

THE SECRET POWER OF GODLY WISDOM



TO COMPLETELY
TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE

LILLIET GARRISON

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Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

THE AIM OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

WHY SEEK WISDOM?

THE MISSING PIECE TO THE PUZZLE ABOUT CHANGE

HOW TO ACHIEVE AND MAINTAIN GOD ORDAINED

SUCCESS

- 1 RECOGNIZE WHERE YOU ARE AT PRESENTLY
- 2 DETEST YOUR CURRENT CONDITION
- 3 THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF KNOWLEDGE
- 4 KNOW WHO YOUR REAL ENEMY IS
- 5 CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES OF REBELLION AGAINST GOD
- 6 DEVELOP GREAT FAITH
- 7 MAKE TODAY YOUR CHANGE DAY — THE RISK OF TAKING NO RISK
- 8 KEEP MOVING FORWARD WITH GOD
- 9 TELL SOMEONE WHAT JESUS HAS DONE FOR YOU
- 10 RESOLVE TO PURSUE THE WISDOM OF GOD ABOVE ALL ELSE
- 11 LET THE HOLY SPIRIT MENTOR AND TEACH YOU
- 12 AVOID THE COVER-UP
- 13 ABANDON TOXIC AND ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS
- 14 CREATE A CLIMATE OF FAITH IN YOUR LIFE
- 15 ALLOW YOURSELF TIME TO CHANGE
- 16 FEED YOUR FAITH DAILY
- 17 BEGIN THE HABIT OF SITTING AT JESUS' FEET
- 18 MAKE TIME TO PRAY
- 19 LET GOD MANAGE YOUR SCHEDULE
- 20 BECOME A PART OF THE BODY OF CHRIST
- 21 LISTEN AND LEARN FROM WISE MENTORS
- 22 WELCOME CORRECTION
- 23 DETERMINE TO BE AN OVERCOMER IN THIS LIFE
- 24 DON'T LET PRIDE KEEP YOU FROM ACCEPTING HELP
- FIND YOUR PURPOSE IN LIFE
- 25 PURSUE YOUR PASSION TO FIND YOUR PURPOSE

- 26 RELENTLESSLY CHASE YOUR PURPOSE AND SEE IT TO COMPLETION
- 27 DETERMINE TO BE OBEDIENT TO GOD AND TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL YOUR HEART
- 28 LET GOD EXPOSE TO YOU YOUR CHARACTER WEAKNESSES
- 29 SPEAK FAITH WORDS INTO YOUR LIFE
- 30 BECOME A WINNER BY ENDURING TO THE END

I'd like to thank you in advance for purchasing and reading my book. If you found practical help and wisdom within its pages, please consider leaving a review on Amazon.

Reviews are important to all authors, but for the Christian author, positive reviews spread the Word of God.

Thanks in advance for your help. Lilliet

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INTRODUCTION

FIRST, SOME THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT WISDOM PRINCIPLES and the POWER TO CHANGE

“Every problem you have is a wisdom problem!”



“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind” (James 1:5-6).

Is lasting change really possible? Many desire to change but find changing difficult, and find permanent, lasting change beyond their ability.

Is there a secret to changing and turning our lives around for good? If so, how do we equip ourselves to ensure that change lasts long enough for transformation to take place? What are the key elements to change?

Knowledge and focus are two significant keys to change. Right focus leads us to the right kind of information. And having right information leads us to the right kind of knowledge, which in turn, leads us to the right kind of wisdom – Godly wisdom, that is!

Right focus allows us to change and achieve more. Wrong focus and wrong knowledge lead us to live foolish, wasted lives. Broken focus leads us to distraction, instability, and the non-fulfillment of our dreams.

We don't need many keys—we only need the *right* key to make life work, and that key is Godly Wisdom. Godly wisdom is also the key to making permanent and lasting change that leads to total life-*transformation*.

King Solomon achieved many good things in his life and none in history can equal his works or accomplishments. He was also the wisest man to have ever lived, and because God gave him more wisdom than any other, he possessed the keys to great success and riches.

Studying his methods will help you achieve the change you need to make lasting success possible. Little keys unlock big doors. By studying Proverbs and Godly wisdom you can make small changes that will provide big breakthroughs in your life. Wisdom will influence your daily habits, and your daily habits influence your character, your integrity, and your ability to overcome evil in this world.

Is complete transformation possible?

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind...” (Romans 12:2)

Transformation is possible, but ONLY by transforming our minds first. This is **our** assignment and no one else can do it for us. After our mind and thinking is permanently changed, all else will follow.

A glimpse of God's plan for mankind in Ezekiel 36:24-27.

“For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.”

This verse explains how complete transformation takes place. Our lives require a God intervention. Without it, we're doomed! If we'll accept God and allow Him to come into our heart, He'll give us a new and improved heart—one that has the capacity to love as He loves, and sees as He sees. This results in our flesh being renewed, and we become a *new* person. When God puts His Spirit in us, we have the ability to live rightly for we're made righteous *in* Him.

