of Himself. When He revealed Himself as the bread of life, their eyes were opened.

Jesus revealed Himself through the broken bread, and then a miracle happened. In Luke 24:35 it says, "And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread."

There are some symbolic things here. Remember how Jesus said, "I don't say anything unless the Father has said it first, and I don't do anything unless the Father has spoken"? (John 12:49–50.) Everything that Jesus said had to be the Word of God—everything! The reason is that Jesus didn't say anything unless the Father said it first.

That's the way we need to be. We need to quit stating our opinions and thoughts and speak the Word of God. Get out the Word, break the bread and see what God has said, and then say what God said. If you say what God said, then the words that will proceed from your mouth will be just like the words that proceeded from Jesus' mouth. They will be light; they will be life; they will be spirit; there will be power behind them. (John 6:63.)

Jesus came to earth as a man. He suffered the same things that we suffer. He was tempted by everything that we are tempted by. Jesus had to get what He got the same way we do. He had to get it through faith and by repeating what God said. The reason the words that Jesus spoke were spirit and they were life is because what He spoke was the Word of God. I propose this to you: if you only say what God says, then your words will be like the words of Jesus.

How do we know what God says? There is only one way. We must break bread daily—we must open the Word and eat it. Unless we have the Word in us, we will not be able to speak it with power in our time of need.

Remember, Jesus said that what we have in our hearts is what will come out of

our mouths. So, hide the Word in your heart and it will flow with power.

# RESPECT

## Respect for the House of God

I come from a denominational background. As a child, I attended church with my parents every Wednesday and Sunday—morning and night. My parents made sure I participated in all the church functions, both spiritually and socially. I was in the church bell choir and sang with various musical quartets. As a child, attending church was not an option. My father never considered what I had done the day before or what I had to do the next day. How I felt was irrelevant. On Sunday morning we went to church.

Recently, I asked a husband and wife how their child was doing because I hadn't seen him at church for a while. Their response startled me. They said, "He hasn't been wanting to come lately." I thought to myself, Who's the parent in this household? Those same parents do not allow their child to decide whether or not he goes to school. They require school attendance, regardless. However, they let him choose whether or not he attends church. Without realizing it, those parents are instilling in that child the thought that education is important, but God isn't.

Likewise, when children are required to show respect for teachers at school, but not required to show respect for elders at church, it also sends the wrong message.

While we were at church, my parents had several rules for me. One rule was that I did not talk, walk, or look around during prayer. I was not allowed to talk or whisper during the sermon. I remember one incident where I leaned over to my father and quietly asked if I could go outside. He discreetly shook his head no. I leaned over a second time and whispered, "Dad, may I go outside?" After I asked him the third or fourth time, he looked at me and said, "You wanna go outside?" We went outside together. I never asked him again. My dad could have "spared the rod" that day, but by not sparing the rod and giving me proper discipline, it instilled within me respect for God and for His sanctuary.

I am in no way advocating hurting children or child abuse. However, some households are ruled by the children and because parental authority has not been established in many homes, the lack of respect is carried over into the church.

A few years ago, I was standing at the front door of our church greeting people as they arrived. One of our youth brought a guest with him and the guest was

wearing a T-shirt with a nude woman on it. Since my goal is to minister to people and not run them away, I pulled the young man aside and told him he was welcome at church, but I couldn't let him go into the sanctuary with that T-shirt on. He stepped into the restroom, turned it inside out, and came to church.

It is true that under the New Covenant, the Spirit of God lives inside of each and every believer. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit. However, we cannot use this as an excuse to not honor God when we come together corporately.

Once while attending a concert of the Moscow Philharmonic, I was handed a card upon entering the auditorium. The card listed several things that were not allowed during the concert including talking, whispering, and getting up and walking around. Shouldn't God at least be given the same respect that the world gives to secular musicians?

Our children should be taught respect for the house of God. But how can they be taught respect when adults have none. In many churches, the back of the sanctuary has the activity of a bus station during the service.

Once, I saw a family bring fast food into the sanctuary for themselves and for their children. In amazement, I watched them eat hamburgers, fries, and soda all through praise and worship. While visiting another church, I watched a man and his family eat cupcakes and ice cream cones. They brought them in after the speaker had already started speaking and sat in the center on the second row. As the nationally known speaker gave his teaching, most eyes in the auditorium were on the ice cream-licking children. There was no respect for this great man of God.

Disrespect for God's house is indirectly showing disrespect for God. All through the Word we find where God requires respect and honor. God has not changed.

Scripture References:

You shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary: I am the Lord. (Leviticus 26:2)

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4 nasb)

## Protect Your Man of God

At a recent ministers' conference, there was a seminar entitled, "Protecting the Anointing." I overheard one minister comment, "Why should we try to protect the anointing? I thought it was the anointing that protected us!" Although his statement is true, it is also true that many times a good message from God can go unheard because of the senseless words of a third party. Let me explain.

A few years ago, I was prepared to deliver a specific word from God to my congregation. I spent much time in prayer and preparation in order to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. I wanted to deliver the message accurately and in the spirit that I received it. As I turned a corner in the hallway to the auditorium, an usher stepped forward, pointed his finger in my face, and began to tell me how he and his family would be leaving the church because of a letter someone in our church had written. I let him rant and rave for a couple of minutes. When I asked him what the letter said, still huffing and hyperventilating, he said, “Well, I haven’t actually read it myself, but I know what it says.”The letter wasn’t the issue. The enemy knew that I had a message from God. The enemy also knew who he could use to attempt to spoil the message. The incident did not affect the teaching that day, although it took me a while to refocus. Actually, it made me more determined to deliver God’s message to the people.

I’ve often thought about writing a book about some of the crazy things that have happened in my services. Once while speaking in Iowa, I had a man leap out of the congregation, run to the platform, and try to take me down. For a moment, I felt like a quarterback being sacked. I kept my cool, the power of God fell on the meeting, and the man got delivered from demonic possession. Satan lost again.

Another time, I walked up to the pulpit as a guest speaker in another church. I opened my Bible and said, “Jesus is Lord!” Immediately a man on the front row leaped to his feet and yelled, “No, He is not!” I leaned over the pulpit, pointed my finger in his face, and said, “Yes, He is, and in the name of Jesus, sit down and be quiet!” The young man sat down and never uttered another word for the remainder of the service.

There are some people who will get into the face of a minister just before a service and talk incessantly. Little do they know they are being used by the enemy in an attempt to distract the man or woman of God from their message. Although a minister may be able to recover from unkind words or from someone who will just not stop talking, it may affect the intensity, the clarity, and the passion of the message being delivered.

A few months ago, I sat in a room for fifteen minutes with an internationally-known minister just before he was to speak. There was no one else in the green room. Nothing was spoken. It was obvious to me he was meditating on the message and communicating with God. This was not the time for small talk. For me to have tried to strike up a conversation about the weather or sports would have been rude and foolish.

While it is true that the anointing protects us, we must, to the best of our ability,

create an atmosphere for worship and ministry. We must respect God's house, His messenger, and the message. When we honor God, He blesses us with revelation knowledge.

So the next time you think about criticizing your pastor or the guest speaker because they distance themselves before a meeting, don't. It may be that they are in the process of communicating with God to receive a word for you.

Scripture References:
He said to them, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves. (Mark 6:31–32)

Then Jesus went into a house to get away from the crowd. (Mark 7:17 nlt)

## Respect and Honor

For centuries, authors have written about the younger generation. From the time of the Roman Empire until now, one thing has always been believed and written —no one seems to feel that the next generation of young adults has the proper respect for their elders, parents, or property.

Through the centuries, each adult generation has believed the youth of their generation are disrespectful. And the reason, of course, is because that's the way it appears. However, the truth is, each generation is the product of the teaching and training of the previous generation.

A couple of years ago, one of the young boys at our church needed a ride to a local store so his parents could pick him up. They were having transportation problems and since I was going that way, I volunteered to drop him off. As we started down the highway, the young man reached in his pocket and pulled out a candy bar. He started looking out the windows in several directions, then immediately threw the candy bar wrapper out the window. When I commented that he shouldn't litter, his response was, "Dad says it's okay as long as you don't see a policeman when you do it." That parent had trained his child that disrespect and lawlessness was acceptable as long as you didn't get caught.

When I was a young boy growing up in Raytown, Missouri, the pastor at the church I attended seemed quite old to me at the time (probably in his fifties). My parents referred to him as Brother Porter. They were friends. Other adults referred to him as Pastor Porter or Rev. Porter. He was a great man of God and I respected him. But if I would have called him "Hey, Joe," my mother would have washed my mouth out with soap or my dad would probably have taken me

outside the building for a nice little chat.

Rebellion is not of God. However, everything that looks like rebellion is not rebellion. Every generation attempts to assert itself by not being like the previous generation. If the adults have short hair, the next generation has long hair, and if the adults have long hair, the next generation shaves their heads.

But some things should not be changed. Respect, honor, and loyalty should be standards through all generations. Regardless of how a person looks on the outside, inside the fruit of the Spirit must be nurtured. As adults, we should never “write off” the younger generation just because they are different.

A trip to the farm will show that there is a huge difference between youth and age. While the yearlings are jumping around, running, and getting into mischief, the mature animals are standing quietly by chewing and watching. It’s natural for children and youth to act differently than the elderly. And neither should be criticized for the actions of their age.

To go to the house of God, we are not required to dress like we’re going to the senior prom. But there has been an extreme casualness that has entered the church on every level that demonstrates a lack of honor for God, His house, and His values. How can we expect the world to honor God when God’s people refer to Him as the “Big Man Upstairs,” and treat Him like a “good ole boy.”

Years ago as a man was leaving our church, he stopped off by the restroom. Later as he was walking out the double doors in front of the church, one of the doors bumped his shoulder and three rolls of toilet paper that he had stolen from the bathroom fell to the ground. How can adults who steal from God expect their children to respect the house of God? Of course, we will help people in need, but there is a huge gap between benevolence and theft. Adults should know the difference!

Instead of complaining about the disrespect of the young, let’s try training them by example. Actually, children imitating their parents has been much of the problem. Many adults show no respect for the commands of God and don’t trust God with their money.

When parents force their children to go to school, and then give them a choice of whether or not to attend church, that is teaching and training their child that the schoolhouse is more important than God’s house.

So here’s the conclusion. Adults must realign their values with God’s Word. Children are very perceptive. They can see past empty words, so the value change must take place in the heart. Empty words backed up by lame actions will not change anything, but conviction and motivated sincere actions will rally

the next generation.

Too many adults say one thing and do something else. Young people are looking for honesty, integrity, and spiritual insight. They will listen to someone who has something to say and they will imitate someone who is real. The young people didn't create the problems of today; they inherited them, and to blame them is wrong.

# RETURN OF JESUS (The)

## Looking for Faith

According to 1 Thessalonians 4:16, when Jesus returns to the earth, the Christians will be caught up in the air to be with Him. From that point on, we who are Christians will be with Him forever. As Christians, we know this and we are anxiously expecting and looking for His return.

But let me ask you something. When Jesus returns, what will He be looking for? What will He be expecting to find on the earth?

Jesus made an interesting statement in Luke that is often overlooked and untaught. In Luke 18:8 while speaking a parable, Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" What will Jesus be looking for when He returns? He will be looking for faith.

When Jesus returns, He will be coming for His Church. He will expect the Church to be spotless and without blemish. Jesus will not be returning for a puny, beat down Church but He will be looking for a Church that is victorious, powerful, and full of faith.

In order for the Church to have faith when Jesus comes back, we must believe what God says and act on that belief. It will not do any good to believe God unless we put our belief into action. That's what is called faith.When we have faith, we can overcome the things of the world. Now don't take me wrong. We won't eliminate our problems. Satan and his demonic forces will always be trying to destroy us, but we will be able to go through our trials without fear, knowing that God always does what He says.

Faith is a substance and a gift of God. (Heb. 11:1; Eph. 2:8.) We can accept it and develop it or we can reject it. But remember this—when Jesus returns, and He will, He will be looking for faith on the earth.

Now let me ask you something else. What makes faith so important that Jesus would look for it when He returns? Well, here's the answer. God places a very

high value on belief.

Several years ago, I gave an automobile to a young man who really needed the transportation. I told him that it was his. He didn't owe me anything. All he had to do was come and get it. Every time I saw him, I reminded him that the car was his. It was paid for. Just come and get it. However, he never showed up.

Finally, after much urging without result, I disposed of the auto by other means. When I asked the young man why he hadn't picked up the car, he said it was because he didn't really believe I had given it to him.

Unfortunately that's the way many people are with God. He has given good gifts and they have not been accepted. Why? Probably for the same reason the young man didn't get the car. They don't really believe God has given these things to them.

You know, it's interesting to me that most people act like Jesus will be looking for something else when He returns. When He returns, He will not be looking for your church attendance records. He will not be looking for your offering report. It is good to tithe and to attend church, but according to Jesus himself, He will be looking for one thing and that is faith.

Remember what Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"

# RIGHT THINKING

## Examine Your Thoughts

> *These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.*
>
> Matthew 15:8,9

Jesus said that out of the abundance of our heart, our mouth speaks. (Matt. 12:34.) Of course this is true, but we also see from Matthew 15:8 that it is possible to say something that's not in our heart. Of course, ultimately, our heart will be shown through our words.

Words and observations enter through the realm of the soul. When words come into the mind, a decision must be made. You must decide whether to keep or reject the words that have just entered. If you accept them, they will eventually enter the heart and either strengthen the fear or strengthen the faith. Every thought you have either complements or contends with faith.

When Jesus was talking to His disciples about leaving, He said, “Because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart” (John 16:6). Your heart can be sad or it can be happy. A great determination of whether you have a sad or happy heart is by whether you accept words of victory or words of defeat, words of light or words of darkness that enter into the realm of the soul.

When I was in high school, some of my friends and I would randomly pick out a student and each of us throughout the day while passing in the hall would tell him he looked like he didn’t feel well. At first, the “victim” would reject it and say something like, “I don’t feel bad.” But after a few hours of several different people saying the same thing, the chosen student would be in the school clinic asking if he could go home because he didn’t feel good.

What we did wasn’t nice and I don’t recommend for any young person to do what I did. However, it does prove a principle. If you listen to a lie and allow it to enter your heart, you will eventually speak the lie yourself and act on it.

We may say things we don’t believe, but if we continue to repeat the lies of the devil, these lies will embed themselves in our hearts. Then we will speak them and they will become reality.

As words enter your thought realm, keep the good and reject the bad. Examine every thought and determine its source. Anything that is not of God should be rejected.

> *Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate [think] on these things.*
>
> Philippians 4:8 explanation mine

## Heavenly Minded

The other day, I heard a young man who was a new Christian talking about Jesus and the Bible. He was joyful and excited. In fact, he was so excited about the things of God that the other person evidently felt it was their duty to shed some reality on the conversation. The older person looked at the young man with a very serious expression and said, “When I first became a Christian I was excited like you, but later I matured. If you don’t watch yourself, you may become so heavenly minded that you will be no earthly good.”

Well, let me say this about that statement—baloney!

Yes, there is an old phrase that says, “You are so heavenly minded that you’re of no earthly good.” While this may sound good, the reality is, it doesn’t line up

with the Word of God. We as Christians cannot listen to the witty phrases and clichés of the world and treat them as though they are the Word of God. Let's get real. As Christians, we must rely on God's true Word and nothing else.

So, with that in mind, let's look at this statement and examine the truth. Here's the truth—the more heavenly minded we become, the more earthly good we will be.

Actually, Satan wants us to not be heavenly minded. To be heavenly minded means that we love God and seek His will, that we walk in the Word, and that we walk by faith instead of by what we see. When we walk in faith, it pleases God. And Satan hates it when we please God.

We've seen that the Bible says in Matthew 6:33, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." This verse clearly states that in order to have our earthly needs provided, we must first and foremost seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. In other words, we must be heavenly minded.

It's interesting that many church members want to confine their spirituality to two hours on Sunday and possibly another meeting during the week. Then the rest of the week they are earthly minded and the things of God are a side issue and rarely thought of. That should not be!

If we as Christians want to be effective here on earth, we must increase our heavenly mindedness. When we have a problem in our relationships, it's a good time to seek God. When we have a problem in our finances, that's a time to seek God. When we have to make a difficult decision, that's a good time to seek God.

But a better time to seek God is to seek Him continually. Don't wait for the problem. Be heavenly minded and stay in His Word, and you will increase your faith. Then, when problems arise, you will be better equipped to deal with them.

Now don't take me wrong. Sometimes people are not heavenly minded, they're just goofy. We need to be heavenly minded, but we must not become goofy. Seek God daily. Continually be in communion with God by way of prayer and worship. There is a difference between seeking God and acting like a goof ball.

Over the years I have found that most people who act real religious are doing just that—acting. So, don't act religious, be heavenly minded. Keep focused on the things of God. And when that excited new Christian comes along, bubbling over with joy, stand close. Maybe some of that joy will spill over on you.

# RIGHTEOUSNESS

## Are You Skilled in the Word of Righteousness?

There are many people who say, “This faith thing doesn’t work. I tried it once and it just doesn’t work.”

We don’t just try God. We receive the Spirit within us. We don’t test and try. We don’t just try faith. We’re either in faith or we’re not in faith. We either believe God or we don’t believe God. In a scripture concerning tithing, God says “Test Me, prove Me, and try Me in this and see if I won’t do as I promise.” (Mal. 3:10, author paraphrase.)

In the Bible are many conditional blessings God makes available for us to take advantage of. They say, “If you do this, then I’ll do that.” However, we cannot try the foundational truths of God. We’re either saved or we’re lost. We’re either in faith or in fear. We either accept the grace or refuse it. There is no middle ground.

Let me ask you something. How are you judging your faith? Are you judging it on whether a storm came or not? Are you one who would say, “I believed God would take care of me. Then I went out and got in my car and the engine would not start. I guess faith just doesn’t work.”?

The truth is, your car not starting has nothing to do with faith. Faith has to do with how you react to your problem. If you kick it and cuss and act like a fool, you aren’t in faith. The act of faith begins when you say, “Father, in the name of Jesus, I ask for Your grace to get my transportation lined out. Thank You for giving me Your grace.”

God will give you grace. Then you’ve got to believe He gave it to you. That’s where faith comes in. He can give you the grace, but you can make the grace of no effect if you don’t believe and walk in faith. Some people say, “Well, I tried grace.” Grace is not something you try. You accept it by faith. The writer of the book of Acts said, “With great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33).

Where do you think that power came from? It came from the great grace of God. It’s nothing they worked up. They didn’t just decide they were going to be spiritual hot shots and go around and heal a bunch of people. They didn’t get their heads together and say, “Look at that guy over there. Wouldn’t it be cool if we went over there and healed him?” No, they were led by the Holy Spirit. The grace of God moved upon them and they received the power to do the things God wanted them to do.

*Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who*

> *was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.*
>
> Acts 14:3

Think about it. God was bearing witness to the word of His grace. So don't worry; just be led by the Spirit. God will not fail you! He has great, unlimited grace for you.

When we are born again, we are born righteous. We are made righteous and we work toward holiness. Being righteous gives us the right to stand before God. When we get saved (born again), we are entitled to go to God, stand in the presence of the Father in the name of Jesus, and make our petitions known.

How do we become righteous? We become righteous by being born again. When we're born again, we are born righteous.

Hebrews 5:13 says, "Everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness." What does that mean? Being unskilled in the word of righteousness means that you do not understand you became righteous when you were saved, so you try to accomplish righteousness through your works. It means you don't understand that you can go boldly before the throne of grace and say, "Father, in the name of Jesus, I ask for Your grace in this situation."

If you do not know you are in right standing with God, if you do not know you can go before the Father and He will by grace meet your need, then you are unskilled in the word of righteousness. Remember, when you are born again, you are born righteous. You are put right with God through Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:30.)

# SALVATION

## The Default Setting Is Death

> *He who believes in [Jesus] is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*
>
> John 3:18

Two things are certain in life. God wants to bless you and Satan wants to destroy you. God is looking for every way possible to bring joy into your life. His plan is for you to have everlasting life. Starting now, and continuing throughout all eternity, He wants to shower you with blessings.

On the other hand, Satan is looking for every way possible to destroy you. His

destiny has already been established. He has been judged and sentenced to the pit. (Rev. 20:3.) His goal is to pull God's creation into the pit with him. He lives in darkness and, in fact, is the prince of that kingdom. He hates the light and everything that the light represents. His plan for Christians is sickness, poverty, and death to all our relationships. Everything that God holds dear, such as character, integrity, peace, and joy, Satan hates.

In the beginning, God created man and clothed him with His glory.[46] Adam rejected God and brought a curse upon mankind. (Gen. 3.) Four thousand years later, God sent His Son, Jesus, to reverse the curse so that we could live under the blessings of God instead of the curses of the devil. This generation is living in the dispensation of choice. We choose our destiny. We decide whether we will live under the curse or under the blessings of God.

Because of a lack of knowledge or because of procrastination, many people are not making a choice. What they don't realize is that by not making a choice, they have allowed the choice to be made for them.

To choose Jesus and receive Him as Lord and Savior is a choice for life. (Deut. 30:19.) To reject Jesus is choosing the devil's plan. But there is a default setting. If you fail to choose, the default setting is death.

We are born into darkness and when we become born again, we are transformed into the kingdom of light. (Col. 1:12–13.) Without the born-again experience, there is no transformation and we remain in darkness.

Salvation is the most vital decision for you. This one decision will determine your eternal existence. If you haven't already chosen salvation, it should not be taken lightly and the choice should be made immediately. Remember, if you fail to choose, the choice has been made for you.

> *You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.*
>
> Ephesians 5:8

## Works Will Not Save You

It's not my policy to eavesdrop or listen in on someone else's conversation, but sometimes you get into a situation where you cannot help but overhear. Recently that happened to me.

I heard two people talking about tithing. As you most likely know, the tithe is 10 percent of our increase that God says should go into the storehouse. (Mal. 3:10–11.) One of these two folks seemed to be quite adamant about tithing. In fact, he said that if a person didn't tithe, they wouldn't go to heaven. In other words, they

would not be saved and would be condemned to an eternal existence in hell because they did not tithe.

After hearing their conversation, I was reminded of a TV minister I heard say something similar. He said that if a person did not attend church every time the doors were open, he doubted if they were truly Christians. Also, he said that his family had always attended church and attending church would keep you from having any problems in your life. While he was probably sincere, his way of thinking was misguided and misleading.

You can attend church three times a week. You can give your tithe to that same church. You can give another 10 percent in offerings to missionaries and still be lost and spend all eternity separated from Christ and never see heaven.

How can this be? Well, it's this way. You are not saved from hell and born again because of anything you can do. Nothing you can do will save you, except the act of accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life. It's because of what He did and not what you can do that saves you.

Now, don't take me wrong. It is the will of God that we should assemble ourselves for the purpose of building each other up in faith. It is His will that we tithe, that we give 10 percent of our increase to the church. Remember, in James 1:27 it says that true religion is to take care of the orphans and widows. How can the church take care of the orphans and widows if it has no funds? Should they steal? Of course not! God wants us to give. Taking care of the orphans and widows is a good thing and Christians are supposed to do it—but doing it will not save you.

Let's look at God's Word and see what it says about being saved and attaining everlasting life.

Romans 10:9 says, "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."

It's important to know the truth on this. Obeying the law doesn't save you. In fact, the Bible says in Galatians 2:21 that if righteousness comes through the law, then Jesus died in vain. Once again, it's not what you do, but what He did. You just have to accept Him.

> *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*

John 3:16,17

*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

1 John 1:9

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

Romans 6:23

*If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

Romans 10:9,10

## Now Is the Time to Receive Jesus

Because God loves each individual soul, He paid the price to bring us back to Him. The price that was paid was the life of His Son, Jesus. (1 Cor. 7:23.) God loves us with an everlasting love. (Jer. 31:3.)

Compassion was the heartbeat of Jesus' ministry. Compassion is a sympathetic consciousness of another's distress together with a desire to alleviate it.

God has compassion for you and for me. He doesn't just feel sorry for us, but He also wants to see our distress alleviated. He really does care about every detail of our lives, no matter how small or insignificant it may seem to us.

There are those who have lived in the world so long they believe there is no way they could ever change. Others have so many sins in their lives they feel like they are beyond repair. Some even feel like God has no place for them in His kingdom.

These people have either never known God at all, or they feel like God has forgotten them. Some people are so ashamed and burdened with guilt because of the things that have happened in their lives that they are too embarrassed or afraid to seek help.

Don't ever underestimate the power of God. The work that Jesus accomplished upon the cross is far greater and infinitely more powerful than any sin man could ever commit.

It doesn't matter how far a person has gotten away from God, He can restore that person. It doesn't matter how guilty a person feels about his or her life, God can remove the guilt and replace it with peace. God wants to do it because He is a God of compassion.

Let's look at the words of Jesus relating to this in Luke 7:41–43.

> *"There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged."*

So you see, God can turn any situation around. When it seems we are far from God, it just gives Him that much more room to work in our lives. God loves us and He has compassion for us. He will take our past failures and defeats and turn them into victory, if we will let Him.

When God created us, He created each one of us with special talents and with a special job to do in His kingdom. But in order for us to use our talents, we must first allow Him to come into our lives and be our God.However, some people are afraid to make the decision to be a Christian. Even though God has over and over again shown us His compassion and love, many are afraid to accept His Son, Jesus, as their Savior.

Don't ever be afraid to come to God. Isaiah 1:18 says, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

If you are feeling a "tug" on the inside of you right now, that means God has a hold on you. That's not you doing that. It is the Spirit of God trying to draw you closer to Him. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44).

If you sense God trying to draw you closer, just stop whatever it is you are doing for a minute, and open your heart up to Him!

Don't be afraid. He is a God of compassion.

## Where Will You Be in a Million Years?

I have something to ask you. Where will you be in fifty years? Will you still be alive? Well, that's possible, but what about in a hundred years? Will you still exist or will you just be nothing. Will you be like an old bar of soap—all used up, there is nothing left and you just don't exist anymore?

Let me clear this up. One hundred years from now, you will be very much alive. In fact, a million years from now you will exist. You will be able to think. You will have intellect and you will have feelings. The question is not whether you will be alive or not. The question is where will you be?

It may not seem logical, but what you do in this lifetime determines where you

will be for all eternity. In the short time of 100 years or less, you will determine your existence forever. How long is eternity? It's not measurable because it's never-ending.

If you wanted to measure the length of something, what would you do? First, you would find a measuring device, a ruler or tape measure. Then you would go to one end and start measuring. But what if there was no end? It would be impossible to measure, right?

Well, that's the way it is with eternity—no beginning and no end. Time was created for man and we live within the framework of time. It has a beginning and it will have an end. God, however, does not live in time. He lives in eternity and someday we will be in eternity also. But we have a choice to make. Do we live in eternity with God and with all the greatness of heaven or do we live in eternity without Him in outer darkness, commonly called hell? The choice is ours!

God sent His Son, Jesus, to earth to live and die as a man. When Jesus was crucified, the powers of darkness thought they had destroyed God's plan for mankind, but they were wrong. Jesus came back to life and is now with God the Father. (Matt. 26:64.)

The Bible says that if we will accept and believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that God raised Him from the dead, and if we will choose to make Jesus the leader of our life, then we will be saved from an eternity of darkness. Instead, we will live for all eternity with Jesus in heaven.

Remember what the Bible says about this? Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Why does the Bible say that eternal life is a gift? Because it is a gift! Nothing you can do will save you. Only Jesus can do that and all you have to do is ask Him to be your Lord and Savior. It seems simple and our part is. Jesus has done all the difficult work. All we have to do is accept Him.

## Eternal Life in an Eternal Body

Not too many years ago, the best method of recording sound was on analog tape. While making a copy of an analog recording was possible, each reproduction showed a slight decline in quality. Although the copy was of less quality than the original, the difference was so slight that the average person could not tell the difference. But as copies were made of copies, over time it became very noticeable.

More recently, technology has developed digital recordings. Although an original digital recording doesn't sound better than an original analog recording,

there is one dramatic difference. Every generation of digital reproduction is equal to the original. And regardless of how many copies you make digitally, each one is identical.

Medical science tells us that the cells in our bodies regenerate periodically. They say that with each regeneration, there is a decrease in quality in much the same way the sound quality degenerates when you reproduce an analog tape. This was not God's plan, however. Man was created to regenerate eternally (digitally) so that in one million years the cells in his body would be as perfect as the day he was created.

On this earth, we might say that man is living in an "analog" body and from the moment of physical birth, it progresses toward physical death.

But why is this so? If man was created by God to live forever, why is it that his body only lasts for a few decades on this earth? Well, according to the Bible, it's the result of a decision that man made. Man decided to separate himself from the Life Force of the universe—God—and when he did, he began to die.

It seems that mankind is destined to live out meager lives, with each day a struggle to survive. Is there any hope for us? The answer is yes! There is a way to stop this death cycle. There is a way that we can live forever. The greatest fear known to man is the fear of death. But there is a way that we can no longer be threatened by death, now or ever.

The Bible says that Jesus came to the earth for the purpose of defeating death and giving eternal life to everyone who would receive it. This eternal life refers to the rebirth of your spirit, the real you deep inside, but it also includes the promise of receiving a new body when this one wears out.

When that happens, Paul, the apostle, explains that every Christian will receive a new body that will never decay, it will never age, and it will have superhuman powers. In fact, we are told that our bodies will be like the body that Jesus had after His resurrection. He traveled dimensionally, walked through walls, and gravity did not affect Him. Although He had a new body, He was still recognized by His friends and enjoyed fellowship with them over a meal.

So how do we move from imminent death to eternal life? How do we live without the fear of death? Actually, the answer is quite simple. The Bible says, "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9).

Every person born into this analog world is moving steadily toward death without hope and without the light of God. But when you make the choice to receive Jesus as your Lord, then immediately you move into the digital world

that never decays and is full of love and light.

Scripture References:

Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed —in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. (1 Corinthians 15:51–53)

The world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:17)

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? (1 Corinthians 15:54–55)

# SATAN

## Submit to God and Resist the Devil

*Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*

James 4:7

The question is often asked, “How can I get the devil off of my case?” The Word of God tells us clearly how to get the devil to flee from us. If you want to see the devil’s backside instead of his face, then listen to this simple formula in God’s Word.

We know that the book of James was written to believers. As a born-again believer, you have benefits the world does not have. There are promises and formulas about life that when applied by the world, will not work. But when they are applied by the born-again believer, they work flawlessly. James 4:7 is an example of this principle. Here, James says submit to God and resist the devil and the devil will flee. But how do we submit to God? We submit to Him by submitting to His will.

If you are in the military and you submit yourself to a superior officer, it means that you do everything the superior officer tells you to do. If he or she says to do fifty push-ups, you don’t argue. You do fifty push-ups. If he or she says to march

in the rain, you don't argue. You march in the rain.

Submitting to God is the same principle. If God says don't lie, you do not lie. If God says speak His Word, then you speak His Word. If God says to tithe, you don't argue. You don't debate the subject. You just do it cheerfully and willingly.

The second part of this formula is resist the devil. If you are on a diet, you might "hear" a piece of chocolate cake crying out to you and saying, "Eat me! Eat me!" You resist by not doing what the chocolate cake says to do! Once again, this is the same principle.

To resist the devil means you do not listen to his plans and you do not obey his words. Quite simply James 4:7 says, obey God and give no place to the devil and he will go away.

Of course, the devil is relentless and he never gives up. We see that when he tempted Jesus several times in the wilderness and finally "departed from Him for a season" (Luke 4:13 kjv). Continue submitting to God and continue resisting the devil (as Jesus did) and each time you will see him flee.

## Believing a Lie Can Be Deadly

All truth originates with God. The Bible says in Titus 1:2, "God…cannot lie." Again in Hebrews 6:18, it says the same thing, "It is impossible for God to lie." In contrast, Satan is a liar. Remember, Jesus said in John 8:44 that Satan "does not stand in the truth" and that "there is no truth in him."The fact that Satan is a liar would not present much of a problem if the lies of Satan were clearly identified as lies. But, unfortunately, they are not. He is the master of deception.

From the time of his fall from heaven until now, Satan has deceived many. He convinced one-third of the heavenly hosts that he could rise up and be like God. Like most liars, he began to believe his own lie. He told himself that he had the power to overthrow God and His kingdom and make it his own.

His lie was so convincing that one-third of all the created heavenly beings united with him and attempted to overthrow God and His kingdom. (See Rev. 12:4.) They attempted to place Satan on a throne in heaven.

For the angels to stand against God, they must have truly believed they had a good chance of defeating Him. After all, Satan, their leader, was sure of himself. He was beautiful. He was powerful.

However, when the battle was over, Satan and one-third of the angels were cast out of heaven. (Isa.14:12–14; Ezek. 28:12–18.) Even though they believed they could defeat God as Satan had told them, they still lost the battle. Just believing a lie is true and acting on the lie as if it were the truth, does not make it true. The

angels acted on what they thought was truth, but they were still cast out of heaven. Acting on a lie is deadly.

Today the devil still cannot produce truth because there is “none in him.” He is a liar. With hate in his heart, Satan still believes that he can somehow defeat God. With his ability to make a lie look like the truth, he plans daily to destroy God’s creation, man. Destroying man gives him great pleasure.

Satan’s method of attack is still through his mouth, and his battlefield is the mind of man. First, Satan lies, disguising the lie in beauty and the appearance of truth. He then convinces man to believe that the lie is truth. Then man acts on what he thinks is truth and is destroyed.

As Christians, we should be able to recognize Satan’s lies. A banker once told me that the best training for discovering a counterfeit bill is to study the real thing. He said that he would have his employees sit and study real money closely for hours. He wanted them to know the bills so well that when a counterfeit bill came along, they would immediately notice something was wrong.

This is the way we are to be concerning the truths of God. We are to study His Word daily. We are to meditate upon it and let it sink deeply into our hearts. We need the Word to become so alive within us that we know God’s nature instinctively. Then when we hear a whisper of a thought we know is not God, we can say as Jesus did, “Get thee behind me, Satan.”

Jesus said, “My sheep know my voice.” (John 10:4–5,27.) We must be able to recognize His voice without question and obey it without hesitation.

Have you ever thought something was true and then found out later it wasn’t? Everything you did from the time you believed the lie until the time you discovered the truth was in vain. The only things that count are the things you do that are based on truth.

# SECULARISM

## Secular Christianity

There is a war taking place and it’s not between the church and the world. It is within the church.

In the world system, there has always been a battle between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. This battle takes place in the secular arenas of politics and public organizations. The kingdom of light desires to proclaim the good news of the gospel publicly and the kingdom of darkness uses all their

resources to suppress the message.

Politically, we have seen this take place within nations. There have been, and are today, atheist nations. The former Soviet Socialist Republic (Russia) proclaimed within their constitution that God did not exist. And in our present time, there are nations that have elevated false gods, proclaiming that their worship was mandatory while denying their citizens the right to worship Jehovah God. Many times this restriction has been literally a death sentence.

However, this is not the battle I am speaking of. Within the church, we have a battle taking place between spiritual Christians and secular (carnal) Christians. We see this most evident at the times when we celebrate events that memorialize the foundation of our Christian existence. Let me explain.

There is nothing wrong with bunny rabbits and fictional stories of a good-hearted man passing out gifts. Jesus used parables and illustrations in all of His sermons. However, when the illustration becomes elevated higher than the message and it becomes “politically incorrect” to talk about the true message, something’s wrong.

As Christians, we have two events that we celebrate that represent the foundation of our victory over death. They are the birth and the resurrection of Jesus. We celebrate God sending His Son (Christmas) and God resurrecting His Son (Easter or Resurrection Day). More than anything else that is taught in the church, these two events should never be diluted or swept aside and replaced as secular holidays. Actually, there is nothing secular about these two events.

I am not advocating that we should eliminate the illustrations of a jolly old man who gives gifts. It’s a wonderful story that when used properly, can illustrate how God loved us so much that He gave, but we can never allow the jolly old man to replace the Child in the manger.

We live in a time like no generation before. We are surrounded by instant communication along with a continual flood of audio and video. With the ability to make anything we can imagine look real through computer graphics and technology, we must never forget the reality of what actually is real.

With the ability to create anything we can imagine, comes the responsibility of training our children to know the difference between truth and fiction. Because of God’s great love, He created us within this vast universe. Even though man rejected God and separated himself, God came up with a plan to redeem mankind so that our existence would not be futile, but glorious and eternal. This plan began with the birth of Jesus and was completed with His resurrection from death. These two events must never be diluted or shunned, but they need to be

memorialized and honored as dates that changed mankind for all eternity.

Scripture Reference:

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. (Romans 8:5–7)

# SHALOM

## As Your Soul Prospers

> *Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.*
>
> 3 John 2

God's will is that you prosper in all things. His plan is for you to be prosperous in all areas of your life—financially and in your relationships. God is very pleased when we walk in prosperity. Actually, the Bible tells us that God takes great pleasure when those who believe in Him are prosperous. (Ps. 35:27.)

Of course, prosperity is not just money, but it does include money. True prosperity is actually a word we've looked at before: shalom, meaning nothing broken and everything whole and complete in our lives. As we read further in 3 John 2, we see that it is also God's will that we be in health. Walking in good health is greater than being healed because one who walks in health does not need healing. God's desire for His children is that they prosper and walk in health.

As this verse continues, we find a very interesting revelation. Yes, it is God's will that we prosper and be in health, but our prosperity and health are connected to the prosperity of our souls. This verse says that God wants us to prosper and be in health to the same degree and in the same measure that our soul prospers. The health of your body cannot be separated from the thoughts, words, and emotions of the soul.

If it is true that the health of your body is determined by the prosperity of your soul, then it would be a good idea to understand what the soul is and how to bring it into the realm of prosperity.

First Thessalonians 5:23 says that we were created as three-part beings. We are spirit, soul, and body. In Genesis, we are told that we were created in the likeness

and image of God. (Gen. 1:26.) God himself is a three-part being, as the apostle John told us: “There are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one” (1 John 5:7).Your spirit is the real you. When you were born again, it was your spirit man that was born again. Your soul is your mind, your will, your intellect, and emotions. Let’s briefly examine how to walk in prosperity in these four areas of your soul.