Since man was created in God's image and His Spirit was breathed into man (Adam), our spirit is empty and always seeking until we're reunited with our Creator. Sin separates us from Him until we recognize our sinful, fallen nature and repent. We're not whole until we willingly accept God's provision for our sin, which is His Son Jesus. When we surrender to Jesus, He begins His restoration process in us. We receive this newness of life by asking Him to come into our heart and allowing Him to change us from within. The results are: wholeness for brokenness, fruitfulness for barrenness, abundance for poverty and lack, and the wisdom to know what to do, where once was indecision and confusion.

THE AIM OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

Proverbs aims to help us improve our lives with simple, yet powerful spiritual truths. Solomon taught, almost three thousand years ago, what we now know as personal development and success principles.

Solomon's dream.

According to the accounts found in the Bible, God appeared to the newly crowned Solomon in a dream and offered him his heart's desire. Unlike the fabled King Midas, who according to legend, foolishly asked that all he touch be turned to gold, the young Solomon asked not for fame or fortune, but for wisdom to rule his people well. Pleased with this request, God replied:

"I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be" (1 Kings 3:12).

From then on Solomon began an inspired study of the principles of wisdom and wrote them in the book of Proverbs. The Hebrew word translated "proverb" more nearly means parable or parallel.

The law of cause and effect shapes our lives and there are things to do, and things to avoid doing, that make a difference in our quality of life. These are acts of omission and commission. Solomon seems to suggest that there are two kinds of proverbs, Goads and Nails.

Goads, which are designed to pierce our thick skin of complacency and stir us to positive, productive action, and....

Nails, solid and reliable values or truths that help us avoid making disastrous mistakes.

Life-changing wisdom.

All of us to some degree already possess a type of wisdom. Unfortunately, our human weaknesses cancel out and work against that wisdom. An example would be of good seeds being planted in a garden. Although the seed contains everything needed to produce an abundant harvest, an unaware gardener can frustrate that potential by not tilling the soil properly, by depriving the seedlings of water and nutrients, and by allowing weeds and pests to attack the plants and choke off future growth.

Likewise in our lives, the success that should be readily available to us is all too often self-sabotaged by unawareness, wrong thinking, and negative emotions, such as greed, lust, selfishness, anger, malice, envy, anxiety, fear, pride, laziness, and ignorance. Our own carnal nature, coupled with incomplete or wrong information about God, negative emotions, and ignorance of the laws that govern the world, lock millions into mediocrity, poverty, ill-health, and death.

Through the inspired writings of Solomon, the foolish can attain wisdom and become more effective and productive than they ever thought possible. God called us to be fruitful, and wisdom shows us the way to live just that way.

Solomon enjoyed unparalleled wisdom. (See 1 Kings 10:1, 6, 23-24). Verse 24 of this scripture portion tells us...

“The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart.”

Fans from around the world gathered to behold Solomon in all his splendor. Yet for all his fortune, fame, and fulfilled fantasies, he could not find lasting satisfaction. Like diets rich in fat or sweets, the pleasures soon made him nauseous. His glory soon lost its luster, as a junk-food diet makes us sick.

What really lasts in life?

Solomon soon found out that,

“All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers, the flowers fall, but the Word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:6b, 8).

Only God’s Word will last! Each of us should ask ourselves, *am I investing my time and life in what will last?* Much of what we put our passion into will fade away. It will not count for anything, especially after we’re gone. If we want our life to matter, we’ll need to take another look at how we’re spending our days and what we give our time and attention to.

Solomon found out that great success has an emptiness to it. Unless God builds your successes, they’re likely to distract you from what really matters most. A lot of what busies us will eventually waste away. Only His Word really lasts. Only His Word keeps our character and our lives from eroding away (Psalm 119:9, 11).

WHY SEEK WISDOM?

The Book of Proverbs is unique in the whole Bible. It's a handbook solely devoted to detailed instructions in day-to-day godly living.

Proverbs keeps it simple—by simply teaching the *way of wisdom*. This handy guidebook prepares us for everything Jesus later taught his disciples about worshiping God in spirit and in truth, through prayer, faith, and love.

God isn't interested in our rituals or lip service. He sees deeply into our heart and wants our motivation for service to spring from the same deep well. If we simply worship Him, instead of other things, we've captured the essence both of the book of Proverbs and of living with wisdom.

Solomon was inspired by God to interpret His Law and to translate it into practical, detailed instructions or formulas for successful daily living.

Similarly, Jesus made it clear that He hadn't come to rescind the Law of God, but to fulfill it. He did this through his teachings and by demonstrating and then translating for us through parables. The parables were His chosen means of instilling within our heart the true intent of God's message of love for us. God loved us first, and we're not only to love Him back as a reflection of our gratitude, but to take it a step further, loving our neighbors as much as we love ourselves.

Solomon instructs us on how to live with wisdom. And wisdom, personified in Proverbs, tells us that if we're rightly motivated we'll live right, love right, be right, and end right.

Knowing God personally is the vital first step in being able to live rightly.

Solomon implored us to seek wisdom *first*, because it's the ***principal thing***. *Principal* in this context means main, chief, major, most important, prime.

Proverbs 4:7 (NKJV): "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get *understanding*."

Proverbs 4:7 (NLT): "Getting wisdom is the wisest thing you can do! And whatever else you do, develop good *judgment*."

Why is wisdom the principal thing?