1) Your mind.

Although our spirits are renewed by God, it is our responsibility to renew our minds. This is done by washing our minds with the Word of God. (See Eph. 5:26.) We must daily read and meditate on His Word. This will create a prosperous mind—one that is filled with faith, not fear, “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7).

2) Your will.

In order for your will to prosper, you must bring your will into agreement with God’s will. Being submitted alone is not enough. You must submit and willingly set aside your own plans and desires and embrace His with joy. Remember, Jesus said, “Not My will, but Thine, be done” (Luke 22:42 kjv).

3) Your intellect.

Many feel that education is not connected in any way to our health. However, God’s Word says in Hosea 4:6 that, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.” Second Timothy 2:15 says, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (kjv). We are also told that “All scripture is…profitable” (2 Tim. 3:16).

We cannot ignore God’s Word and expect to walk in revelation knowledge concerning any part of the Word that we have never read. Revelation knowledge of Scripture is given by the Holy Spirit to those who read and meditate on the Word. So, in order for our intellect to prosper, we must meditate on God’s Word and submit to the revelation of the Holy Spirit.

4) Your emotions.

God expects you to have control over your emotions. When God imparted love, joy, and peace, He also imparted self-control. (Gal. 5:22–23.) Walking in self-control is a choice, just like walking in love is a choice. A Christian has no excuse for not walking in self-control. Your emotions are subject to you. There may be reasons, but there are no excuses.

Proverbs 17:22 says, “A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.” The health of your body is subject to the condition of

your heart and your attitude.

So the next time you pray for prosperity or health, examine the prosperity of your soul. There is definitely a connection.

# SIN

## Sin—The Default Condition of No Faith

> *But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.*
>
> Romans 14:23

Anything not of faith is sin. According to Romans 14:23, sin is the default condition of not being in faith. To many, the statement, "Whatever is not from faith is sin" may seem harsh. But let's ask ourselves this question—what is not of faith?

Anything that God says in His Word that you do not agree with is anti-faith. In other words, if God says something and you disagree, it is a sin. When God says that He heals, if your religion believes He doesn't and you agree with your religion, then it's sin. If His Word commands you to forgive and you say that you can't do it, then you are in sin.

If God's Word commands you to love your neighbor, but instead you gossip and spread rumors, that's sin. Sin is any action that is contrary to faith. Sometimes I think it's a little soft when we say, "I'm not in faith concerning that."

Recently, a man and his wife in my church contacted me for counseling concerning their finances. They knew that I had financial interests in several banking organizations and had been successful in the business world and they felt that I would be able to give them good advice. Instead of giving them specific financial advice, I gave them the Word.

I told them about Isaiah 48:17 and how God would teach them to profit. I told them about Matthew 6:33, about how if they would seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness then God would add to them. I shared other verses and promises and then I said, "You must stand on God's Word in faith."

The gentleman looked at me and said, "I'm sorry, I just don't have faith for finances." Without knowing it, he was actually saying, "I am in sin concerning my finances."

The point is, God responds to faith. He does not positively respond to sin. Faith

is the key but sin is the rust that will keep the lock from opening, and anything that is not of faith is sin.

# SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

## Satan Doesn't Care If You Have Authority, as Long as You Don't Use It

> *Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.*
>
> Luke 10:19

In this verse, Jesus gave authority to the seventy disciples He sent out. Then in Mark 16:17–18, Jesus gave this same authority to everyone who believes in Him.

When Jesus gave believers this authority, He was giving the authority to the Church. Christians are the Church.

When you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, your spirit within you becomes born again. You become a part of the Church. When the Bible talks about the Church, if you are a believer in Jesus, it's talking about you. And, as a Christian, you are an heir to the authority Jesus gave.

So when Jesus said, "I give you the authority…over all the power of the enemy," He's talking to you. As a believer you have been given authority over the demonic forces of this world. They are subject to you.

Now, the devil doesn't care if you have authority over him, as long as you don't exercise it. As long as you stand idly by and let him destroy your home, finances, and body, he could care less how much authority you have. All that concerns him is whether or not you use it.

Once I substituted in a high school class for a day. When I went into the class, the students knew I had authority. They knew I had the authority to expel them from class and to give them a failing grade for that day. But, they were not sure if I knew I had authority or if I would use it. So, they pushed just a little. They started making a few noises.

When I didn't make them stop, they started getting a little louder. Eventually they were almost out of control. Then, I used my authority and got the class back in line. But it wasn't easy. I had let things get so far out of hand that it took all the class time just to get things under control. If I had used my authority in the

beginning, things would have never gotten out of control in the first place.

Satan is just like that high school class. He knows we have authority over him. He knows that with a word we can expel him. He knows that if we know our place in the body of Christ and operate in the anointing and authority that has been given to us, he will be ineffective in his attacks on us. So, he tests us to see if we know we have the authority. And, if we know we have it, he tests us to see if we will use it.

We should walk daily in our authority. We should keep things under control. When we allow things to get to the limit, we usually act out of desperation rather than authority.

Ephesians 1:22–23 tells us that we are the body and Jesus is the head. Verse 22 says that God has put all things—principalities, powers, might, dominion, and everything that has a name—under the feet of Jesus. The feet are a part of the body. As the body of Christ, as believers, the enemy is under our feet. (See Ps. 91:13; Rom. 16:20.)

Satan has been defeated, but he hasn't yet been destroyed. You must take authority over him daily. And you can. Jesus gave you that authority.

# SPIRITUAL DEATH

## Spiritual Death Is Separation from God

Jesus was the perfect sacrifice. When Jesus died and was resurrected, He defeated Satan. The Scripture tells us that He made a public display of the devil. (Col. 2:15.) Jesus led captivity captive (Eph. 4:8) and, once and for all, He did what He came to earth to do. He did what God told Him to do.

The Bible says that the reason the Son of Man was manifested was to destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8.) What were the works of the devil? His works were to destroy God's creation, man: "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

The devil came into the Garden of Eden to tempt Eve. (Gen. 3.) Adam sinned and fell short of the glory of God. Before that point, he was able to walk and talk with God. But when Adam fell into sin, he separated himself from being able to fellowship with God. That's what spiritual death is. Spiritual death is separation from God.

The work of the devil was to separate man from God. In the New Testament, we

are told that one of the works of Jesus was to reconcile man back to God. (2 Cor. 5:18–21.) The only way we can step into the presence of God again is for us to be cleansed of our sins and to be perfect. How can we do that? The answer is we can't do that. It is impossible. You cannot be good enough to get into the presence of God.

That's where grace comes in. We've seen that grace is God's willingness to do for us that thing that we can't do for ourselves. What is the thing we can't do? We cannot clean ourselves up enough to go into the presence of God. No matter how good or religious we try to be, no matter how much we tithe and give to the poor, no matter how many good works we do like mowing our neighbor's yard, no matter how much we love our spouse and hug our kids, we cannot get ourselves good enough to stand in the presence of God. We would die.

Satan liked it that way because man was forever separated from God. If man tried to get into the presence of God, he would die. In all of the earth, the high priest, once a year—one man out of all the millions of people on the earth—got to go into the Holy of Holies in the earthly temple or tabernacle (which was where he would enter into the presence of God). But even that was marginal. The sacrifices of the blood of bulls and goats had to be done just the perfect way.

But God had a plan. He sent His Son here to the earth so that all mankind could be cleansed of their sin. Then all mankind could do what they were created to do —to fellowship with God and to live with Him through all eternity. But either man had to be perfect or he had to have the perfect sacrifice. The perfect sacrifice, the only sacrifice that was without sin was Jesus. So God sent His Son, Jesus, here to the earth and He shed His blood on a cross for you and for me. (John 3:16.)

We must understand what Jesus did. We must understand that Jesus died for our sins, and then accept Him as our Lord and Savior. That's what we call becoming saved and born again. Without the blood of Jesus, we could accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior and it wouldn't do us any good at all. Without His perfect sacrifice, there is no remission of sins. (Heb. 10:10–21.)

Yet because of Jesus' sacrifice, we now have the ability to spend eternity with God. All we have to do is receive Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior by faith. All the work for salvation is complete. God's plan is in place. Remember, the choice is ours. Choose life!

# STRESS

## Living Today, Today

Most people today, in our fast paced society, seem to be under great stress. We face stress from many areas of our life—stress from work, school, home, and our friends.

A man once told me that he was upset because he knew he had a promotion coming in three months and he didn't know how he would perform at his new job. Every morning when he would get up, he would think of his upcoming new responsibilities and would be tense for the remainder of the day.

A lady also shared that she had a class reunion she was to attend, but because of her weight, she was concerned how her old friends would react to her. In fact, she was so concerned that she was sick daily from the stress she had placed on herself.

These two illustrations both have one main common characteristic. That is, both persons are actually living in the future instead of the present. If we would concern ourselves with today, not yesterday and not tomorrow, but today, much of our stress and many of our problems would disappear.

If your problem is overeating, then decide not to overeat today—not yesterday. Yesterday's gone. Not tomorrow—tomorrow is not here yet. Just don't overeat today. If you have a temper and argue with your family, then decide not to argue today—just today. One day is much easier to deal with.

If we try living our tomorrows before they get here, we can miss today completely. The Bible tells us, "This is the day the Lord has made. [I] will rejoice and be glad in it."

We can't live yesterday today and we can't live today tomorrow. We can only live today, today.

Let me suggest this. Each day when you wake up, take just five minutes and do this:

1) Thank God for the day He created for you.

2) List your goals and obligations for that one specific day.

3) Ask God to give you wisdom and understanding and to guide your steps through that day.

God created each day for you and me. He wants today to be a good day. He wants us to be healthy, emotionally sound, prosperous, and seeking Him and His will today.

## Sleeping in the Storm

It was the middle of the night and I was awake. The reason was because of a storm in my life. The sea was tossing my boat and it looked like it was going to sink. The storm was relentless and had no appearance of letting up. What should we do when it looks like all is lost and it looks like there is no hope?

The first thing we must do is quit looking at the storm. Studying the storm and rating the storm does nothing but give us greater knowledge of the storm. Our help doesn't come from the knowledge of the storm but from the truth of God's Word. That is the source of our freedom from the storms of life. (John 8:31–32.)

Once, Jesus was in a large fishing boat with His disciples on the Sea of Galilee when a severe storm came unexpectedly. (Mark 4:36–41.) It was night. It looked like the boat was going to be destroyed and they were all going to die, when they discovered Jesus asleep. To them it looked like the end was near and all was lost —and Jesus was sleeping!

The disciples were furious. They asked Jesus how He could sleep while everything in their lives was being destroyed. His reply is what we must hear today. He asked them two questions. He said, "Why are you fearful?" and "Why is it you have no faith?" (v. 40).

Maybe that is what we need to ask ourselves today. When the storm rages and it looks like our boat is sinking, let's ask ourselves why we are fearful and why it is that we have no faith. Then we must act like Jesus instead of acting like the disciples.

What did Jesus do? He spoke to the storm and commanded it to cease. He commanded the storm to be still and then there was a great calm.

Do you need a great calm in your life today? Do you need the storm to be stilled? Then here is the answer. Do what Jesus did and don't do what the disciples did. Imitate the One who had victory and don't imitate the ones who had failure.

It sounds simple because it is.

> *As evening came, Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross to the other side of the lake." So they took Jesus in the boat and started out, leaving the crowds behind (although other boats followed). But soon a fierce storm came up. High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water. Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, "Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown?"*

*When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Silence! Be still!" Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. Then he asked them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" The disciples were absolutely terrified. "Who is this man?" they asked each other. "Even the wind and waves obey him!"*

Mark 4:35–41 nlt

# SUBMISSION

## The Key to Great Faith

In the realm of the spirit there is a substance that can activate God's Word and put into action His promises in your life. Although it cannot be easily seen, it is powerful. When applied properly, this substance can increase and become the key to deliverance and victory. This substance is faith.

In Matthew 8, Jesus was approached by a Roman centurion who pleaded with Him to heal his servant who was at home paralyzed and tormented. When Jesus offered to travel to the centurion's house and heal the servant, the centurion gave a surprising response. Instead of allowing Jesus to come to his home, which in most people's eyes would have assured the healing of the servant, he said,

*"Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."*

Matthew 8:8–9

When Jesus heard the centurion make this statement, He marveled and made a proclamation that certainly astonished everyone with Him. Even though the centurion was not from the house of Israel and although he had no covenant with God, Jesus said, "I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" (v. 10). What was the key to the "great faith" that the centurion had? What quality was there that he possessed that caused our Lord Jesus to commend his great faith?

If we examine the centurion's statement, we will find that he understood the concept of submission and authority. He knew that in order for his men who served under him to honor his commands that he must himself be submitted to those with a higher rank. He knew that authority did not exist without submission and because of that, Jesus singled him out in front of all of His

disciples and proclaimed that the centurion was a man of great faith.

The principles in God's kingdom have not changed. Faith is still activated today in the same manner that it was 2,000 years ago. Of course, man has increased in science, mechanics, and medicine. But nevertheless, God's kingdom has not changed. Many study the Word of God and understand the principles of submission and authority, but few put into action the principle of submission to authority. In order to have mountain-moving faith, true submission to God's Word must be a lifestyle.

The centurion said, "For I am also a man under authority." He knew that Jesus was not doing His own will but rather following the commands of His Father. Remember, Jesus said that He had never spoken a word or performed an act unless the Father had told Him to do it first. That's true submission to the leadership of the Father. Because Jesus submitted to the Father, great miracles took place at His hand. Without the submission, there would have been no authority.

Now don't take me wrong. I'm not advocating that Christians should blindly submit themselves to every person who calls themselves a leader. But as a Christian, you know who has been placed in authority both in the world and in the church. Authority is needed to move the mountains in your life. But submission is required to activate the faith that moves the mountain.

Submission first, and then authority.

> *Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*
>
> James 4:7

## The Duty of Faith

> *So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you. And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'"*
>
> Luke 17:6–10

Jesus was a faith teacher. Everywhere He went He taught faith and everything

that He said contained faith. He taught how faith could be great and He illustrated “little faith.” All who traveled with Him knew that great faith was pleasing to Jesus.

One day the apostles approached Him with a request. They knew that great faith produced great miracles and that great faith pleased Jesus, so they requested, “Increase our faith” (v. 5). Jesus then gave an explanation of how faith could be increased.

In verse 6 in this opening passage, Jesus answered them with the illustration of the mustard seed. Jesus said that if they would have the faith of the smallest of seeds, then they could command a mulberry tree to be pulled up by its roots and to be planted in the sea and that it would obey them.

Then Jesus said something we would not expect Him to say. However, it provides us with a fresh look at faith and if we can understand the mystery of this illustration, it can unlock great faith in our lives today. Jesus told His disciples that if they had a servant who had toiled all day in the field, at the end of the day when the servant entered their house, instead of allowing the servant to eat first, the servant should continue working by preparing a meal for the master. Only after the master was fully satisfied should the servant even consider preparing his own meal.

Then Jesus said that the servant should not be thanked, nor should he expect to receive thanks for doing the thing he was commanded to do. It is like in the military, soldiers have duties they are expected to complete without receiving a pat on the back. They do receive a reward, but their reward is the victory that comes as a result of each soldier doing their duty. We are in the army of God and likewise, we are to complete our orders without hesitation or resistance in the same way that a servant makes dinner for the master.

Keep in mind, this illustration about the servant was Jesus’ reply to the apostles’ request to have their faith increased.

Remember, Romans 10:17 says, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” This is how faith comes. After faith arrives, it increases by the believer doing the duty of faith.

What is the duty of faith? As soldiers in the army of God, the duty of faith is seeking first our Commander’s requests and desires and putting Him before ourselves in all that we do. As we seek His kingdom first, He supplies all our need.

## A Submissive Tongue

What you say is important. In fact, it is so important that our lives are better or worse because of the words we speak.

Proverbs 15:4 says, “A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.”

Our words are containers. When we speak, our words contain power—the power to build or the power to destroy. Our words can contain faith that builds, or they can contain doubt and criticism that destroys. The interesting thing about that is we control the words that come out of our mouths. We are the ones who determine whether we will build or destroy.

There are several reasons why we as Christians should speak the Word of God. First, it’s the way we sow seeds. Many times Jesus talked about sowing and reaping. He said that what we sow, we would reap. And in Luke 8:11, Jesus made an interesting statement. He said the seed is the Word of God. We sow the Word when we speak it. Psalm 45:1 says, “My heart is overflowing with a good theme; I recite my composition concerning the King. My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.”

Secondly, speaking the Word causes faith to come. And as we’ve seen, “Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17). The only way to hear the Word is for the Word to be spoken. We as Christians need to continually speak the Word, as well as hear it through other avenues such as by going to church and listening to Christian music and teaching CDs, in order to build our faith.

How can we be at peace concerning the promises of God and how can we even believe them in order to have faith, if we have never heard them? And, how can we hear them if they are never spoken? Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. One of the best ways to hear the Word and get it deep in our hearts is by speaking it. When you speak with your mouth, you hear with your ears. Speaking the Word causes faith to grow.

Third, when we speak the Word, we keep the promise before us. Some people confuse positive thinking with speaking the Word. Speaking the Word is simply repeating what God said. You can never go wrong doing that and you will never lie or exaggerate. Speaking God’s Word will keep the promise in your mind instead of the problem, and that produces peace.

Also, keeping God’s words in our mouths produces health. Proverbs 4:20–22 says, “My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; for they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh.”

Speaking the Word will keep us from speaking words that will trap us. Proverbs 6:2 says, “You are snared by the words of your mouth; you are taken by the word of your mouth.” Have you ever said something and later regretted it? Well, if we follow the principles of God, that doesn’t have to happen. When we speak His promises and His Word, we won’t be trapped.

Satan tried to get Jesus to sin. He did this by tempting Him three different times. (Luke 4.) All three times Jesus did the same thing—He quoted the Word. When Jesus quoted the Word, He stopped Satan in his tracks. Satan could do nothing when the Word was spoken.

Today, God’s Word still has the same power. When the Word of God is spoken, Satan can do nothing. We must keep God’s Word in our mouths.

Speaking God’s words instead of speaking words from our flesh is a type of submission. And remember what James 4:7 says about submission: in submitting to God we are able to resist or withstand the devil “and he will flee from [us].”

# SUCCESS IN LIFE

## Overcoming Through Faith

> *Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.*
>
> Joshua 1:7-8

God’s promise for those who observe, meditate and obey His Word is that He will make their way prosperous and successful wherever they go.

Would you like to overcome the world? Would you like to have victory in your daily life? The Bible says in 1 John 5:4, “Whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” According to the Word, the ingredient we need to overcome the world is faith. But what does it mean “to have faith?”

Well, what it means is this. You believe what God says in His Word and act on it. You just simply listen to God through His Word and unconditionally believe and act on what He says.

Many Christians live their lives daily under stress—stress from work, stress from unpaid bills, stress from family problems and sometimes even stress from religion. But this should not be. God has given us a plan for overcoming all these things. He has a plan for overcoming the world and that plan is to have faith in Him.