Wisdom, the principal attribute of the Almighty, has seven key aspects as seen in Proverbs 9:1-11:

"Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out its seven pillars. She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table. She has sent out her maids, and she calls from the highest point of the city. Let all who are simple come in here! she says to those who lack judgment. Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of understanding. Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult; whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse. Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you. Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One, is understanding. For through me your days will be many, and years will be added to your life."

Why is wisdom necessary?

Wisdom is important because it was there in the beginning with God and **GOD IS WISDOM!** If Wisdom was with God, then it's important, and since it's important to God, it must become important to us! Here, in fact, is something so important that it existed "before the works of old."

What are wisdom principles?

A *wisdom principle* is a fundamental truth about human nature and behavior that challenges a person's belief system. The definition of wisdom is *knowledge that is rightly and appropriately applied*. If wisdom principles are accepted and diligently applied to one's life, they'll change a person from the inside out. As they become that person's truth, they come to constitute his or her belief system. Our beliefs reveal what we think—and what we think in turn reflects our beliefs.

The wisdom of the world is foolishness to God.

At best, the good examples of the wisdom of this world represent damage control or behavior modification. *For who of us possesses the perfect wisdom to prevent any or all of the evils of this present day?*

“The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He takes the wise in their own craftiness” (1 Corinthians 3:19).

“Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget *My* words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. **Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom.** Though it cost all you have, *get understanding*. Esteem her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you. She will set a garland of grace on your head and present you with a crown of splendor” (Proverbs 4:5-9) (emphasis added).

How do I develop wisdom in my life and what should I expect?

Mark 4:26-29 provides us with an example of this spiritual concept in the parable of the growing seed:

“This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself, the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

In this parable Jesus used an example that incorporated seed, time, and harvest—all of which everyone understood to illustrate truths about how God’s Word works—which very few understood.

First, He taught that God’s Word has to be planted like a seed within our heart. Just as a seed doesn’t release its life until it’s planted in the ground, God’s Word won’t set us free until it’s implanted in our heart. Having a Bible on our table, in our hand, or even in our head isn’t sufficient; we have to commit God’s Word to our heart.

Second, the man in Jesus’ parable who sowed the seed also slept, rose, and waited, day after day. It takes time for a seed to germinate. You can’t plant a seed one day and expect to see a seedling the next. Just because there’s nothing visible above ground, though, doesn’t mean the seed isn’t growing. If you dig it back up every day to check whether anything is happening, it will never grow. You have to have faith that the seed will do what it was designed by God to do—to produce fruit in its time.

The Word of God works the same way. When we meditate on God’s Word for one day, we can’t expect to see results the next. And if we allow ourselves to meditate on His Word one day and then live differently for the next six, we are in effect digging up the seed.

The real and only key to finding wisdom that produces transformation.

In John 15:7–8, Jesus said: “***If*** you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, ***that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.***”



THE MISSING PIECE TO THE PUZZLE ABOUT CHANGE

Most everyone desires to change something about themselves. The desire to improve is a natural part of our being. Most of us know instinctively, that there's more to life than what we may be currently experiencing or achieving. For Christians, this inner sense of awareness is intensified in that the Holy Spirit actually gives us a holy dissatisfaction that drives us to seek transformation. Once new Christians recognize in whose image they were created, and that their new identity is now in the Lord, they're rarely content to stay the same.

Growth means change!

If you're not experiencing growth in your life it may be due to your unwillingness to change. This is frequently the reason for restlessness and discontent. We often don't see the root of the problem until much later, but that restlessness is a tell-tale sign that something needs to change.

In God's creation, the plant world changes easily and effortlessly. Plants' lives are simple—they simply grow. The change happens before our eyes. They morph from a seed into a seedling, and finally into the adult plant that eventually produces. They do this effortlessly because they were created to grow and produce. You and I were created with this same principle in mind. When we thwart this natural growth process, we create conflict within ourselves.

Change is supposed to be natural and good, producing growth and maturity, followed by fruit and a harvest. Not wanting to change is indicative of not wanting to grow—or not wanting to grow up. Can you imagine a plant or animal taking this “stance”? But this isn’t what God had in mind for us either. When we assume this position in life, we’re settling for mediocrity.

We all know people who are threatened by change. You may be one of them. But once you get used to the idea and you see the fruit it brings into your life, you’ll be able to let go of the fear and welcome the change.

Even when we sense our need to change or grow, the process can be difficult. We frequently don’t know where to start, and the simplest baby steps can seem monumental. Sometimes we’re so overwhelmed that we have no idea what to tackle first, especially if we need change in multiple areas of our life. It’s easier to sit down until the feeling goes away than to stand up and take that first step.

Alternatively, you may know where to start and may actually have tried to change for a while, but when life got really difficult, you found yourself slipping back into your previous behaviors or thinking patterns. Don’t feel alone. It can be difficult to change, especially if nothing and no one else around you is changing. You can feel estranged and lonely being the only one who is moving forward. To alleviate the sense of loneliness caused by being the only one to deviate from the established norm, many return to old behaviors and ways of thinking.

What we often fail to understand when we’re trying to change ourselves is that there’s a missing piece to the puzzle in the transformation process.

Rarely can we make lasting, positive changes that are also effortless, because we don't know what to change *to*.

The Bible tells us we were created in God's own image.

The truth above constitutes for many the missing piece of the puzzle. If we don't fully grasp this truth, we'll find ourselves continuously going against the natural flow. We think we know ourselves best, when in fact this isn't the case. We have so much potential, but we're unaware of it. We have such a great capacity for accomplishment, but we don't tap in to it. If our world has been limited and small, with little global awareness or outside experience, we'll lack any clear notion of what else is out there to know, or who else we could be.

Because we were made in God's image, God knows best what He created us for, the assignment He has planned for us, and what needs to be changed in us for us to fulfill His intended purpose. Getting a vision of what God has for us provides incredible excitement, satisfaction, and fulfillment.

When we look at ourselves in the raw, divested of all the trappings we believe make us who we are, we can't imagine who we could be. And because we can't envision ourselves differently, we assume that change can't possibly take place.

Understand that God, right now, isn't looking at you in your unfinished, work-in-progress condition. He sees you as though you're already at the end of your earthly life and calling. He sees the ultimate you, the person you will *become*. In addition, because you have allowed Him to implant His ideals for you into your heart and mind, He perceives you in the perfect

condition *He* has in mind for you! He sees you as having fulfilled your goals toward a successful and fruitful life. That's how He views you today, whether or not you see yourself in the same way. He had the pattern for the finished product, after all, long before He began knitting you together in your mother's womb.

God isn't affected by how you see yourself.

God doesn't require you to *already* see yourself as He sees you. Nor does He need you to have a better image of yourself *before* you're ready for His intended use. Your disbelief about what you can become doesn't hinder His work in your life at all—unless you choose to fight Him all the way in terms of allowing Him to do what He wants to in your life. If you're willing to go along with Him, you can and will experience the most amazing life imaginable. What He does require is that you *give up*—your life, that is, not your hope—in exchange for the *better one* He has in store for you.

With some people God will make the change anyway, using them despite their kicking and screaming, as He did with Jonah. He'll permit others to have, and to go, their own way. God will never force on you what He wants for you. He allows each of us to make the choice to be fulfilled, successful, joyful, and giving. Alternatively, we can opt to be selfish, unfulfilled, ineffective, hateful, and miserly.

Know that God is loving and merciful. He doesn't want that second option for any of His children. But when He decided to give humanity free will, He thereby allowed us to make our own choices, and suffer or delight in the consequences, regardless of whether or not our choice for ourselves corresponds with His choice for us.

God will perfect you.

Since God is perfect, He alone has the ability to see you complete and made perfect. When you allow Him to change you, by making you into who you were meant to be, the transformation will require so much less effort on your part. Instead of fighting the change, you'll be standing before Him yielded and pliable, ready at all points to cooperate with Him in your transformation process.

As a result you aren't continually frustrated with life and its emptiness. This is the only way to effect change that is permanent, lasting, and effective. God will gradually change you by changing your heart. This happens when you ask Him for wisdom and surrender to Him. In the end, this kind of change is both exhilarating and glorious!

HOW TO ACHIEVE AND MAINTAIN GOD ORDAINED SUCCESS

As we study Solomon's words, it will become apparent that the way of life he was inspired to write about, is the very same God-centered way that Jesus and his apostles taught and demonstrated a thousand years later. Jesus reminded the Jews saying:

"The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now One greater than Solomon is here" (Luke 11:31).

It's important while reading Solomon's wise words of wisdom, to remember that One greater than him has now come. Jesus came to offer us life, as we had chosen death for ourselves. It is only in accepting Him that we have the ability to be successful. It's only through The Holy Spirit that we are privy to the secrets He alone reveals to us that make our way prosperous. This wisdom comes *from* Him and only *through* Him, and not of ourselves. This is how we achieve and maintain real success!

You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms His covenant, which He swore to your forefathers, as it is today. If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God" (Deuteronomy 8:17-20).

We are what we think.

It's difficult to separate ourselves from our belief system. What we believe is reflected in how we think. How we think affects our actions and our actions become our daily habits. These habits, in turn, reflect our choices. Our choices reflect our character, and our character reveals who we are and what we think about ourselves, others, and even God

Everything we think and do reflects to some degree how we were influenced from birth. We also influence our own lives by what we permit ourselves to think about, what we expose ourselves to, and what we allow ourselves to do from young adulthood on. Our beliefs therefore, impact all of our communication (verbal and non-verbal) within our self, with God and others, and even our personal conduct toward others.

We are what we believe.

If the knowledge ingrained in us (our belief system) revolves around God, and we grew up believing what we were taught and shown by example, our lives should reflect the positive results of such input. This outcome reflects not only that the information was received and accepted, but that it was internalized. It has become our own personal belief system. From that point on, it becomes synonymous with who we are, because it's acted upon. It has moved beyond belief to *action*. It started out as information, but as we received, accepted, and acted upon it, it became in effect a part of our DNA, the blueprint for who we are. Even after death, our DNA can still identify us.

Choose to “apply” wisdom to your life.

The Bible is full of wisdom. King Solomon, for example, recorded numerous wisdom principles, which if accepted, adopted, and acted upon

will dramatically change our lives for the better. A new habit is formed in as few as twenty-one days. We can actually reprogram our thoughts, beliefs, and behavior by developing a new set of habits; habits that start with new thinking.