Understanding the spiritual things of God is impossible without faith. Likewise, in order to navigate through our daily lives and understand what God has for us to do, we must daily walk in faith. Faith is the key ingredient in understanding. Without faith, we see only the superficial outward appearance of knowledge.

In order for a Christian to be successful, he must walk daily in faith. Through faith, there will be greater accomplishments in life. Whether we are at home or at work, our lives can be greatly enhanced if we can just grab hold of the truth and realize that faith in God's Word will improve our daily lives.

We must believe what God says about us. He says in His Word that when we accept His Son Jesus as our Lord and Savior, then we are also His children. (John 1:12.) Then, in His Word He gives promises to His children. He promises health, peace, and prosperity. As Christians, God our Father wants us to succeed in life and live for Him in peace and health. He wants the best for you and me. However, in order to receive completely, we must believe completely. We must believe He is telling the truth and act on our belief. That's called faith!

When we walk in faith, we will also be walking in joy and peace. We will be excited about what God is doing. We will know our authority. We will walk into the spiritual battleground and into the battlegrounds of life with our heads held high, knowing that the shield of faith will protect us. (Eph. 6:16.)

To be a winner in life, you must be on the winning side. Walk in faith and gather the spoils. The victory is ours if we trust in Him because faith is the victory that has overcome the world.

# SUICIDE

## The Source of Suicide

At 3 p.m. on a cold afternoon, I received a call that a friend who I hadn't seen in nearly a year had taken his life. This wasn't the first time that I had received such a call.

Years ago, one of my friends in the ministry took his life also. He was married with children and had a wonderful wife. He had great accomplishments. He was

a scholar and an author and public speaker. However, he believed the lie of Satan for just a moment. Because he had the opportunity and the means, in that moment, he took his life.

One of these men seemingly had nothing to live for and the other one had everything to live for; yet, in a moment of weakness, they chose death over life. God said, “I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life” (Deut. 30:19). For many years I wondered why God would say to choose life. Of course, anyone in his or her right mind would choose life. Yet, many are not in their right mind.

We’ve seen that the thief (Satan) comes to steal, kill, and destroy. (John 10:10.) If he can steal your prosperity, you have poverty. If he can steal your joy, you have depression. If he can steal your belief in Jesus, you have hopelessness. Poverty, depression, and hopelessness are the key ingredients for suicide.

Some people would never take their physical lives. However, many commit emotional suicide by “checking out” of society. If you live your life in a state of emotional dullness without friends, without relatives, and without God, you will accomplish no more than the person who takes their life. Satan wins either way.

We must break this cycle of suicide and it can be done by the daily renewing of our minds with the Word of God. We must decide that nothing will separate us from the love of God and we must train our children accordingly. Remember, Jesus said, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31–32).

Renew your mind daily with the Word of God and cast down the words of the enemy. Know who you are in Christ and know your authority. Accept the teachings of health, prosperity, and joy and reject the teachings of false humility through poverty, sickness, and solemnness. Know the truth, be set free, and choose life.

# TEMPTATION

## Temptation Is Not the Problem

Once a man came to me for counseling and was very upset because of some great sins he had committed. The more he talked, the more I began to realize that he hadn’t actually sinned, he had just been tempted to sin.

Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus was tempted just like we are, but He was without sin: “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our

weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."

You may ask, "How could He be tempted and not be in sin?" Well, actually the answer is quite simple.

It's not temptation that is a sin. It's the yielding to temptation that is the sin.

Now don't take me wrong. Although temptation is not a sin, we cannot dwell on these temptations, because meditating on those thoughts will quickly lead into sin. Imaginations will come to mind, but we must cast them down immediately. Playing with explosives is dangerous!

James 1:14–16 says, "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire [or lust] has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived."

The Bible says that Jesus as a man was tempted by all the things that any other man has been tempted with; however, He did not give the temptation any place in His life. He overcame the temptations and did not sin. Jesus is our example. He defeated Satan and gave Christians authority over the devil. We can resist temptation the same way He did.

Over the years, I've counseled many people who have yielded to temptation. They said they had no choice. They said the pressures of the temptation were just too great. They couldn't help it. They had to yield; they had no other option.

Once a man told me he just fell into adultery. No, with the secret phone calls and all the sneaking around and all the lying, he didn't just fall into adultery. He planned it all. He claimed he fell into it when he got caught. He had a choice and he chose poorly.

First Corinthians 10:13 offers us hope regarding temptation:

> *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.*

If you have been tempted by greed, lust, adultery, hatred, or any other evil thing, then today I have good news. God's Word has clearly given us a method to overcome temptation.

In Luke 4, Satan tempted Jesus three times. All three times, Jesus overcame the temptation using one weapon—the Word of God. Each time Jesus spoke to Satan, the tempter, He quoted the Word.

Satan, with all his temptation, could not overpower the Word of God.

As Christians, we are to be like Jesus. When Satan comes against us with

temptation, we say, “It is written” and he will flee. For example, if you are tempted to hate someone who has hurt you, say, “It is written, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Luke 10:27.)

If you are tempted by Satan to be unfaithful in your marriage, then say out loud, “It is written, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’” (Matt. 5:27.) Whatever the temptation, find the scripture that stops it. Quote it out loud. Speak the Word and the tempter will flee.

# THANKFULNESS

## Choose Thankfulness

A few weeks ago, I met an elderly gentleman who had lost his left arm when he was a young man. Because of this, he had lived his entire life not being able to do everything that others could do. His life had literally been handicapped. When I asked him how he lost his arm, he stood straight and tall and said, “I gave my arm for my country while I was in Korea.”

Even though we were standing in a shopping center as he told me this story, I could hardly keep my eyes from watering. The reality is this man sacrificed his life for me and my family. The thankfulness for him and what he had done, and the respect and honor I felt for him was overwhelming.

Honor and respect are two qualities that have been devalued in our culture. Honor for authority and respect for property seems to be at an all time low. Much of the reason is due to a lack of thankfulness.

As a Christian nation, we should be thankful for the countless men and women who have given their lives for our freedom and for those who are placing their lives on the line each day for our freedom. As Christians, we should also be thankful for those who have sacrificed through the centuries to keep the Gospel message alive.

Without thankfulness, there can be no honor and respect. Without honor and respect, there is chaos and confusion, and confusion breeds lawlessness. In order for our nation to be at peace, our families must be secure. But our families will never be complete until the spirit of thankfulness is in our hearts. Even in times of great need, we should be thankful.

In Philippians 4:6, the Bible tells us that when we pray, we should not be anxious or fearful, but as we make our requests known to God, we should do so with an attitude of thanksgiving. A lack of thankfulness will affect our prayers.

Thankfulness is not an emotion, but it is a decision of the heart.

Over the years, I have noticed that people who have an attitude of thankfulness are usually pleasant people with positive attitudes. Their friendships are solid and based on love and caring. They are generally happy people.

On the other hand, people who are not thankful usually gripe and complain about everything. People who are unthankful do not respect authority and have problems submitting to authority. Unthankful individuals never see themselves at fault but see everything that is wrong in others.

Now don't take me wrong, I'm not implying that a person should be thankful for all things. Of course, you are not thankful for sickness, or poverty, or the attacks that come in life. But as Christians, we can be thankful in spite of these things. Our lives should not be ruled by what we see around us, but instead should be ruled by the promises of God.

Even though it may look like the enemy is strong, we stand thankful for the promise of victory from God. When David looked at Goliath, everyone said, "Goliath is too big to hit," but David said, "He's too big to miss." (1 Samuel 17.) See your problems through the eyes of victory and not through the eyes of defeat. As Christians we have the victory.

The Bible says in 1 John 5:4, "This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith." What is faith? Faith is believing that God has done what He said He would do and believing it so strongly that your words and actions are based on His promises instead of being based on what you see. If it looks like defeat is coming in an area where God has promised victory, you must believe His Word regardless of what you see.

If you are a Christian, you can be thankful in this. The God who spoke the universe into existence said that no weapon formed against you will prosper. (Isa. 54:17.) When the enemy says you can't make it, God's Word says you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. (Phil. 4:13.) When the enemy says, "I will overpower you," God's Word says, "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4 kjv). When the enemy says there is no way out, you say, "God's Word says I get what I say, and I say, 'Victory is mine!'" (1 Cor. 15:57.)

The world is full of negative words, doubt, fear, defeat, and unthankfulness. Do not allow yourself to be caught up in this. As a Christian, even though you are in the world, you are not a part of it. You live in a higher kingdom, above the negative kingdom of fear.

We've seen in God's Word that He has placed before us life and death. With life

comes blessing and thankfulness. Remember, thankfulness is not an emotion, but it is a decision of the heart. Choose wisely.

## How to Express Thankfulness to God

Thankfulness is expressed in words, but measured with actions.

Expressing gratitude and showing gratitude is not the same thing, but should work in conjunction with each other. Let me explain.

Expressing thankfulness is relatively easy. All that is required is a smile, a sincere look, and words that contain the phrase, “Thank you.” Some people desire appreciation and friendship so much that the words alone satisfy their immediate need. But given enough time, these same individuals will face disappointment and rejection when the thankful words are not accompanied with actions.

While it is true that almost everyone knows how to express thankfulness with words, the question is how do we complete our thankfulness with actions? In the same way that faith without works is dead, thankfulness without corresponding actions accomplishes little. So we could say that thankfulness contains two parts —expression with words and expression with action.

Words of thankfulness written on a card are wonderful and are a great way to express thankfulness, but we must go beyond just words and have corresponding actions.

God sent His Son to die so that we could live. Jesus took on sickness and disease for our healing. He took on poverty for our prosperity. He paid the price in full so we could receive eternal, abundant life. Our only requirement is to receive it by grace through faith. (Eph. 2:8.) He paid it all, once and for all. So, how do we show our gratitude? How do we completely be thankful?

First of all, we express our thankfulness with our words. Through daily prayer, spiritual songs, and confessions of faith we can acknowledge that we are grateful for the immeasurable gift we have been given.

Secondly, we must put our gratefulness into action. The ultimate act of love is giving. God loved us so much that He gave. (John 3:16.) If we say we love Him, it is only words unless we give. While love and gratitude is not measured by the size of the gift, it is measured by the generosity and consistency of the gift. A gift could be money, possessions, or a sacrifice of our time. If it’s valuable to us, it’s valuable to God.

As a parent, one of my greatest joys is giving to my children and grandchildren. While they usually get me a gift, my joy is greatest when I watch them receive

their gift from me. I love them so much that I would give out of my need to bless them. That's just the way love is. It gives.

So, when it comes time to thank God for His goodness, remember that God doesn't need your money, but your gift reflects your love and gratefulness.

If you have a home church, make a "Thankful to God" donation that will bless God's house. Once a man told me that he would give to his church, but the church didn't need it. Well, that's totally irrelevant. Giving is not based on need, but on love, obedience, and thankfulness, and your gift will reflect your affection.

So, the next time you express your thankfulness to God, consider backing it up with actions. Remember, thankfulness is expressed in words, but measured with actions.

# THE BLESSING

## Forget Not His Benefits

Once I was talking with an older man about Jesus. This man was very result-orientated and he point blank asked me this question. He said, "What are the benefits of being a Christian? If being a Christian is such a great thing, then what do I gain?"

Psalm 103:1–2 says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."

Here we are told that we are not to forget the benefits of God, and then it goes on to list them. These are really great!

> *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*
>
> Psalm 103:2–5

So, as a Christian what can we expect from God, our Father?

1) He forgives our sins.

When we accept Jesus, all the sin nature and all the sins we have committed are forgiven. Jesus paid the price, once and for all. We can be clean, and that's a wonderful feeling. All the guilt, pressure, and stress that sin brings can be gone.

It’s a benefit of being a child of God.

2) He heals all our diseases.

When Jesus bore the stripes for our sicknesses, He paid the price in full for our healing. All through God’s Word, we find this one thing: God wants to heal all those who are His. He is a good God and His will is that all who believe will be healed. In James 5:14, for instance, the Bible says,

> *Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up.*

3) He redeems our life from destruction.

When things look like all is lost and there is no way of escape, God can make a way. Psalm 34:6 says, “This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.” When it seems like there is no way, God makes a way.

4) He covers us with lovingkindness and tender mercies.

While we were in sin, God sent His Son Jesus to die in our place, for our sins. Why? Because He loved us.

5) He satisfies our mouths with good things.

He not only wants us to live, but He wants us to have good things. James 1:17 says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights.” God is good and as Christians, He is our Father. Then logic dictates our inheritance is beyond our comprehension and it is good.

6) He renews our youth.

Many people have looked for the fountain of youth. Ponce de Leon searched across the known and unknown world looking for the fountain that could give everlasting youth and life. He looked in the wrong place. God has it and He has given it to those who believe in His Son, Jesus. In John 3:16, Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

Are there benefits to being a Christian? You be the judge.

## The Open Door to the Blessing

We open the door to the blessing in our lives through obedience and faithfulness to God’s Word. He wants us to do what He tells us to do and to follow His guidance because He wants us to live in the blessing. The devil’s desire for your life is put into operation in the same way. When you listen to him (in your mind)

and do what he says, you walk out his plan for your life under the curse.

The blessing of God contains life and abundance, wholeness and shalom. The devil's plan for you is the curse which brings death and destruction. He is a master of deception and he covers his lies with the logic of man.

Over the years I have heard many reasons and excuses from people who did not give tithes, offerings, or alms. Once a man told me that God had spoken to him personally and that he was exempt from tithing until he got all his bills paid. Another lady told me that God understood why her family didn't tithe. She said God knew that she didn't have enough money to tithe and He told her it was okay.

First of all, neither person heard from the Spirit of God. The reason is that God will never tell us to do something that is directly opposed to His Word. If it wasn't God (and it wasn't), it was either their flesh or a demonic spirit. Either way, the result was the same. All these years later, both families are still in poverty. The money they saved (or stole from God) by not paying their tithes became a curse and actually brought on poverty and prevented them from qualifying for the blessing of God.

The bottom line is actually quite simple. We implement God's plan for our lives by listening to Him, saying what He says, and acting on His Word. That's called obedience. We implement the devil's plan for our lives by listening to him, saying what he says, and acting upon his words. The result is disobedience to God.

"To obey," the Word says, "is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22). And obedience to God opens the door to the blessing.

# THOUGHTS (Controlling Your)

## A Word of God Land Mine

In 1 Timothy 6:12, we are told to fight the good fight of faith. That is the only war we as Christians are to wage as New Testament believers. Satan has been defeated by Jesus in the spirit realm and he does not have access to the spirit of a Christian. So he attacks us in the realm of the soul. Yes, we must fight the battle of faith, but where does this battle take place? The battle of faith takes place in the mind.

> *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the*

*faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.*

1 Peter 5:8–9

Satan is not a roaring lion, but he is like a roaring lion. He is our enemy and he does seek to devour us. But how does he do it? Well, since he is not a lion and is only like a lion according to verse 8, all he has is his "roar." It is the tool he uses to destroy us. He speaks with his mouth into our thought realm and what we do with his words is our choice.

When you hear a lie, you can do one of two things. You can recognize it as a lie, reject it, and forget it. Or, you can ponder it, repeat it, and believe it. When you believe a lie, you usually will act on it. That can be deadly.

If you believe a lie about a friend and you repeat it, you become a part of it. And when the truth is finally revealed, and it always is, you will stand there with egg on your face and probably a relationship will have been destroyed. Satan is a liar and he destroys relationships, but only if we believe his lies.

We've seen how Jesus said in John 8:44 that Satan is the father of lies. Every word that proceeds out of Satan's mouth is a lie or part of a deceptive plan. We are to resist him and not listen to the roar.

James 4:7 tells us to submit to God, and resist the devil, which causes Satan to flee from us. Then verse 8 says, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." How do we resist the devil? How can we keep from listening to his lies? How do we draw near to God?

These may seem like complicated questions, but the answer is really quite simple. Remember, the fight of faith takes place in the mind. That's where Satan attacks. He moves into our thought realm and throws his lies at us. So we must be prepared.

In the same way our bodies need regular food, our soul needs a steady supply of God's Word. Let's say in a week you eat 21 meals. Would it be healthy for you to eat all your meals on Sunday and not eat the rest of the week? No, that would be silly. But that's what many Christians do spiritually. They try to get enough Word in one day to last a week or longer.

You must fill your mind with the Word of God daily. Plant the Word of God in your mind and then when Satan steps into your thought realm, he won't be able to walk without stepping on a "Word of God land mine." You will be so full of God's Word that Satan will not be able to stay. That's how you resist the devil, and the result is, he will flee.

## Your Mouth Overrides Your Thoughts

Many years ago a man approached me after a meeting and told me an amazing story. He said he had molested several young boys in this particular town and was having an affair with another woman. This man was a notable person in the community so he had to be very discrete. He said that the porn store even stayed open late just for him, so he wouldn't be found out. Also, he was upset because his doctor told him he had an incurable, sexually transmitted, deadly disease.

Two things were very amazing about this encounter. First, this was the man who had invited me to speak at the meeting; and secondly, when I asked him how all this got started, he said it was because he started thinking perverted thoughts. When I asked him why he continued thinking these perverted thoughts, he said he couldn't help it. He said he just couldn't control what he thought. In fact, he asked me, "Why did God let me think those thoughts anyway?"

Even though this man had gone to church most of his life, he didn't know the Word of God. God did not cause him to think perverted thoughts. He thought them himself. The Bible says we control our thoughts. Hosea 4:6 says "My people perish for a lack of knowledge." This man was a good example.

The point is this. The battle of faith is fought in the mind and wrong thinking can keep you from having all that God wants you to have.

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

Here, the Bible tells us clearly what to dwell on. If it was impossible, we would not have been told what to think.

We, as Christians, cannot only control our thoughts, but we must renew our minds daily. We can meditate on the things of the world or we can meditate on the things of God. The choice is ours. We have no excuse.

Romans 12:2 says, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

We must daily renew our minds. As Christians, we can purify our thoughts and be made more acceptable to Jesus. According to the Bible, this can be done through thinking about and meditating on the Word.

In Ephesians 5:26, we are told that this is accomplished by the washing of the

Word. This means that we not only can, but must renew our minds daily by reading and meditating on the Word of God. Some say they just can't control their thoughts. They say they can't meditate on the Word of God because too many bad thoughts come in.

If that describes you, I encourage you to try this experiment. Count mentally to twenty, silently to yourself. Now say your complete name out loud while you are counting. Did you notice that you quit counting in your mind to speak your name with your mouth? The reason is that your mouth will override your thoughts. So when you feel you can't control what you're thinking, just read the Word of God out loud. Your ears will hear the Word and your mind will be washed, plus you will quit thinking what you shouldn't be thinking about.

# TITHE

## What Did Jesus Say About the Tithe?

Not too long ago, a gentleman told me that he doesn't believe it is important for Christians to tithe, because Jesus never addressed tithe, not even once. So since it was not important to Jesus, it was not important to him.

I appreciate other people's opinions, even when they don't agree with my teaching because when I am challenged, it forces me to examine what I teach. Such is the case with this gentleman.