Success requires a diligent quest to incorporate wisdom principles into our mind and heart and accordingly, into our everyday lives. Wisdom affects who we are, not merely what we think. If we seek out wisdom (an action), it will imprint itself upon our heart rather than merely populating our thoughts, as information does. Many people may read the book of Proverbs and not be profoundly impacted because they're reading for information only. They're looking for skills, not transformation.

If you sincerely want to see change in your life; more, if you want your life to be changed to the point of complete transformation, you'll first need to reflect upon and ask yourself some hard questions as you make your way through the 31 wisdom chapters in the book of Proverbs. I would suggest keeping a journal handy and then asking yourself and responding to questions as you go.

Such as:

What is this Scripture saying? What is it saying to me personally?

Do I want to accept it and allow it to translate into a new belief system for me?

Am I willing to permit my mind (my thinking) to be transformed?

Am I willing to ask God to help me let go of things and people that might be detrimental to me and shouldn't be a part of the new life I'm seeking?

Am I willing to open up my heart and mind to assimilate these principles into my life?

Am I ready to recognize and acknowledge that I'm wasting my life and wish to stop repeating the same old patterns?

Am I willing to admit that I've been wasting my life on things that don't really matter, or that lack substance?

Have I ever found purpose or understood what life is really all about?
Do I want more?

Do I desire to be productive, content, joyful, and satisfied with my life?

Do I want to leave worry, anxiety, and/or depression behind? Or do I want to hang on to them because they bring me the attention I so desperately crave? Am I willing to be made whole and new? To be healed—from deep within?

Do I really want to change? Or do I want to try the ala carte method, picking and choosing, incorporating some new ways but keeping the old habits as backup? Do I want both/and...?

Do I want these wisdom principles badly enough to incorporate any change to my schedule that may be required for me to pursue them

with my whole heart, mind, and soul?

Am I willing to have my relationships changed as a result?

Am I willing to pursue the principles from these wisdom Scriptures until they become a part of my DNA?

Again, the definition of wisdom is knowledge that is rightly and appropriately applied. It has been said that there's a reason the rearview mirror is so small and the windshield so big: Where we're headed is much more important than what we're leaving behind. Keep that in mind as you pursue the wisdom that will characterize and embody your new future.

It's all about the future—not the past.

The past is your clue about what needs changing for you to have a better future. In that regard, the past serves as a teaching tool. Don't be tempted to stay in your past. This decision will keep you from moving forward.

Choose life, not death!

Our enemy has devised a powerful tool to keep people from enjoying life and freedom by keeping them ignorant of the blessings and love of God. By keeping them locked in a painful past, they are then robbed of *any* future. But this describes death, not life! You don't have to be a spiritual fatality. God sent His Son and His Word so you could know of His immense love for you.

“See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land

your are entering to possess....This day I call Heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to His voice and hold fast to Him. For the LORD is your life, and He will give you many years in the land He swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).

God commands us to choose life. But it is you who must decide! If you decide not to choose, you’ve actually made your choice by default. Satan enjoys nothing more than when people are indecisive and passive; he doesn’t have to exert extra effort with fence riders who simply choose not to choose.

Hope is about the future too.

Wisdom is learning that life isn’t about what has happened to you in the past, but about what you decide to do about your future. Opting for wisdom is an action step. As long as you merely wish for a better future, you won’t move beyond the yearning stage. Action and a renewed mind will move you in the direction of getting what you want.

And the good news is...

Contrary to popular opinion, you really don’t need to know all that many things in this world. What you do need is knowledge of where to look for the right information, and that includes knowing the right “go-to person.” Multitudes of people are searching everywhere for answers to their problems. However, they’re searching in all the wrong places and looking to all the wrong people for their answers. You don’t need many answers; you only need the *right* answer. So who has this right answer? Only the ONE who created you—that’s who! That one is God. If you’re not looking for the right answer and the right person to give you that right answer,

you're wasting a lot of valuable time. In the end, you'll wind up with no permanent solutions to your problems.

If you've looked in many places for the secret to starting over but find yourself in constant frustration, then perhaps you've been looking in all the wrong places. Self-help books, seminars, and the Internet offer many suggestions for self-improvement. But, like many New Year resolutions, they don't seem to be long-lasting. Perhaps you've even attempted to start life over a few times, only to find yourself right back in your original state within a few months or even weeks.

If you picked up this book because you wanted to know more about wisdom, I congratulate you. Your desire will be richly rewarded, first by immersing yourself seriously into the book of Proverbs and then, it is my hope, by considering also some of my reflections on it. As you implement what you learn about wisdom into your life, you'll begin to see dramatic and beneficial changes.

Remember God will bless you for seeking and choosing to live your life with wisdom that comes only from Him. You'll never regret it! Your only regret will be that you didn't find and pursue it sooner...

I desire for you God's richest blessing for a full and blessed life. Enjoy learning about Godly wisdom. Moreover, don't neglect to ask the Lord for it, not once, as Solomon did, but again and again as you make your way through life's ever-changing passages.

Take courage! Your life is about to change for the better.