His reasoning would be correct except for one detail: his facts are not true. Jesus didn't ignore talking about the tithe. In fact, when speaking to the scribes and Pharisees, he clearly spoke about the tithe. He told the scribes and Pharisees,

> *"You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law— justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."*
>
> Matthew 23:23 niv

The gentleman told me that he did not tithe because Jesus never mentioned tithing. But as you can see, Jesus did mention it. All too often people will take actions that can mean life or death based on an assumption that is not true. Jesus said in John 8:32 that the truth of His Word would set us free. Anything that does not align with the Word of God is false. The truth brings deliverance. Everything else brings destruction. Here is the truth about Jesus and tithing.

There were things the religious leaders were not doing at the time of Jesus that

they should have done. Jesus corrected them on this, while at the same time reminding them to not neglect what they were already doing. He said very clearly that tithing was good and they should continue to do it.

So, with this in mind, let's use the same logic that this man used. Since Jesus did mention tithing and since He said it was a good thing to do and He told those He was talking to that they should continue to tithe, we should tithe.

What is a tithe? The word tithe means a "tenth part"[47] or one-tenth. The tithe belongs to God. It is not ours. It never has been and it never will be. It should not be included in our budget, because it is not ours to decide what to do with.

According to the Bible, to use the tithe for personal expenses is stealing from God. He said in Malachi 3:8, "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings." So what is the bottom line? Jesus said we should tithe and the Bible says if we don't, we are stealing from God. If you are a tither, know that you are being obedient to God. If you are not, I encourage you to begin right now. Not only are you helping to further the kingdom of God when you tithe, but there are other benefits of personal harvest and blessing as well.

## Food in God's House

> *"Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it."*
>
> Malachi 3:10

One thing is very clear. All through God's Word, He wants us healed—physically and financially. God's plan is prosperity for the believer. In fact, according to Luke 12:32, God the Father takes pleasure in giving the kingdom to His children. And Psalm 35:27 says that God takes pleasure in the prosperity of His saints.

We know that according to Galatians 3:13, Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law. The curse of the law as described in Deuteronomy 28 is death, sickness and disease, and poverty. Jesus died so that we wouldn't have to. He carried our sickness and disease, and by His stripes we were healed. (1 Peter 2:24.) The price for our healing has been paid. And according to 2 Corinthians 8:9, "He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich."There is no doubt that eternal life, health, and prosperity is God's will for every believer.

God put forth a plan for His house on this earth to be blessed. We know that the

church building is not the Church. Every born-again believer is the Church and their body is the temple of God. (1 Cor. 3:16–17,19.) However, the local church is where the body of believers meets and is God's storehouse.

God's plan is for each believer to place 10 percent (remember, the word tithe means a tenth) of their increase into the storehouse. With every church member being obedient to this, there is sufficient bread in God's house. The more Christians prosper, the more they have to give. Ten percent of a million dollars is greater than 10 percent of one thousand dollars.

I love to give into God's storehouse. Every time I receive financial increase, my first thought is excitement about being able to bring my tithe to God's house.

Like many churches, our church has online giving available to our members. Whenever someone is out of town, or if the weather prevents travel to the church building, many of our church members will use online giving to make sure their tithes and offerings are deposited into the church account. Several people in our church get on line immediately when they receive an increase and send their tithe because they are so eager and excited to give into God's kingdom.

Many years ago in a home Bible study, a man wanted to argue that tithing was under the law and that he had been redeemed from the curse. Actually, he was trying to figure out an excuse for not giving. First of all, tithing is not a curse and secondly, it was not instituted by the law. Abraham tithed before Moses ever existed. While some are looking for an excuse so they won't have to give, God loves cheerful givers who are looking for excuses to give. (2 Cor. 9:7.)

Some feel they can't afford to tithe. They feel they don't make enough to pay their bills to people and their tithe to God. The one you pay is the one you fear the most: "To you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves" (Mal. 4:2).

God is a giver. (John 3:16.) Satan is a thief. (John 10:10.) As Christians, we are told to imitate God. (Eph. 5:1.)

We've seen that it is possible to rob God. And, according to God himself, if we don't tithe, we are not only stealing from Him, but we are stealing food from God's house. (Mal. 3:8.) So let me ask you this question and please answer honestly: Are you a tither or are you a thief?

# TONGUES

## What Is "Praying in the Spirit?"

> *What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.*
>
> 1 Corinthians 14:15

When Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, he addressed many issues that they were struggling with. One of these issues was speaking in tongues.

Confusion is rooted in a lack of knowledge. So Paul enlightened the church on the reality of tongues. When the subject of speaking in tongues is brought up, many people only think of the gift of various kinds of tongues as listed in 1 Corinthians 12. The gift of "different kinds of tongues" (v. 10) has certain requirements. For one thing, it must be followed by the gift of "interpretation of tongues" (v. 10).

Paul explains that in a public setting, if an individual speaks in a tongue and there is no interpretation, then it is unprofitable to the group because the group has no understanding of what has been said. But on the other hand, if someone speaks in tongues in a group setting and the same person or another person interprets, then everyone receives benefit. Again, we are referring to one of the nine spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12 and the title of this gift is "different kinds of tongues."

Likewise, there is another type of tongues called "praying in the Spirit." Some people refer to this as their "prayer language." Romans 8:26 says that sometimes we don't know how to pray as we should. In other words, our understanding of the problem or the solution to the problem is so limited, that we just don't know how to pray. At times like these, we are instructed to pray in the Spirit. (See Eph. 6:18.) Paul went on to say that if we don't know how to pray, that the Holy Spirit himself will make intercession for us and that He knows and prays the will of God on our behalf. In other words, the Spirit makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

The solution to your problem may be a mystery to you, but there are no mysteries in God. Even though you may not know what you are praying in your own consciousness, the Spirit does and as He prays the will of God according to 1 John 5:14–15, God hears this prayer and acts to fulfill it.

You may ask, "Then why shouldn't I just pray in the Spirit all the time? If I'm praying God's will when I'm praying in the Spirit, then I will always be praying right." The answer to this is quite simple. Praying in the Spirit cannot be used as a crutch and an excuse for not studying the Word of God and for not renewing

our minds daily with the Word.

When someone asks me to pray for their healing, I usually do not pray in the Spirit. Why? Because I know it is God's will that they be healed. On the other hand, if someone asks me to pray about their employment, in the natural I may not know whether it is God's will or not for them to get the job. But there are some things I do know. I know it's God's will for them to prosper. So in that case, I pray in the understanding. I also pray in the Spirit. Why? Because there are some things I don't know. I do not know how that prosperity is to come about.

The point is this. As a Christian, I pray in the Spirit and I pray with the understanding. I sing in the Spirit and I sing in the understanding. Only when we do both will our prayer life be complete.

> *But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit.*
>
> Jude 1:20

# TRUST

## The Father's Arms

One day I watched as a two-year old boy stood on the edge of a table. His father was close and was holding out his arms. The young boy fell forward and the father caught him in his arms.

The father stood the young boy back on the table and this time stepped back a few feet. The young boy, with a smile on his face, began leaning forward again. The father immediately stepped up and caught the boy. This happened several times and each time the father would step back just a little farther. It didn't matter to the young boy, though. He would still fall forward with the same confidence. He had confidence in his father, knowing that no matter how far away the father seemed to be, Dad would always catch him if he fell.

The young child had faith in his father. He knew the father would catch him, regardless.

We as adults need to be like this young boy. His faith was so simple, but sometimes ours is so complicated.

Jesus said in Matthew 18:3 that unless we became as little children, we would by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. But how do we become as little children? How does a little child act? Usually they imitate their parents. They

say what they hear their parents say and trust in their words. That's the way we are to be with God the Father.

As Christians, we are children of God. When we accept Jesus, the Son of God, into our hearts and recognize Him as our Lord and Savior, then the Bible tells us that we enter into the family of God as adopted sons. (Rom. 8:14–15; Eph. 1:5.) We are saved, born again; we are believers. We are then subject to our heavenly Father and we are to listen to and trust Him.

When Jesus was here on the earth, He told us something about His relationship with the Father.

> *"I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak."*
>
> John 12:49,50

Jesus himself tells us here that He only said what the Father told Him to say. In John 5:19, Jesus said He only did what His Father wanted Him to do and in John 8:38, He said He only spoke what He saw when He was with His Father.

We as Christians need to speak what the Word of God says. When we pray, we need to pray the Word of God. Too many Christians are out there praying for things to happen in their lives that are totally against God's will for them. If we want God to hear us when we pray, we must know His will.

> *This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.*
>
> 1 John 5:14,15

Now, here's the key. We need to read and meditate on the Word of God and spend quality time with God our Father in prayer. We can't speak the words of our heavenly Father if we never listen to Him. We must be like the little boy standing on the table. We must trust in the Father and His Word. And then, His arms will always be there to catch us.

> *The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.*
>
> Deuteronomy 33:27

## Why Are You Afraid?

Jesus and His disciples were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee and the intention was to simply cross to the other side. (Mark 4.) It seemed like an easy thing to do.

They had done it dozens of times. But this trip was different.

I have been on the Galilee more than once in a boat that was a replica of the large boat Jesus would have been traveling on. At that time, there were small fishing boats and large ones. But the Bible specifically tells us that Jesus and His disciples were in one of the large boats.

To the east of the Galilee is the Golan Heights and Mount Hermon is to the north. To the west is the Mediterranean with Samaria to the south. On the Sea of Galilee, the weather can change in a moment of time and that's what happened while Jesus and His disciples were crossing the sea. The storm was so fierce that even though they were in a large boat, the waves were filling the boat.

The disciples panicked and, like most people during a storm, started counting heads to make sure everyone was accounted for. They couldn't quickly find Jesus. But when they did, He was at the stern of the boat asleep on a pillow. The disciples screamed at Him, "Don't You care that we are dying!" While they were frantically yelling at Jesus, He simply stood and commanded the storm to be still and immediately the wind ceased and there was a great calm.

Then He turned to His disciples and asked them two questions. Remember, moments earlier these men had been gripped with fear and were yelling at Jesus, accusing Him of not caring about them. The first thing Jesus asked them was, "Why are you so fearful?" Then He asked another question. He said, "How is it that you have no faith?" In today's terminology, we could think of it this way. He said, "Why are you afraid?" and "Why don't you believe what I told you?"

These men had walked with Jesus, seen the miracles, seen the healings, and watched the anointed Son of Man perform miracles in the lives of others. But when they faced their own personal disaster where it looked like there was no way of escape, they became gripped with fear and accused the Master, who actually was their only way of escape, of not caring.

As you are reading this, you may be in the storm of your life, in the middle of the sea, surrounded by darkness and overpowering waves wondering, "Where is God now?" If you are a born-again believer, God is already with you, and if you will listen, He is asking you two questions. "Why are you afraid?" and "Why don't you believe what I've told you?"

What has God told us? God, in His Word, says to us that any weapon that the enemy forms to destroy us will not work. (Isa. 54:17.) God says that if we can believe, all things are possible. (Mark 9:23.) God says that no matter what the attack, He has prepared a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13) and that even though we may be surrounded by a pounding storm, we are possessed by a Power on the

inside that's greater than any attacking power on the outside. (1 John 4:4.) If those things are true, then why would you be afraid?

Scripture Reference:

On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" (Mark 4:35–40)

# TRUTH

## The Word of Truth

Second Timothy 2:15 says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

In this scripture we find we are told that we are to be workers for God, not ashamed, and that we are to rightly divide the Word of truth. What's interesting about this statement is that if the Word can be rightly divided, then it can also be wrongly divided.

When I was young in the ministry, I wondered why there were so many different Christian denominations. If we all believed in the same Jesus and if we all taught from the same Bible, then why did we have so many different beliefs within Christianity?

As I grew older and matured in the Word, I realized that even though we all used the same book as our guide and manual, that not everybody studied this book. In fact, one minister that I met in college ordered his sermons through the mail and only used his Bible as the folder to hold them as he preached. Too often we develop a belief and then search the Bible to find a scripture to back up what we have predetermined as the truth. With some, it doesn't matter if it is out of context; it only matters if a phrase matches their belief.

Recently, on a major news channel, a reporter asked a seminary professor from one of the nation's largest Protestant universities this question. He asked, "Why is it that there are some ministers who seem so strong in their views on abortion

and homosexuality? And why is it that they will not compromise what they believe?"

The seminary professor's reply stunned me. He said, "One of the problems we have in modern theology and in many of our churches today is that there are some ministers who actually believe that everything in the Bible is true and that it is the ultimate code for their lifestyle and the lifestyle of their congregations."How sad it is when the men and women training ministers don't believe the Word of God is completely 100 percent pure truth.

Titus 1:2 and Hebrews 6:18 both tell us that it is impossible for God to lie and John 8:44 says that Satan is a liar.

I know that rightly dividing the Word means so much more than what I am stating here. However, the first step to rightly divide God's Word is to believe that the Bible is inspired by God himself and was written by men under the direction of the Holy Spirit. It is the Word of Truth.

## Jumping Without Faith Is Deadly

When we study the Bible, the Word of God, it is very important that we study it in such a way that we know the whole truth. We must study God's Word in context. We must not pull out small phrases and base our entire lives on a partial sentence. Unless we know the whole truth and act on the truth, we cannot achieve complete results. Remember, a partial truth can be twisted into a lie. The truth leads to freedom and a lie will always lead to bondage. A partial truth may sound logical, but the result can be deadly.

Remember, Jesus said in John 8:44 that Satan is a liar. And Jesus went on to say that not only was Satan a liar but that Satan was the father of lies.

An effective liar does not expose his lie. He tries to make the lie appear to be truth. In other words, a liar tries to deceive someone into believing the lie is truth. This is what we call deception.

Second Corinthians 11:3 says, "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ." Here we see that Satan deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden. He made her believe a lie and because she believed the lie instead of the truth, she was driven out of the garden and cursed. Satan has not changed.

Let me give you an example of a partial truth. Let's say you wanted to jump out of an airplane. Personally, as a pilot, I wonder about anyone who would jump out of an airplane. Myself, I love to fly. Ten thousand feet in the air and sailing above the clouds is where I love to be, but I have never jumped out of an

airplane, and I never intend to.

Well anyway, you may believe that if you jump out of an airplane with a parachute, you will float safely to the ground. You can buy books on parachuting. You can attend parachuting classes. You can watch parachuting videos and even join a parachuting club and never miss a meeting. But unless you wear the parachute properly and follow the instructions exactly, you will have problems.

When you hit the ground clutching your unopened parachute, it is too late to discover that you must pull the rip cord. Having the parachute is not enough. Knowing that it will work is not enough. Knowing the instructions is not enough. You must know the instructions and act on them in order to survive the jump.

It's the same principle with the Word of God. Too often Christians know only that the Word works without knowing what makes it work. Knowing that God heals is not enough. Knowing that we can be saved through the blood of Jesus is not enough. Knowing that we are to be filled with the Holy Spirit is not enough. We must act on the Word.

Knowing that the ripcord exists on the parachute and what it does is not enough. Even knowing that the ripcord exists and believing with all your heart that if you pull it, the parachute will open and you will be saved is not enough. You must pull the ripcord!

In the same way, knowledge about the Word of God without action is not enough. Knowledge without action is not faith. Faith is believing that God has done what He said He would do and acting on it.

# VICTORY

## Imminent Victory

You may be in the battle of your life. You may have been pounded by wave after wave after wave for a long time. You have been praying for deliverance and feeling like you can't take another wave, only to discover that the next wave looks like a tsunami. It appears like this killer wave is coming to shore for the final, fatal blow.

But today I bring you good news fresh from the heart of God. The weapon that the enemy has formed to destroy you will not destroy you. The wave may still come to shore, but if you stand in faith, you will not get wet and God will

provide a place of shelter. And after the storm, the treasures that have been hidden from you will be exposed and you will walk onto the battlefield and take the spoils. Although the enemy has a plan of defeat for you, if you stand in faith knowing that God is your deliverer and avenger, then the attack and the storm will not harm you, but instead will work for your benefit. If the enemy had known the victory that you are going to walk in, he would have reconsidered his attack.

You must always remember what God's Word says about you and the victory that God has planned for you. When the enemy tells you that you're not strong enough to survive the pressures of this world, God's Word says that greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world. (1 John 4:4.)

When the enemy says that you won't make it through the trial, God's Word says that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. (Phil. 4:13.)

When the enemy says you are trapped and there is no way out, God's Word says that He will always provide a way of escape for you. (1 Cor. 10:13.)

When the enemy says that the opposition is too great, God's Word said that no weapon formed against you will prosper. (Isa. 54:17.)

When the enemy says victory is impossible, God's Word says this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. (1 John 5:4.)

The enemy is a liar and his only weapon is his mouth. The weapon of his warfare only has power when you add belief to his words. The weapons of our warfare are not worldly, but are mighty in God for the tearing down of strongholds. The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. When the enemy comes at you with lies in his mouth, then you speak to the enemy with the Word of God in your mouth. The Word of God will always overpower the words of the enemy.

Fear and faith are opposites. The Word of God contains faith, the words of the enemy contain fear. When the enemy speaks and shoots you with his bullets of fear, faith is your bullet proof vest that will keep the fear from penetrating into your body. Faith is the shield that is manufactured by hearing the Word of God and it is placed in the position of protection through your belief and confidence in what God says.

The Word says that if you believe, all things will be possible for you. Even when things look impossible, you must remember that Jesus said, "With God all things are possible."When it looks like you are facing imminent defeat, remember this. God has a different plan. His plan is imminent victory.

# VISION

## Your Dream Is Not Dead

Your dream is not dead. It is only sleeping.

Lazarus, a friend of Jesus who lived in Bethany, was terribly ill. (John 11.) When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, He said, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God” (v. 4). Jesus didn’t panic. He didn’t get into fear, and of course, He didn’t worry. But He said, “Lazarus is asleep, but I will go and wake him up.” (v. 11.)

Even though Jesus knew that Lazarus had died physically, His mind-set was that Lazarus was asleep. But to everyone else, it appeared that Lazarus was dead in the grave and would never live on this earth as a man again. Of course, his sister, Martha, believed that he would be resurrected in the distant future in the resurrection at the last day, but she had no faith that he would live again as her brother.

Then Jesus made a statement that probably seemed strange at the time. He said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (v. 25). Martha was caught up in religion and was convinced that Lazarus had already started to decay. Then Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” (v. 40). Then they removed the stone and Jesus said, “Lazarus, come forth!” and he who was dead became alive. (vv. 43–44.) They saw the glory of God.

Your dream may appear dead and even your religious friends may tell you that it has already begun to decay. In fact, when you talk about your dream, to some people it may “stinketh.” (v. 39 kjv). But God is the God of the living. His plan for your life has not changed. In the same way Jesus spoke to Martha, God is saying to you today, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?”

Your God-given dream is not dead. It is only sleeping. Apply your faith to your dream and God will resurrect it into new life. It doesn’t matter how things look or what others say. Speak God’s promise into your dead dream, and it will live.

Years ago, it was prophesied that this is the time when the glory of God would be manifested. In order for Martha to see the glory of God, she had to add belief to the promise. Do not allow circumstances, people, or presumed defeat to derail you from believing. Believe in your God-given dream and you will see the manifested glory of God.

## Believe in Your Dream

When God imparts His destiny into your heart, it becomes a dream that burns with energy. As enthusiasm builds and you share your dream with your family and friends, many times you will discover that they do not share the same excitement.

In Genesis 37:5, the Bible says that Joseph had a dream. He told it to his brothers and the result was, they hated him. But the truth is, where there is no dream or vision, there are no accomplishments. Proverbs 29:18 says, “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (kjv).

People may hate you because of your dream. It may appear that the resources needed to accomplish your dream are unavailable. But regardless of these things, if God has given you a vision, He expects you to accomplish it. Once the vision is given, the responsibility is in the hands of the receiver to move forward with it while continuing to look to God for guidance, help, strength, and whatever else is needed to accomplish it.

One of the saddest things I have ever seen is a person without a vision for their life aimlessly wandering from project to project, job to job, church to church, and never accomplishing anything. If you want to do something for God, you must have a vision.

What’s even sadder is to see someone do this who has a vision. A vision is worthless unless it comes to pass and sadly, too many people allow their vision to drift into obscurity and die.

Years ago I knew a young man who constantly told everyone of his desires for life. His plans were big. His goals were high. His vision was lofty. But there was one problem. As the years passed, all he did was talk, and as he aged, he developed new methods of sharing his old vision, always explaining how it was going to be done, but never applying himself and getting started.

Recently, he passed away and when they closed the lid on his coffin, they also closed the lid on his vision. You may ask, “Why didn’t he accomplish his vision in life? If God gave him a plan for his life, certainly he must have had the ability to do it.”

Well, the answer to that question is quite simple. It’s impossible to cross the finish line if you never show up for the race. It doesn’t matter how much you prepare. It doesn’t matter how much you plan. It doesn’t matter how many people are cheering for you on the sidelines. If you never start the race, you will never finish the race.

So here's the point. If God has given you a vision or a dream, He has also equipped you to accomplish it. Because He has given you the talents and abilities by way of His grace to do the tasks, all that remains is the doing.

In the book of James we are told that faith without works is dead. (James 2:26.) Well, so is a vision! Take the vision God has given you and step out in faith. Even if you don't see the resources required to accomplish your calling, they are there. God never sends His soldiers into battle without the proper weapons and armor.

So this message is quite simple. Take your God-given assignment, the dream He has given you, and do it.

# WISDOM

## Knowledge and Wisdom

God is the God of increase. His plan is for us to increase spiritually, physically, financially, and emotionally.

Recently, I talked with a man who had spent his entire life worshiping at the altar of intellect. He had spent most of his life as, what some people would call, a "professional student." He had multiple diplomas, multiple majors, and multiple doctorates. He was highly educated, but he knew nothing about God. Education is good, but education will not save you. In some circles it seems as though some people are just going to hell smart.

I believe in education and I respect knowledge. However, knowledge in the things of man, as good as it is, pales by comparison to the knowledge and wisdom of God.

James 1:5 says that if any of us lacks wisdom, we can ask God who will give wisdom liberally to everyone. But it also tells us in verse 6 that when we ask Him for this wisdom, we must ask Him in faith, without any doubting at all, because anyone who doubts is comparable to a wave on the sea, being driven and tossed in all directions by the wind.

That chapter goes on to tell us that anyone who is in this condition of being tossed around by every wind or breeze should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. (v. 7.) Yes, wisdom is important and yes, wisdom is available. But the wisdom of God can only be received if we receive it in faith.

Hosea 4:6 is a familiar scripture that tells us that without knowledge we will perish. Truly, knowledge and wisdom are God-attributes. God wants us to have

earthly knowledge and spiritual knowledge. He wants us to have earthly wisdom and heavenly wisdom.

Over the years, I've met Christians who seemingly studied the Word a lot, but couldn't change a light bulb. And I met a great electrician who knew nothing of God. God's desire for His children is to walk in the fullness of all wisdom and the fullness of all knowledge with understanding.

# WITNESSING

## Ambassadors for Christ

Second Corinthians 5:20 says, "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God."

As Christians, we are ambassadors for Christ. We are His representatives here on earth until He returns. Here's why that is important.

As His ambassador, you represent Him. What you do, what you say and the way you act all reflect on the character of God. When the world looks at you, they should not just see you, but see Christ in you. And, you should represent Him in such a way that they want to become a Christian themselves.

When a king or president sends an ambassador to a foreign land, he is taught what to say and what to do. The ambassador does not promote his own agenda, but he presents the ideals and plans of the one who sent him. He does not act on his own, but is merely a representative of the king or president.

Remember, Jesus said that He did not do anything unless He was told to by the Father. (John 5:19.) We are to be the same way. We should only speak what God wants us to speak and we should only do what He wants us to do. If we do what we want instead of what He wants, then we are not His ambassadors. But, if we will read and meditate on the Word of God and then put what we read into action, then we will be ambassadors of Christ.

A few years ago a man told me how great of a witness he was on the job. He said that from the time he got to work in the morning until the time he clocked out to go home, he talked about Jesus. The only problem was, he never did any work. One day his boss contacted me and asked me what was wrong with this man. He said he wouldn't work, he would only preach. He didn't keep his jobs very long because he kept getting fired. It reached the point that this man had such a bad reputation for being a loafer and talking all day instead of working, that no one

would hire him. Instead of drawing people to Jesus, he ran them off.

There is an excellent way to be an ambassador for Christ. There is a way that you can represent Jesus so that people will see Jesus in you and want what you have. All you have to do is do the things Jesus said to do, without any fanfare and without drawing any attention to yourself. Read the Word and do the things you read. Read the teachings of Jesus and act on them in faith and you will be a good ambassador.

Matthew 28:19–20 tells us one of the last things Jesus said before ascending into heaven.

> *[Jesus said,] "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you."*

Jesus wanted us to make disciples, and we can if we will be like Him. In over forty years in the ministry, there is one phrase I have heard over and over and I never want to hear it again: "If that's the way a Christian acts, then I don't want to be one." If we'll be good ambassadors for Christ, then we won't hear that phrase again.

## BE A-TRACT-TIVE

> *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*
>
> Matthew 5:16

On a recent trip to Israel, my wife, Loretta, and I stopped into a little Jewish shop in Old Jerusalem. This is one of our favorite stores, not just because Loretta loves to buy their jewelry, but because of the two men who own the store. They love God, they love God's Word, and they love to talk about God's Word and His law. Although most of their clientele are Christians, these two Jewish men do not believe Jesus is the Messiah. But they love talking to Christians about the things of God.

On our last trip, after entering the store, they closed the door and began to share with us God's Word like they had done on previous trips. After some discussion, they began to talk about Christians and how they viewed many of the Christians that entered their store.

One of the store owners said, "You Christians from America come into our store and place little tracts under our merchandise hoping that when you leave we will find it and, because of the tract, suddenly decide to be a Christian. What we actually do is we throw the tract away. Instead of leaving a tract, Christians

should become a tract."

When I heard the words of this Jewish businessman, my heart was pierced. What he was saying was so true. If Christians would be truly Christlike and led by the Holy Spirit, the world could be converted in one generation.

As Christians, we have everything the world needs. We have the ultimate product at the perfect price. The message we have can save the world from eternal destruction and the price has already been paid. Why should a world full of hurt, poverty, and offenses join the local church that is full of hurt, poverty and offenses? It's time for believers to walk in the full anointing provided for us by the blood of Jesus.

Tracts are good, but the world needs more than an information pamphlet. How can the world believe they can walk in the victory that we preach when we are not walking in it? It's time for the Church to stand up and walk totally released from the curse of the law. Life, health, and prosperity should radiate from our actions, our lifestyle, and our words.

We cannot expect the world to step to a higher level when we appear to be lower than they are. When we become a tract, we will become attractive to the world. They will recognize the anointing and the victory in our lives and they will want what we have and we will point them to Jesus.

# WORD OF GOD (The)

## Heavenly Food

After Jesus had been tempted by the devil, He gave this interesting response. "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matt 4:4).

Consider this. There are two types of bread. Of course, there is the physical bread that you eat with your physical body. But not only is there physical bread, there is spiritual bread. Jesus told the devil, "Man shall not live by bread alone." He was referring to physical bread. Then He spoke of spiritual bread: "But by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

The first verse in the Bible tells us, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). We know the way that He did it. He spoke and the heavens and the earth came into existence. We know from John 1:1 that Jesus was there in the beginning also. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Then it says,

> *[Jesus] was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.*
>
> John 1:2–5

Jesus was and is the Word.

The word comprehend in the Greek can also be translated "overtake."[48] The darkness did not overtake the light. So here we see that the Word was in the beginning and Jesus was the Word.

Let's get a little clearer on this. Revelation 19:13 tells us that there is a name that Jesus will be given and this will be His name that He will have for all eternity: "He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God." Revelation 12:11 tells us, "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony."

Received by John in two God-given visions on the isle of Patmos, the book of Revelation tells us that John saw Jesus clothed with a robe dipped in blood and His name is called The Word of God. So, Jesus was in the beginning as the Word.

If I were to say something to someone, that would be the word of Larry. If Larry is speaking, it's the word of Larry. If God is speaking, it's the Word of God. It's God's Word. God's Word is Jesus. Jesus is the Word of God. If Jesus is the Word of God, then what did Jesus mean when He said, "It is written, 'man shall not live by bread [earthly bread] alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matt. 4:4)?

Jesus was saying, "You cannot live by earthly bread only, but you need to live by Me because the Word that proceeds from the mouth of God is Me. I am the Word of God. I was in the beginning." That's what Jesus was saying in Matthew 4:4.

Look at it this way. What if Jesus was quoting John 1 and substituted the word Me (or I) for The Word of God ? He might say, "In the beginning was Me. And I was with God. And I was the Word of God. I was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Me and without Me nothing was made that was made. In Me was life and I was the light of men. And I shone in the darkness and the darkness could not overpower Me. I am the Word of God."

Is that powerful or what? Jesus said, "Man shall not live by earthly bread alone, but by spiritual bread. I am the Bread of life. I am the Bread of God. I am the Word of God."

# Your Seed Is His Word

As Jesus was standing by the Sea of Galilee, there was a great number of people who had been following Him and they gathered together to hear Him speak. (Mark 4:1–20.) He got into a boat and pushed away from the shore. Facing thousands of people, He began to speak.

He told the story of a man who went out to sow seed. Some of the seed fell by the wayside, some fell on stony ground, and some fell among thorns. None of these seeds produced a worthy crop. But other seed that was sown fell on good ground and produced up to a hundredfold. Jesus concluded by saying, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (v. 9).

As soon as Jesus got alone with His disciples, they questioned Him about this story concerning the seed, because they obviously didn’t understand what He was talking about.

Jesus told them that to the multitudes what He said would just be a parable or a story. He went on to say that those who were on the inside could understand the mystery of the kingdom of God. Then focusing on His disciples, He told them that this parable was the key to all the parables. Then He began to reveal the mystery. He said, “The sower sows the word” (v. 14), and He said the soil was the hearts of men. Jesus didn’t say that the sower sowed money, time, or things. Jesus said, “The sower sows the word.”

How do we sow the Word into the hearts of men?

Just before Jesus ascended, He gave His followers a command. He told them to go and make disciples and to teach them everything that they had been taught by Him. (Matt. 28:19–20.) In other words, take the Word to the world and place it in the hearts of men.

Years ago there was a nation who had developed a powerful bomb. However, they were not a threat to any of the surrounding nations because they had no missile or delivery system. In the same way, the seed (the Word) is powerful and can turn a nation upside down. But unless man can deliver the Word to the hearts of people, it is of no effect.

The Word (seed) is supplied in abundance by God. There is no shortage of Word. When you give financially, you are actually sowing into the delivery system. The money you give into ministries is not “the seed.” Remember, the seed is the Word of God. But your money enables churches, ministries, and organizations to deliver the seed to the soil (hearts of people) where it will explode upon impact and change their lives forever.

When you give into ministries, it is extremely important that you give where the finances are converted into Word and taken to the world. Only then is the Word sown into good soil.

So the next time you plan your giving, place your financial seed into a ministry that has a heart for teaching the Word to the world. The seed (the Word) is always good, but the harvest (thirty, sixty, hundredfold) depends upon where it is sown. The delivery system is extremely important! The Word of God is always pure, anointed, full of life, and does not change. The variable is where it is sown, and that is determined by the delivery system.

Scripture References:
Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19–20)

Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness. (2 Corinthians 9:10)

## Without the Word, Faith Cannot Exist

When we open the Bible, we should not have preconceived ideas. Wouldn't it be great if we could open the Word of God, not as people of a specific denominational church, but simply as Christians, and accept clearly what God's Word says?

Even though most Christians claim to believe the entire Bible as the inspired Word of God, many times we hesitate to blindly trust in God's Word. Even when we study the Bible, sometimes we have a point to prove and merely use the Bible to solidify our already established belief.

When you talk with some people about the things of God, they become defensive. They have their opinion and nothing you can say, no biblical logic discussed, will change their mind. We must have the mind of Christ and the only way to do that is to believe what He believes. Jesus only believed the Word of the Father. We must be like Jesus.

Sadly, some Christians get a belief and hold on to it as truth, regardless. If the Bible disagrees with their doctrine, they ignore that portion of the Bible. This should not be. We must go to the Word of God and ask God to show us His truths and then believe what He shows us!

We should never believe something just because of tradition. Instead, we should

believe because God said it. Jesus said in John 8:32 that if we would abide or continue in His Word then we would be His disciples and we would know the truth and the truth would set us free.

How can we find the truths of God? Second Timothy 3:16–17 says,

> *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

A missionary, after returning from a non-Christian country, related to me that he had seen great miracles take place. He had seen the blind healed and the lame walk in the name of Jesus. When asked why the natives received their healings so easily, he replied that the natives had nothing to unlearn. They just simply believed the Word and acted on what they believed.

We must clear our minds of man's ideas and philosophies and abide in the Word of God. Only when we believe God's Word enough to act on it will we receive the promises of His Word.

Once a man told me that the Bible was just too complicated for him to understand. He said that instead of reading the Bible, he just listened to preachers and he knew they must be right. Well, quite frankly, that's wrong thinking. If Satan can keep us out of the Word instead of in it, then his lies will be easier to believe because we have no truth to compare them to.

In John 17:17 Jesus said, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your Word is truth." Satan hates the Word. He knows that it is the Word that sets us free. He knows that it is through the Word that we receive faith. Satan knows that faith is the substance that will destroy his kingdom. He will do whatever is possible to keep Christians out of faith and the easiest way to do that is to keep them out of the Word. Satan knows that without the Word, there is no faith.

It takes faith to accomplish anything in the spirit realm. Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith, we cannot please God. But faith in what? Faith in God's Word. We must believe that God does not lie and we must believe it so completely that we daily place our lives in the hands of His Word.

So, read the Word of God. Believe what you read and act on what you believe.

That's faith! And that pleases God.

# WORDS

## Words Move Faith

There is power in your words. Probably more power than you could possibly imagine. All through the Word of God, words were used to create, control, and destroy.

When Jesus heard that Lazarus was dead, He went to the tomb and spoke these words: “Lazarus, come forth” (John 11:43). When Jesus said those words, Lazarus came out of the grave.

In the book of Matthew, Jesus went to get something to eat off of a fig tree. After walking over to it, He found nothing on it but leaves, so Jesus spoke to the fig tree and said, “Let no one eat fruit from you ever again” (Mark 11:14).

The next day as Jesus and His disciples passed by, they saw that the fig tree had dried up from the roots. And Peter, remembering, said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away” (v. 21). Then Jesus answered and made a very dramatic statement pertaining to the words of our mouth.

> *“Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.”*
>
> Mark 11:22,23

How much plainer could Jesus have made it? We must speak to the mountain, just like He spoke to the fig tree and just like He spoke to Lazarus.

In John 18, we have one of the most overlooked miracles in the Bible. Jesus was in a garden with His disciples. Jesus had met them in this particular garden several times. They knew it well, including Judas, who was heading toward the garden with a detachment of troops and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees. They had lanterns, torches, and weapons. They were there to arrest Jesus.

Jesus knew exactly what was going on so He walked forward to the soldiers and said, “Whom are you seeking?” The soldiers answered, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Then Jesus said, “I am He” (John 18:5–8). Actually, He was saying, “I AM.” (See Ex. 3:14.)Now, when Jesus said “I am He,” the officers of the court, the Pharisees, and the detachment of soldiers all fell backward to the ground. (John 18:6.) The power of the words of Jesus was more than their physical bodies could handle. According to the Bible, when Jesus spoke, they could not remain standing. They fell under the power of God. They had no choice.

Don’t kid yourself. There is power in the spoken word. Words, your words, can produce life and they can cause death.

Remember, Proverbs 18:21 says, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue,

and those who love it will eat its fruit." This verse means that your words can produce life or death. Your words are the tool that you use to move your faith. When you speak positive words of faith, it moves God to perform His Word in your life. When you speak worry, doubt, and unbelief, then faith is not present and God only responds to faith.

When you have a mountain in your life that you need moved, get into the Word of God and find out what He says about your mountain. Read the Word and meditate on it. Then speak the Word to your mountain. Believe that what you have spoken will come to pass and then watch your mountain be cast into the sea.

## The War of the Words

The enemy has words. His words are his weapon and they can cut and destroy. They have a purpose and that purpose is to bring fear and discouragement to you. When fear grabs your heart, the enemy has accomplished his mission. With fear, there is no faith. Without faith, there is no victory.

From the time of creation until now, God has not changed. Neither has the devil. From the beginning in the Garden, Satan spoke lies and deception. (Gen. 3:1–5.) The problem was not that Satan was a liar. The problem was that someone believed his lies. Without the belief of Adam and Eve, the lies would have accomplished nothing. Only when their belief was added to the words of the enemy did the destruction happen.

Today you have a choice. We just saw that according to Proverbs 18:21, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." Your life and your death are in the power of the words you speak. The world you live in today was formed by the words you spoke yesterday. And the world you will live in tomorrow is being formed by the words you speak today.

Jesus said in Matthew 12:34 that we speak out of the abundance of our own heart. Then in verse 37, He said, "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." The words that come from our hearts have power because we believe them. Likewise, when we hear the enemy speak words of doubt, fear, and destruction, we must cast those words down and not allow them to enter our hearts. You will speak your heart.

The words we meditate, the words we repeat over and over, are the words that find their way into our hearts. The words that are embedded in our hearts are the words we believe. And then, when we speak them, they have power—the power to build or the power to destroy.

There is a war of words that wages continually in the realm of the soul. Your eyes and ears are the entrance to your soul. You are the gatekeeper of what enters. The words of the world and the Word of God enter through the same gates. The soul (your mind, will, intellect, and emotions) decides what it keeps and ponders and what it casts down. The words you keep become who you are and frame your world.

You decide what movies you watch and what music you listen to. You decide what minister you hear and you choose your friends. Your life is full of choices and you are the one making them. You may not feel like you are, but you are. God has placed before us life and death and He wants us to choose life. He will not choose it for you. You must make the decision.

> *I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.*
>
> Deuteronomy 30:19

So as you live your life each day, remember this. The enemy is a liar and his mission statement is to destroy you, your life, and your witness as a Christian. He does this through his lying words. Also remember, his words only have power when you add your belief to them.