CHAPTER ONE

RECOGNIZE WHERE YOU ARE AT PRESENTLY

Not too many years ago America experienced unprecedented prosperity. The 80s were a decadent age as personal and economic wealth skyrocketed. Our nation saw the greatest sustained fiscal growth and accumulation of wealth the world had never before witnessed. Human reasoning would tell us that we should have been content with such riches and world dominance. However, the reality is quite the opposite.

Americans are now experiencing unprecedented sorrow and disillusionment. Our nation and many other countries worldwide are now experiencing worldly sorrow over lost wealth and influence. We haven't gotten around yet to godly sorrow, but that may come.

We saw this in the Great Depression of the 1930s, and we're told that what we've experienced economically in the last few years has been in many ways the equivalent of the Great Depression. To a large extent, the world has cycled back from great affluence and optimism into hopelessness. Depression, despair, and suicide have once again skyrocketed. We see all around us a world in agony.

Do you find yourself feeling hopeless about the future? Are you currently living with depression and despair? Are you overcome with worry and anxiety about the future? Has the stress of life taken a toll on your health and your relationships?

If you find yourself in an intolerable place...well, this may surprise you, but I'm going to say *good*—for only when we despise the place in which we currently stand, that we find ourselves motivated to turn from what doesn't work, to seek answers and find out what does.

Prosperity doesn't bring about change, because it doesn't bring discomfort. Discomfort brings out in us the necessary motivation to seek out change and then to follow through.

From where do you derive your strength?

You'll need to take a good, hard look and be honest with yourself. Unless you do, you probably won't muster the motivation needed to break away, either from the past or from the pack. Unless you despise the place at which you currently stand in your personal life, and the person you've ended up becoming, you won't seek out a different way of life.

The National Institute of Mental Health has some rather grim statistics on depression and the adult American population:

An estimated 33 to 35 million U.S. adults are likely to experience depression at some point during their lifetime. The condition affects men and women of all ages, races, and economic levels. However, women are at a significantly greater risk than men to develop major depression. Major depressive disorder affects approximately 14.8 million American adults or about 6.7% of the population age 18 and older in a given year.

18.8 million American adults suffer from clinical depression. Remember that clinical depression is the more serious. 9.5% of

the adult population cannot function properly in society because of severe depression. They are mentally incapacitated to function normally in life. Approximately 35 million Americans suffer from depression severe enough to warrant treatment from a professional. Approximately 19.1 million Americans 18–54 years-old suffer from anxiety disorders. This represents about 13.3% of this age group. (Author’s paraphrase)

“Reuters Health said that one in five Americans are depressed or unhappy, and report high levels of stress, anxiety and sadness. According to the National Institute of Health, Americans age 65 and older, account for about 13 percent of the population, but almost 20% of all suicides.”

Society’s answer – drugs.

In the past 15 years the number of people seeking treatment for depression in the U.S. has doubled. Recent research reveals that 90% of those who leave their doctors’ offices after looking for treatment for sadness or depression depart with prescriptions for antidepressant drugs.

Our society doesn’t see the link between selfishness, greed, and unhappiness, so it turns to drugs to solve their problems. Yet drugs only add to our problems. Our children are suffering from depression at a younger age and are increasingly unhappy, at times to the point of suicide. The school’s answer is the same as society’s—to turn to drugs.

Doctors prescribe drugs because they have neither the answers nor the wisdom to understand what causes these symptoms or what can alleviate them. They’re trained to recognize physical symptoms, not to recognize

and understand the spiritual condition of the heart that causes many of these symptoms in the first place.

The propagation of evil in our day.

We're witnessing the proliferation of evil and the destruction by our own government, of the very godly principles upon which America was founded. Evil is everywhere and ever-present, and it's taking over many of our institutions. The pillars of our once godly society are being torn down and stripped away, making way for every kind of perversion and evil. What is good is called evil, and evil is called good. Pride and greed are rampant. The book of Revelation tells us what will take place in the last days, and we're in the midst of seeing this played out.

Materialism produces in us first greed and then eventually sadness and depression because it can neither be retained nor sustained. People become obsessed over the accumulation of things, or over ways to prevent others from taking their worldly goods, or getting ahead of them in the race to acquire more. Many are even willing to sacrifice themselves and their families over worldly possessions and wealth.

An abundant life is not about possessions and wealth.

Desperation sets in when we fail to understand that we were never meant to hang on to those things. That's what *folly* is, and it's why we have the words of Solomon in Proverbs addressing the very societal issues and problems that affect us today. These maxims are universal; as God designed human beings in such a way that each must choose to live according to one or the other of two diametrically opposed standards.

One is foolish and leads to death.

The other is wise and leads to abundant life and wholeness.

God allows each of us free reign to choose which of the two roads we want to travel. We become depressed because we fail to comprehend that we've been duped by the enemy into putting our heart and soul into fluff—bubbles that float in the air and, lacking substance, blow away.

We fail to pursue that which can't be taken from us, so we end up living foolish lives. This *should* depress us as we begin to grasp the enormity of the sham we've been fed and the intensity of our belief in that sham. We've sold out to it! Only when this realization hits us between the eyes do we suddenly see greed, wealth, and materialism for the emptiness they bring.