When the enemy says all is lost, don't believe his words. Instead, believe the Word of God. Stand strong. When Jesus said that all things were possible, He added this: "Jesus said… 'If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes [His words]'" (Mark 9:23 explanation mine).

Reject the lie. Meditate on the truth. Speak the truth from your heart and stand. You will see victory.

> *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*
>
> Ephesians 6:13
>
> *Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*
>
> 1 Timothy 6:12

## Winning Words Create Winners

Let me ask you something. How do you see yourself? Do you see yourself as a victorious person, able to conquer the problems of the world? Do you see yourself as an overcomer?

There's an old hymn that says, "I'm just a poor old sinner, saved by grace." This song has a nice old melody and the words sound really religious. The only problem is the words are not completely true. A partial truth always sounds good and sometimes even very religious. But only the whole truth sets us free. (John 8:32.)

Yes, before you were a Christian you were a poor old sinner, and when you accepted Jesus you were saved by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8), but once you became a Christian, you became redeemed. You became victorious and, according to the Bible, you became more than a conqueror "through Him who loved [you]" (Rom. 8:37). Jesus became our redeemer. He made a way of escape from poverty, sickness, and spiritual death.

However, some Christians don't understand that we have been redeemed from the curse of the law. (Gal. 3:13.) They accept sickness and poverty as part of life. This should not be. We have been set free from the curse of the law. We need to start acting like it. We need to quit speaking the lie and speak the truth. We're not "just poor old sinners." We are the righteousness of Christ. (2 Cor. 5:21.)

Before we were Christians, we had a debt. Unless this debt was paid, we could never have everlasting life. But the problem was, we could not pay the debt. It required a perfect sacrifice. We were not perfect. So, our debt was impossible to pay.

But then Jesus came to earth as a man and died in our place. He took stripes on His body for our sicknesses. He redeemed us. He paid the debt we could not pay.

So, when we become a Christian, we receive all the benefits of a paid up account. We have health and prosperity available. Now, I'm not saying that there will never be problems, but what I am saying is this, we don't have to be diseased and in poverty. The problems can be solved. Remember, Jesus redeemed us from the curse of the law.

We are victorious. Jesus has defeated Satan and we, as Christians, are the body of Christ. We are not only on the winning side, we are on the side that has already won.

Unfortunately, there are many good Christians who see themselves as beat down and defeated. Why? It's because they believe the lies of the devil.

Several years ago, my son was on the state championship football team. One thing you can always spot on a championship team is this—they believe that they are winners. A winning team is always filled with the belief that they can come in first. The coach must be an encourager. He must constantly build up the boys and keep them looking toward the goal.

A different coach could take this same team and instead of encouraging them, he could discourage them. How would he do that? He would do it with his words. The only thing required to take a winning team and make it a losing team is to start speaking losing words. The more the words are heard, the more the team will believe. And a team that believes they are losers will be losers.

That's what Satan tries to do to the believer. He says, "You're a loser." He says, "You can't be healed." He says, "You can't be prosperous." He says, "You're just a poor old sinner, saved by grace."

Read the first two chapters of Ephesians and you'll discover who you are in Christ. You are victorious!

## Your Words Are Containers

What we say is very important. Proverbs 18:21 makes that very clear: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit." According to this verse in God's Word, we see that death and life are in the power of the tongue. But what does that mean?

This means that words, your words, are containers. They can contain faith or they can contain doubt. What you say today is not only important to you, but can affect the world for years to come. So, your words are important. In fact, Proverbs 6:2 says, "You are snared by the words of your mouth; you are taken by the words of your mouth."

Now, here is a spiritual law: God is a faith God and He releases His faith in words.

In the beginning, God spoke and the universe was formed. In Genesis 1:3 God said, "Let there be light," and it was so—"there was light." And throughout the creation until now, God has spoken and whatever He spoke came to pass.

When Jesus was here on the earth, the Bible tells us that He spoke to the winds and sea and they obeyed Him. He didn't act fearful. He didn't panic. He simply spoke to the wind and sea and said, "Peace, be still!" (Mark 4:39). He believed that what He said would come to pass. He knew His authority and He spoke in faith. And what He said happened.

If you read all of this story in Mark 4, you will see that immediately after the sea calmed down, Jesus spoke to His disciples who were in the boat with Him. It's very interesting what He said. He said, "Why are you so fearful. How is it that you have no faith?" (v. 40).

How much plainer can the Scriptures be? It took faith to calm the sea—not fear, but faith! The disciples were fearful. But when Jesus came on the scene and He

commanded the wind and the sea—and faith was present—the miracle happened.

Ephesians 5:1 tells us to be imitators of God, as children imitate their parents. As Christians, we are to be Christlike. We are to make Jesus our example. What He did, we are to do. We are to live as He lived.

He walked in faith and we are to walk in faith. When Jesus spoke, the sick were healed. demons were cast out, Satan had to leave, the winds were calmed. When Jesus spoke, the power of God was in His words. And that's the way we are to be.

Speak the Word and the will of God the Father and what we speak will come to pass. Not because we are commanding God, but because we are speaking His promises, not our will. We are only repeating what God has already said. And when God speaks, it comes to pass.

If our words contain either faith or doubt, and if it is impossible to please God without faith (and according to Hebrews 11:6 it is impossible), then when we speak, what should we speak? Well, the answer is we are to speak words of faith. By speaking faith words, we are speaking the Word and will of God.

I encourage you to do this today. Listen to yourself. Listen to what you say. Are you speaking faith and agreeing with God? Are you speaking His promises or are you speaking the problem? When you speak the problem, you're agreeing with Satan. Agreeing with God is better.

## Your Life and Your Death Are in the Power of Your Tongue

It is true that death and life are in the power of the tongue and that what we say is important. (Prov. 18:21.) In fact, what we say is so important that much of the Bible (God's Word) is devoted to teaching us what to say.

In James 3, for instance, the Bible compares the tongue to the rudder of a large ship. Although a ship may be large and driven by fierce winds, it is turned by a very small rudder. This is the way the tongue is. It may be a small part of our body, but what we say with our mouths can enhance or destroy our lives. (vv. 4–5.)

Most Christians have no idea how their words are affecting their lives. Words can either be words of faith—words that confirm the Word of God; or they can be words of doubt—words that destroy faith. The choice is yours. Your mouth is connected to your head, not someone else's. You have no one to blame for what you say other than yourself. Think of it this way—your life and your death are in

the power of your tongue.

In Romans 10:9 the Bible says, “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” Notice it says that we are to confess Jesus with our mouth. It doesn’t say to think in our minds. It says to confess with our mouth; in other words, say with your mouth that Jesus is Lord.

Jesus told us about the power of our words in Mark 11:23.

> *“For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.”*

Jesus said to say to the mountain, “Be cast in the sea.” He didn’t say think to the mountain. He didn’t say believe in your heart and that will be enough. He said to believe in your heart and say with your mouth and then you would see the mountain moved.

A man once told me that he didn’t have to ask Jesus for anything verbally. He said he had been a Christian for so many years that Jesus just knew his heart. Well, that sounds good, but it’s not scriptural. All through God’s Word we are reminded that what we confess with our mouths can shape the world around us.

Proverbs 6:2 says we are snared by the words of our mouth. This simply means that you are responsible for your words. You have a choice. With your words you can curse and you can bless. What you say today can affect the world for years to come. Your words are important.

For instance, parents have a choice when speaking to their child. They can say things like, “You are the clumsiest child I have ever seen.” “You will never amount to anything.” “You never do anything right” and so on. Or, they can speak faith words. They can say things like, “You are a good child.” “You will be an achiever.” “You can do all things through Jesus.”

You may be thinking, But you don’t know my child! The Bible says that when things don’t look good, we are not to go by what we see anyway, but we are to walk and talk in faith. (2 Cor. 5:7.) Sometimes when it comes to teenagers, we need to stand on the Scripture that says we are to call those things that be not as though they were. (Rom. 4:17.) In other words, see things as they should be. See things as God sees them. Look through the eyes of faith. Speak to your mountain in faith and it will be moved.

The world says: “What you see is what you get.” The Word says “What you say is what you get.” Remember, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Prov. 18:21).

# WORK OF FAITH (The)

## Like a Rock

> *For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.*
>
> Hebrews 4:2

Did you catch that? “For indeed the gospel.” What’s the gospel? It’s the good news of Jesus and it “was preached to us as well as to them; but the word”—the gospel— “which they heard, did not profit them.” Why didn’t it prosper them? It was “not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.”

This may sound strong, but this verse says that you can hear the Word (the gospel) but unless you mix it with faith, the Word will not profit you.

What is faith? Remember, faith is believing what God said is true and acting on it. In other words, believing the Bible, believing God, is only profitable if you act on what you believe.

In Matthew 7, Jesus talked about two men who built houses. The first man built his house with a solid foundation. It was anchored in the rock. This man was compared to a man who heard the sayings of Jesus, the Word of God, and acted on what he heard. He was not just a hearer of the Word, but he was a doer of the Word.

The second man built his house on top of the ground, in the sand, without a foundation. Jesus compared this man to a man who heard His sayings, but never acted on them.

Both houses probably looked beautiful and strong. To everyone passing by, the houses looked alike. But when the storms came, the house that was built on the sand, the house built by the man who only heard the Word, was completely destroyed.

The house built on the rock—the house built by the man who heard and did the Word, the man of faith—did not fall. His house and all it contained was safe.

One thing to note here is that both houses went through the storm. Jesus never promised that there would not be storms in our lives. He never said that once we acted on the Word, that Satan would quit trying to attack us. But what He did say is that even though the attacks come, even though Satan still comes against our households, if we hear and do Jesus’ sayings, we will weather the storm. We may

go through it, but we will not be destroyed.

Psalm 34:19 says, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.”

The key is to do the works of the Word. We must not only hear the sayings of Jesus, but we must do them. James 2:17 says that “faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

But what are the works that we are to do? In John 6, the disciples asked Jesus this question point blank. They said, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” (v. 28). Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (v. 29). In other words, the work of God is to walk in faith. We must believe God’s Word so completely, that acting on it becomes second nature. Only then will we be like the man who built his house on the rock.

Remember, Hebrews 11:6 says, “Without faith it is impossible to please Him.”

## When You Work the Word, the Word Works

> *Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*
>
> James 1:22

God’s Word is powerful. God’s Word contains everything you need for health and healing, prosperity, and emotional soundness. There is no counsel on earth as great as the counsel that can be found in the Scriptures.

Jesus overcame the temptation of Satan by the power of the written Word, spoken with faith. (Luke 4:1–13.) The same life-changing power that healed the sick, raised the dead, and allowed Jesus and Peter to walk on the Sea of Galilee is available today. (Matt. 14:29.) That power is the Word of God.

However, according to the Bible, the Word of God in all of its strength is not always active. (Mark 7:13.) Actually, it is possible to hear the Good News of the Word of God and know of its power and still not have the power function in your life.

So, what separates the people who see and experience miracle power from those who don’t? Actually, the answer is quite simple. The Word always works for those who work the Word. But how do we work the Word of God?

The disciples asked Jesus what they needed to do in order that they could work the works of God. “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’” The word “believe” in John 6:29 is pisteuo, which translates as “commit to (one’s) trust,” or to have faith.[49] In order for the Word to work, faith in God and His Word must be present. (Heb. 4:2.)

The Word of God is full of promises to the believer. These promises will move mountains, change lives, and bring deliverance from every form of captivity. This power in the Word will work in your life if you will work the Word. You work the Word with faith.

Remember this—living faith hears the Word, believes the Word, speaks the Word, and does the Word. That's faith.

Scripture References:
For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." (John 6:29)

Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." (Mark 9:23)

# WORKS

## Faith vs. Works

> *A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.*
>
> Luke 6:45

Your heart must be established in faith in order to move in the area of your need. Faith is believing in your heart that God's Word is true and that belief is so established, that out of the abundance of your heart your mouth speaks God's promises as though they were already in existence. The only way to have faith coming out of your mouth is to have your heart established in His Word.

Legalism says, "If I can be good enough, God will see my good works and answer my prayer." Faith says, "I believe God's promise without wavering, in spite of what I see or hear."Once I heard a man say if everything was established on works, then at least he would be able to see what's happening. Unfortunately, if everything were based on works, he would have never seen anything happen. Why? Because our works can never be good enough to accomplish anything remotely close to what God can accomplish through us by faith.

If your destiny was dependant upon your works and how good you are, then what would your destiny be? The truth is, if our destiny depended on our works,

we would have legalism once again. Grace is much better.

Paul worked hard in the books of Galatians and Colossians to get legalism out of the church. Our best works developed from the mind and imagination of man will pale by comparison to what one can do who is led by the Spirit of God and walking in faith.

The Word says that out of the abundance of the heart that our mouth speaks. I propose that it's much better to have faith on our lips than to have works. Faith is a rest and that's where God wants us. (Heb. 4:11.) When we rely on works above faith, we are subtly saying that our works will accomplish more than what God can accomplish through faith in His Word.

So take a rest from your work and walk in faith.

# WORRY

## Is Worry a Sin?

Have you ever met someone who was a worrier? You know the type. When things are going bad, they worry because things are bad. When things are good, they worry because things might get bad. Well, let me ask you this. Did you know that when you worry, you limit God and what He can do for you? According to the Bible, worry is a sin! When we worry, we are not in faith and anything that is not of faith is sin.

Several times in Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, He addressed the subject of worry. In Matthew 6, Jesus commands us not to worry. (vv. 25, 27–28, 31,34.) But why should it matter if we worry or not? What's the big deal anyway? Worry, which is a type of fear, is the opposite of faith. In the English language, we have words that have opposite meanings. If I were to ask you the opposite of hot, you would immediately say cold. If I asked you the opposite of up, you would quickly say down. If I asked you the opposite of east, you would immediately say west. Why? Because they are opposites. They not only are opposed to each other, they cannot exist together at the same time.

Sometimes when you translate from one language to another, the meaning can be lost. That's the case with worry. In the Hebrew language, the opposite of worry is faith. Remember, worry is a type of fear.

In the same way that you cannot be going up and down at the same time because they are opposites, you cannot be in worry and be in faith at the same time. When you are in faith, you are not in worry. And when you are in worry, you are

not in faith.

When Jesus commanded us over and over again to not worry, He knew that worry would kill our faith. Is that so bad to have dead faith? After all who needs faith anyway?

Well, in Ephesians 2:8, the Bible says we are saved through faith. James 5:15 says the prayer of faith will heal the sick. Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God. In James 1:5–7, we are told that if we want wisdom all we have to do is ask, but if we don't ask in faith, we won't get anything. And in Romans 14:23, it says that anything that is not of faith is sin.

So, who needs faith? According to the Bible, God's Holy Word, only those who want to be saved, healed, who want wisdom, who want to please God, and who want to stay out of sin need faith. To me, that makes faith extremely important, and it also explains why Satan hates it.

Worry is a tool of Satan. He knows that if he can get you to worry, you will not be in faith. When you are not in faith, you will be ineffective as a Christian. So today I will tell you the same thing Jesus did: Do not worry. No matter how bad things look, do not worry.

Remember, as Christians we walk by faith and not by what we see anyway. So when things look bad, look through the eyes of faith and worry will flee.

## Warrior or Worrier?

Fear will paralyze you and keep you from the victory that God has planned for you. Fear is a spirit and the spirit of fear is not from God. (2 Tim. 1:7.)

Peace is a show of confidence. Peace is the outward manifestation of an internal confidence and confidence is the manifestation of pure faith. Mature faith running at full power will destroy all of the plans and purposes of the enemy while delivering joy to the warrior of God. You can actually be swinging the sword of truth in what looks like the battle of your life with a smile on your face, peace in your heart, and victory on your lips.

Because you know the Word and because the Word says, "Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4 kjv), you do not fear. Because you know God is on your side and because you believe Him, you stand in faith knowing that no weapon formed against you can ever prosper. (Isa. 54:17.) You are victorious and you know it, and because you know it, you have peace.

Quit begging God to give you peace. He already has. Romans 5:1 says that as believers, "having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus is the King of peace and in Ephesians we are told that

He himself is our peace. (Eph. 2:14.) Not only that, but the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, God himself lives inside of you. You are a three-part being. You are spirit, soul, and body. (1 Thess. 5:23.) When you became a believer, the very Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, moved inside of your spirit. As a Christian, you are literally Spirit-filled.

Your spirit is you, my spirit is me, and the Spirit of God is God. Because you are indwelt with the Spirit of God, you have the peace of God inside of you and regardless of what is on the outside, you have the fruit of the Spirit on the inside. (Gal. 5:22.) As a Christian, He who is in you (the Holy Spirit) is greater than what is outside of you. (1 John 4:4.)

The peace of God should be flowing out of you into the world instead of the stress and pressures of the world getting into you. You have at your disposal the greatest power in the universe. Nothing can overpower the love of God and according to 1 John 4:8, God is love. Perfect love casts out fear. (v. 18.)

Worry and stress are by-products of fear. Rest and peace are by-products of faith. To eradicate the fear, all we must do is walk in perfect love, be led by the Spirit, and then the peace of God will flow from us and minister to a world that is living in darkness.

Jesus said you are the light of the world. (Matt. 5:15.) You have a responsibility to let the light shine from you into the darkness. Your testimony of peace will encourage and minister to others and you will discover through walking in the peace and rest of God that you will bring glory to God: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (v. 16).

Walking in faith will make you a warrior. Walking in fear will make you a worrier. Warriors overcome the enemy and enjoy peace and rest even during times of battle. Worriers live in a world of tension and stress, continually in fear at what might happen. What world are you living in?

## Worry Is Not Trusting in God’s Ability

Last week I was talking to a man who was really stressed out. He was concerned about his past and worried about his future. Every word out of his mouth was negative. Everything in his life worried him. The bad things worried him because they were bad. And the good things worried him because they might get bad. With him, everything was a “no win” situation.

Worry is a sin. It is not of God and we should not do it. Let me explain.

In Matthew 6, Jesus preached His famous Sermon on the Mount. This sermon

has a tremendous amount of teaching in it, but one thing is often overlooked and that is this: Jesus commanded us over and over again to not worry. For instance, Jesus said in verse 25,

> *"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?"*

I can guarantee you that you will not see this verse on a plaque in the clothing stores in the shopping malls!

Jesus continued, saying:

> *"Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry…? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'"*
>
> Matthew 6:27,28, 31

Then we come to the verse we all know so well, Matthew 6:33, where Jesus said, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Usually when we read this verse we stop there, but we shouldn't. In the original Greek language, there is no punctuation. The periods, commas, and other punctuation marks were added by the translators. With that in mind, let's not quit reading with verse 33. Jesus said, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you, therefore do not worry" (vv. 33–34).

Here in Matthew 6, Jesus said over and over again, "Do not worry." Was He trying to make a point? I think so.

Some people feel that they have no control over worry. I have actually had people tell me that the only way that they could quit worrying would be if God would just take it away. Well, don't expect God to do it. It's our responsibility.

Some things are spiritual and some things are the flesh. And, of course, they must be dealt with accordingly. However, let me say this—worry is almost always the flesh. What I mean is, Jesus did not tell us to cast out worry. He said, don't do it. He said to quit worrying. He told us to take care of it.