Instead of wise living that provides us with more than enough materially not only to sustain our own families, but also to assist others, we choose reckless and ill-advised living that produces great loss, at times to the point that we no longer have enough even for our own family. Only in retrospect do we see that this course has brought us false, fleeting happiness, and absolutely no joy.

Happiness is by its nature transient, but joy is lasting. Joy wells up in us from God's infinitely deep reserves. Happiness is from the world, and it's more often than not temporarily attained either by accumulating more things or by getting our own way.

Is that all there is?

*What's missing? What don't we understand? Is this really what life is all about? What's missing is true and lasting joy, because, as we've seen, joy isn't based on material accumulation or in extraordinary physical accomplishments, but *only* in faith in Jesus Christ, our Savior. There's a reason He's called our Savior. Too often we don't value the fact that we have a Savior until we come to a point so low that we finally see our foolishness and acknowledge our *need* to be saved. The fact is *we need to be saved from ourselves!**

According to the Bible, the mindset of the world is opposed to God. It's under the dominion of Satan and in the grip of this exceedingly wicked and dreadful one. We must face this harsh reality and understand this is the world we live in. And because Satan rules it, he'll do everything in his power to bring us down.

NOW FOR THE REALLY GOOD NEWS

Not all is lost. The good news is that at the moment we recognize what our foolish living has brought our way, we can *repent, ask Jesus to come into our life, and then turn from it*. He'll make something good come out of the bad and give us a brand new outlook.

This is good news! And that's why the gospel is called the Good News. There's no need to resort to despair. We can turn to hope and receive a better life, simply by choosing God over the world. If we keep in the forefront of our mind that the joy of the Lord *is* our strength, we'll possess a strength that can't be taken from us.

Ask for what you want!

As Jesus said in the passage we have just examined,

“Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:4).

That’s a simple message; there’s no need to make it complicated. If you want what Christ has to offer, then take Him up on His offer. Ask!

Gaining knowledge about wisdom principles for victorious living is infinitely more valuable to us than humanly devised success concepts. God’s wisdom lasts longer and comes free for the asking.

With wisdom, even if you were to lose all your money, you could still lead a profitable life. How? For with wisdom, you’ll understand how to earn back everything that’s been lost. And better yet, you’ll learn how not to lose what’s truly valuable in the first place!

How King Solomon became wiser than anyone else.

Many of these success principles come from the wisest, not to mention the richest man who ever lived on earth. His name was Solomon, and He was made a king while still young. Even though He was given enormous responsibility over a busy, thriving kingdom at an early age, before he had acquired much life experience or wisdom, he was smart enough to recognize that he would need wisdom, and quickly, to lead others successfully.

In my opinion, the way in which King Solomon received his wisdom is itself the most telling aspect of his life. The story reveals so much about this young man’s thinking and character. Therein lies the clue, the secret if you will, behind his incredible and even precocious success.

The account is on one level unbelievable, or at least counter-intuitive, because it defies the normal course of human nature. It simply would never occur to most of us to prioritize wisdom so highly and ask for it above all else. To begin with, most of us lack the insight to identify our own weaknesses or needs (Solomon needed a degree of wisdom to see its importance enough to ask for more).

Solomon was so extraordinarily wise that he wrote much of the book of Proverbs so that all humanity could benefit from his teachings. The proverbs help to prosper and fulfill ordinary people who are simply willing to read and live as Solomon and his fellow authors instruct. This book, like each of the 65 others in the Bible, is God's *gift* to us—in this case so that we might live with the principles of extraordinary wisdom. In fact, Solomon was so successful in the way he went about attaining greater wisdom than anyone else, that the narrative demands a longer and closer look.

Together we'll examine this young king's thinking, methods, accomplishments, and management/leadership style. We'll look at his actions and personal relationships, all to get a clear and accurate picture of this highly unusual young man.

Additionally, because we can learn as much from someone's mistakes as we can from their accomplishments, we'll take a serious look at the end of Solomon's life.

Learning to “overcome” is the key to ending strong.

Many people, like Solomon, are able to start off strong but fail to maintain that strength until the end. Solomon's life was in many ways very

disappointing and he finished anything but strong. God granted Israel peace during his lifetime, although there was increasing international tension toward the end. Israel was already in its heyday when he inherited the throne so he didn't need to do much but maintain.

Solomon tragically and unnecessarily allowed much of his God-given potential to slip through his fingers. He allowed himself to become distracted and suffered from broken focus as a result. He didn't end strong because he took his eyes off the Lord and gave his heart to the world.

In the same way we, when we fail to focus fully on God's plan, become distracted and easily lose our way. The good news, though, is that we can at any moment find our way back by simply turning from the world and seeking God's wisdom instead.

CHAPTER TWO

DETEST YOUR CURRENT CONDITION

*H*umanly speaking, you are the only one who can change your life. No one else can do it for you. Regrettably, most people won't change until some desperation or crisis forces them to take a second look. Some will never take responsibility for their choices. But some will see their difficulty in a new light and decide that change is in order. If you're at that place and you have the *courage* and *motivation* to change, you're ready with the Lord's help to make it happen.