Would Jesus command us to do something that we had no control over? Would He tell us to do something that was impossible for us to do? No, of course not! That would be cruel and that is not the nature of our Lord.

If Jesus told us to quit worrying, then we must be able to stop. And if He told us to quit worrying and we continue, that must be sin. Anytime we are commanded to do something and we do not do it, or we are commanded to quit doing

something and we continue, that's disobedience and disobedience is sin.

So, today, remember, don't worry!

# WORSHIP

## Worship Is Not a Spectator Sport

> *Now as the ark of the Lord came into the City of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window and saw King David leaping and whirling before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart.*
>
> 2 Samuel 6:16

King David gathered 30,000 choice men of Israel and took them with him to bring back the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. Although God had given them specific instructions on how to carry the Ark, they put it on a new cart instead. The Ark was picked up at the house of Abinadab and his two sons, Uzzah and Ahio, drove the new cart.

As they traveled to Jerusalem, one of the oxen stumbled and Uzzah put out his hand to protect the Ark. Instantly he died and David became very angry and afraid of the Lord. Because of his fear, David decided not to take the Ark to Jerusalem, but instead took it to the house of Obed-Edom. There the Ark stayed for three months and Obed-Edom became greatly blessed.

When David realized the blessings associated with the Ark of God, he went again and brought the Ark to Jerusalem. There he sacrificed oxen and fatted sheep. David himself was so overcome with the love of God that he danced before the Lord with all his might while wearing a linen priestly garment. David and all the house of Israel shouted and celebrated with the sound of the shofar.

While the King of Israel and all those with him were shouting and dancing before God and worshiping Him, David's wife, Michal, was observing all of this through a window. The Bible tells us that as she saw her husband, the king, leaping and whirling before the Lord, she despised him in her heart.

When David returned home after the celebration, he was met with great verbal abuse. His wife ridiculed him because of the way he worshiped God.

Now, here's the point. Worship is not a spectator sport. And if you read this complete story in the Bible, you can see clearly that God does not bless those who observe and ridicule worship. (2 Sam. 6:14-23.)

David had a relationship with God, but his wife, Michal, did not. Understanding

worship is impossible without a relationship with the Lord.

## Worship Him in Spirit and Truth

In the fourth chapter of John, Jesus was tired from one of His journeys so He stopped and sat by a well called Jacob's Well. While He was there, a woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus was by Himself because His disciples had gone to get food. When He saw the Samaritan woman, He said to her, "Give Me a drink" (v. 7).

The Samaritan woman was shocked. The Jews had no dealings with her kind, but there was Jesus, asking her for a drink. Jesus told her that anyone who drank the water in Jacob's Well would thirst again. But, then He went on to say that He had water and that anyone who drinks of the water that He had, would never thirst again. He said that it would become a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.

Later in their conversation, Jesus made a profound statement. If Christians could grasp the importance of it, their lives would be changed.

> *[Jesus said,] "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."*
>
> John 4:23,24

This is extremely important. Jesus said that true worshipers worshiped the Father in spirit and truth. And He went on to say that the Father is searching for worshipers who will worship Him. Let me say this. Most of what we call worship is not worship.

When Jesus was talking to the Pharisees in Mark 7, He talked about worship.

> *"'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do." He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition."*

Does this sound familiar? All too often it does. Jesus said that the religious leaders of the day had taken the traditions of their time and made them doctrines. They had gotten to the point that they believed that cleaning the cups and pitchers in the temple in a certain manner was worship. They had taken the commandments of men and taught them as doctrines and considered that

worship. Yet that is not necessarily worship. True worship is an intimate, spiritual time with God. External things are only connected to worship by way of the spirit and truth within.

Years ago, I knew a young man who was a marriage counselor. He was an intelligent person with a good personality. He had all the degrees and papers to be a marriage counselor. The only problem was that he himself had never been married. No matter how much he tried, there were some things he just couldn't understand, but he thought he did.

This is where some Christians are today. They have heard the word worship used in their churches all their lives. They think they worship because of external actions.

God is looking for true worshipers—those who will worship Him in spirit and truth. He's not looking for people who want to play church. He's not looking for those who worship with their lips only. He's looking for those who worship Him in spirit and truth.

> *"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him."*
>
> John 4:23

Man looks at the outside, but God looks at the heart. (1 Sam. 16:7.) It takes a conscious decision to decide to worship God and as we place ourselves in surroundings that allow us to focus on Him, we can more easily turn our hearts toward Him. As we yield our inner self to His presence, He ministers to us deep within, and then comes true refreshing, true peace, comfort and understanding that only He can give.

## Giving Is a Type of Worship

Once I was visiting a church in a major city when the minister got up to take the offering. And that's just what he did. He took it. He started by saying that God loves a cheerful giver. Then he went on to say that even though God loves a cheerful giver, that he liked any kind. He just wanted the people to give to his church.

Another time I attended a convention where a strange offering was taken. The convention speaker was from out of state and was relatively well known. When he took the offering, he told the people that God would only speak to them if they gave him seven dollars each. He had all the people leave the meeting one row at a time. They filed past him and gave him seven dollars each. Because it

was a convention, the crowd was quite large. It took several hours for all the people to get out of the building. What a joke!

Giving to God is a type of worship and is a command of God. We are to worship Him with our tithes and offerings; however, we must give with a cheerful heart.

Anytime you talk about giving, there are those who get turned off. There have been many abuses by ministries, churches, and church-related organizations. I understand why some people are skeptical, but we must not ignore the commands of God because of the abuses of some.

Frauds and thieves will be with us until the return of Jesus. The con artists were here on earth 2,000 years ago when Jesus was here and they are still here today. Things have not changed much, the Word of God has not changed at all. So with this in mind, let's see what God's Word says.

In 2 Corinthians 9:6–7 the Bible says,

> *He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.*

Let me clear the air on something else here. God doesn't need your money. The God who spoke the universe into existence doesn't need your two dollars and fifteen cents. What He does want, though, is your obedience.

In 2 Corinthians 9:10 the Bible says, "Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness."

When we give to God, the Bible refers to that as sowing seed. When we sow, we reap, and the harvest is larger that the seed sown. The unique thing about this is that God is the one who gives us the seed to sow. The more we sow, the more we reap. The more we reap, the more we sow, and so on. So…sow on!

I heard one man say it this way. We keep shoveling to God and He keeps shoveling back. The only difference is, His shovel is bigger than our shovel.

> *[Jesus said,] "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."*
>
> Luke 6:38

# CONCLUSION

All answers to the issues of life and living can be found in the Word of God. The

Holy Bible itself is the true Handbook for Christian Living and the only complete manual for life.

Having completed this book, you can see that only the surface has been touched of the vast information contained in the heart of God. I urge you to continue reading the Scriptures and embark on a quest to find precious seed that when planted in your heart, will grow a harvest of wisdom and understanding that will guide you through the joys and trials of life.

I have discovered through a lifetime of ministry that people rarely anticipate the dramatic changes and challenges that are just out of sight over the horizon. A Christian must be prepared, not just mentally, but deep within, so that when the storms of life threaten, they are anchored in the Word of God and prevail.

## How Do I Become a Christian?

Becoming a Christian is not difficult. It's not my intention to give you a formula, but in order to keep things orderly, I'm going to list the requirements.

1) You must believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that God raised Him from the dead.

This is the basis of our Christian faith. One thing to remember here is that Jesus was not created by God and sent to the earth as a man. Jesus has always existed with God and in actuality, is a part of God.

> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.*
>
> John 1:1–3

2) You must repent of your sins.

Repent means to turn away from your sins and stop doing them. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The payment for sin is death, but when you accept Jesus and repent of your sins, you receive eternal life.

First John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." You must confess your sins and repent of them.

3) You must publicly acknowledge you have accepted Jesus.

Being a Christian is not a hidden thing. It is not something that you do once and then deny the rest of your life. Becoming a Christian is a lifestyle.

Romans 10:9 says “If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Did you catch that? It doesn’t say “Believe in your heart and you will be saved.” It says, “confess with your mouth and believe in your heart that God has raised [Jesus] from the dead, [and] you will be saved.”

Jesus himself told us about doing this.

> *“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.”*
>
> Matthew 10:32,33

We cannot hide our belief in Jesus.

4) By faith you must accept the gift of salvation that God has given to you.

Ephesians 2:8 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” And John 1:12 says “But as many as received Him [Jesus], to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.”

To accept Jesus, pray this prayer from your heart.

Dear Heavenly Father,

I come in the name of Jesus. I thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, into this world to die for my sins and for raising Him from the dead so that I can have everlasting life.

I recognize and acknowledge Jesus as my Savior and as the Lord of my life. I repent of my sins and I forgive those who have wronged me. I believe in my heart and I will confess openly my belief in Jesus.

Thank You for forgiving me of my sins and giving me eternal life. I receive this gift by faith. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

# ENDNOTES

**ABUNDANCE—Pressing Past the Need into Possession**

1Based on information from Brown, Driver, Briggs and Gesenius, The Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon, "Hebrew Lexicon entry for Shalowm," available from http://www.studylight.org/lex/heb/view.cgi?number=7965, s.v. "peace."

**AUTHORITY—Under Your Feet**

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**BETRAYAL—Betrayed by a Friend**

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**BREAD OF LIFE (The)—Jesus Is the Bread of Life**

7Based on information from John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible, available from http://www.studylight.org/com/geb/view.cgi?

book=joh&chapter=006&verse=052, s.v. “saying how can this man give us his flesh to eat?” John 6:52.

**CHRISTMAS—Christmas Is About Jesus**

8Psalm 5:8 says that God made man “a little lower than the angels,” and “crowned him with glory and honor.” The Greek word for crown can be translated as “circle…compass…surround.” When He first made Adam and Eve, the Bible indicates that he didn’t clothe them (Gen. 2:25), the reason being that He covered—encircled, compassed, surrounded—them with His glory. Based on information from Brown, Driver, Briggs and Gesenius, The Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon, “Hebrew Lexicon entry for ‘atar’,” available from http://www.studylight.org/lex/heb/view.cgi?number=5849, s.v. “crown,” Psalm 8:5.

**COMPARISON—The Danger of Comparison**

9Based on information from Brown, Driver, Briggs and Gesenius, “Hebrew Lexicon entry for ‘el,” available from http://www.studylight.org/lex/heb/view.cgi?number=410, s.v. “God,” Genesis 17:1–2; and Brown, Driver, Briggs and Gesenius, “Hebrew Lexicon entry for Shadday, available from http://www.studylight.org/lex/heb/view.cgi?number=7706, s.v. “Almighty,” Genesis 17:1–2.

**DISTRACTIONS—Take Time for Jesus**

10We sit at the feet of Jesus by spending time alone with Him, talking to Him, reading His Word, and meditating on scriptures.

**DOUBT—Doubt Is More Than Just Not Believing**

11Thayer and Smith, “Greek Lexicon entry for Diakrino,” available from http://www.studylight.org/lex/grk/view.cgi?number=1252, s.v. “wavering,” James 1:6.

**Doubt and Faith Cannot Coexist**

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**ENCOURAGEMENT—Your Words Are Multidimensional**

14“Home on the Range,” the state song of Kansas, words by Dr. Brewster M. Higley, music by Daniel E. Kelley. Originally written in 1873.

**ESCHATOLOGY—The Blueprint for the Last Days**

15See John Gill, available from http://www.studylight.org/com/geb/view.cgi?book=2pe&chapter=003&verse=008, s.v. "That one day [is], with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day," 2 Peter 3:8.

**EVANGELISM—The Principle of One**

16An ancient unit of weight that had to do with a certain sum of money.

**FAITH—Living Faith**

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**The ABCs of Faith**

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**Faith Never Gives Up**

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GIVING—Your Mite Activates His Might

21Bible History Online, available from http://www.bible-history.com/links.php?cat=13&sub=206&cat_name=Bible+History&subcat_name=Coins, s.v. "the widow's mite."

GLORY (The)—The Glory Is His Presence

22Psalm 8:5 tells us that when God made man, He crowned him with glory. The original Hebrew word for "crowned" here is translated as "surround…compass," or "encircle." In other words, Adam and Eve were surrounded by glory. They had been clothed with the glory of God and didn't need natural clothing until they sinned in the garden and ate the forbidden fruit, which caused the glory to leave them. (Gen. 3.) Based on information from Brown, Driver, Briggs and Gesenius, "Hebrew Lexicon entry for `atar," available from

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**He Is the God of Glory**

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**INCREASE—The Lifestyle of Increase**

29"Every Day with Jesus," words by Robert C. Loveless, music by Wendell P. Loveless, copyright 1936—Percy B. Crawford.

**INDECISION— Indecision Can Be Deadly**

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**OFFENSE—Skandalon—Satan’s Trap**

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**Offense Comes With a Purpose**

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**What Is Hindering Your Ministry**

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**ORIGINAL SIN—Resurrection Glory**

40Psalm 8:5 tells us that when God made man, He crowned him with glory. The original Hebrew word for “crowned” here is translated as “surround…compass,” or “encircle.” In other words, Adam and Eve were surrounded by glory. They had been clothed with the glory of God and didn’t need natural clothing until they sinned in the garden and ate the forbidden fruit, which caused the glory to leave them. (Gen. 3.) Based on information from Brown, Driver, Briggs and Gesenius, “Hebrew Lexicon entry for `atar,” available from http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/kjv/atar-2.html, Strong’s #5849, s.v. “crowned,” Psalm 8:5.

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**PEACE—The Hidden Power of Shalom**

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**I Don’t Care**

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**SALVATION—The Default Setting Is Death**

46Psalm 8:5 tells us that when God made man, He crowned him with glory. The original Hebrew word for “crowned” here is translated as “surround…compass,” or “encircle.” In other words, Adam and Eve were surrounded by glory. They had been clothed with the glory of God and didn’t need natural clothing until they sinned in the garden and ate the forbidden fruit, which caused the glory to leave them. (Gen. 3.) Based on information from Brown, Driver, Briggs and Gesenius, “Hebrew Lexicon entry for `atar,” available from http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/kjv/atar-2.html, Strong’s #5849, s.v. “crowned,” Psalm 8:5.

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**WORD OF GOD (The)—Heavenly Food**

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**WORK OF FAITH (The)—When You Work the Word, the Word Works**

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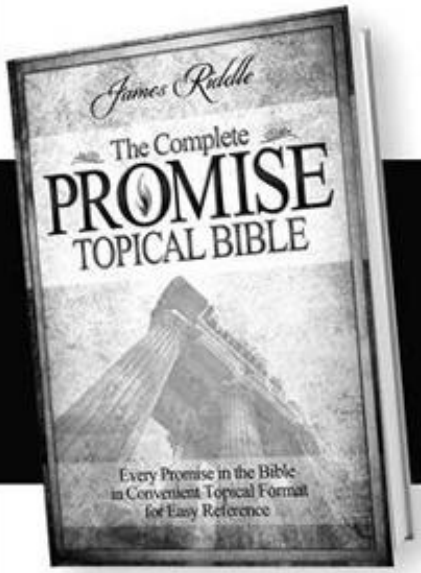
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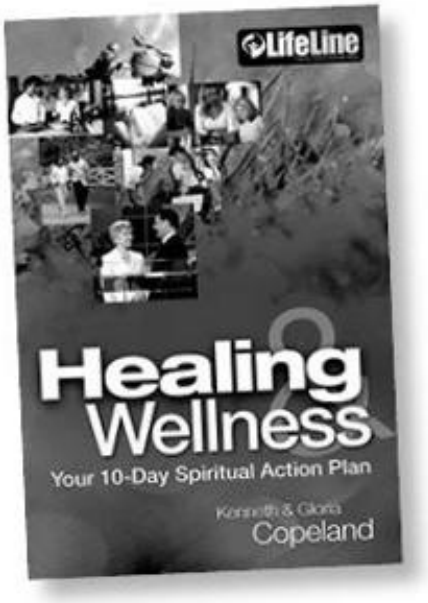
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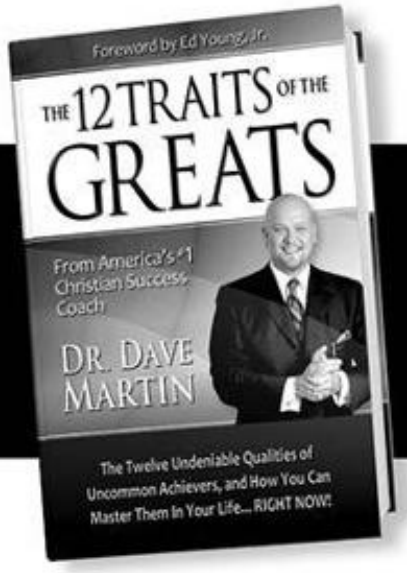
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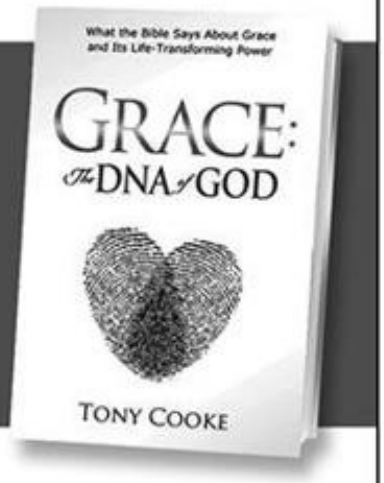
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Practical Handbook for Christian Living by Dr. Larry Ollison

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ISBN: 978-1-606-83354-4

Printed in the United States of America

A minister’s heart and soul is greatly demonstrated through their speaking and writing ministry. If the minister is compassionate and full of the grace of God, it is evident. If he or she has deep understanding of important theological topics and issues, and a real world experience of ministering the love of God to church members, it will be reflected in their ministry to all. This is certainly the case with my good friend Dr. Larry Ollison, and it is very obvious in his new book Practical Handbook for Christian Living.

Dr. Ollison has many years of experience in pastoral ministry, and his extreme love for the Word of God has given him a very unique and mature teaching ministry with great spiritual discernment. That is why I believe that the Practical Handbook for Christian Living will be such a great blessing to any Christian with leadership responsibilities. It helps provide a quick and refreshing reference for dealing with a broad spectrum of spiritual challenges. And it is a helpful resource for receiving personal ministry from the Lord and in ministering to others for the Lord.

I have known Dr. Ollison for ten years and I am very honored to have him as a friend. His church, Walk on the Water Faith Church in Osage Beach, Missouri, is home to an extension campus of Life Christian University. Here, as a professor, he has taught almost every theology and counseling course that the university offers. His published works and radio ministry have propelled him into a global teaching ministry. He has earned both a Ph.D. and a Th.D. in Theology, which is a demonstration of his love for biblical accuracy. In addition to all of Dr. Ollison’s academic and spiritual qualifications for writing this book, he has a wonderful sense of humor which everyone knows is a great blessing for those in ministry, both for personal survival as well as adding a spoonful of sugar to help the medicine go down.

I thoroughly believe that the Practical Handbook for Christian Living will become a well used and treasured volume in your library.

—Dr. Douglas J. Wingate
Founder and President
Life Christian University
Tampa, Florida

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ENDNOTES