Detest is a strong word. It means to dislike intensely or to abhor. *Despise* is similar, meaning to regard with contempt or scorn, to loathe, to hate, or to look down upon. *Do you detest and despise you current condition, or do you merely tolerate what seems to be an unsatisfying and meaningless life? Do you have habits and thought patterns that enslave you?*

Many of us, especially when we're young, get caught up in the things the world offers that at first seem exciting. Only later do we learn that they come with a high price tag. Often that cost is addiction, dependence, and even torment. Without godly wisdom operating in our life, we willingly engage in damaging patterns of behavior because we fail at the outset to see them for what they are. Much of what we do comes from ignorance. We aren't aware of an operating system that's different from what the world espouses. We unfortunately, are innocent babes entering into enemy territory, but we aren't aware of such things. Fools rush in where wise men fear to tread, so the saying goes. Yet, destructive habits are Satan's most

effective weapon against people. Oppression and strongholds keep many from enjoying a life that is liberated and joyful.

When we know little about God and the good intentions He has for us, we live according to our own understanding. We live by *our* standards; standards that we aren't aware are contrary to God's. Consequently, we bring all sorts of problems and difficulties into our life.

But Jesus desires and provided a different outcome for us. He came so we could be set free and enjoy our life and to live it to the full. Only by knowing this truth can you reap the wonderful benefits He offers.

In the words of Jesus in John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

Change that lasts.

As long as you find yourself able to tolerate your current condition, you won't manage to effect change. You'll have to come to the point of determining that your life is unbearable as it is. That you simply can't continue existing the way you are. If you aren't willing to change, my only counsel is that you stop complaining about what *you yourself are permitting*.

You have more power over your condition than you might imagine. Wisdom always shows us the right way to go, but it's up to us to pursue it and run it down. In Isaiah 61:1 the prophet has this to say:

"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners."

What sin “takes” from us.

Sin happens to everyone, and, on the active side, *everyone* sins. Sin drifts in like the fog and surrounds everything it touches. And like the fog, it keeps us from seeing very far ahead on the road. It locks us in, traps us, so that we simply can't make forward progress. Worse, sin causes us to lose ground, to slide backward. Sin destroys and cripples our lives to the point of rendering us useless. If you're brave enough to look sin in the face, begin by taking a serious look at suicide, divorce, child abuse, incest, prostitution, drug dealing, addiction, alcoholism, pedophilia, human trafficking, wife beating, and adultery—to name only a few of its manifestations.

The definition of sin.

The word *sin* comes from the Greek *hamartia*, which means to miss the mark. The Bible variously defines sin as:

A failure to do the things that are right (James 4:17).

A transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4).

All unrighteousness (1 John 5:17).

A violation of one's personal relationship with God (Romans 14:23).

Sin's allure and fascination.

In the beginning of our romance with sin, we perceive it as having soft features and a captivating enchantment. It's charming and attractive and we delight in it. But by the time the relationship has run its course, we see that

it has hurt us, our families, our friends, innocent bystanders—and God. We see that it not only damaged us, but it *stole* from us. Sin plays no favorites. It's neither status-conscious nor discerning. It will accept on its team anyone who wants to play. Nor do you need membership to join this club; it's anything but exclusive.

You grant sin permission to come into your life simply by engaging in it. It's so easy to join up; disenrollment is by far the harder step. Sin has touched the lives of God's children ever since the fall of the first couple in the Garden of Eden, and though already defeated by Jesus' death and resurrection, it won't give up until Christ returns.

If sin cripples and destroys, how do we warn others about it?

How can we explain how sin entices? The Bible focuses on one word to warn God's people of approaching danger; that word is ***remember***. The writer of the book of Hebrews calls on those who've forgotten God, who've become "sluggards" with regard to their Christianity, to look back on, to *remember*, their former days (Hebrews 10:32).

In 1 Corinthians 10:11, after Paul has repeated the effects of Israel's love affair with sin, he exhorts Christians, explaining that all these things happened to God's people, Israel, as examples for our admonition (caution, warning). The Old Testament reproaches were written not only to teach us the right way, but to help us avoid the specific mistakes made by God's people.

Let's take a look at the book of Judges and examine the experiences of Samson, whose life is a harsh portrayal of the escalating effects of sin.

Through three tragic phases, sin took Samson on a wild journey to destruction. Let's examine these stages carefully.

Consequence #1: Sin took Samson farther than he wanted to go.

Sin is like that. Many think they can sin just once and then simply stop. The example of Lot bears record of this. Lot pitched his tent in the direction of sin, and before long he found himself within the city limits. Sin entices and is addictive. The definition of addiction: *being abnormally tolerant of and dependent on something that's psychologically or physically habit-forming.*

In Judges 16:1, the Bible tells us that Samson went to Gaza, saw a prostitute, and went in to her. He probably thought, as many do in today's society, *one fling, what harm can that do?* Just as has been the case with all people from our original fore-parents on, Samson was *enticed by sin*. Once he got started he, like so many other casualties who litter the graveyard of history, couldn't stop. Judges 16:4 tells us that he left one sinful situation for another, that after committing fornication with the harlot, he loved a woman named Delilah. This growing obsession was both to become and to bring about Samson's demise. It was the fruit, the natural consequence, of sin.

Consequence #2: Sin kept Samson longer than he wanted to stay.

Samson thought he could at any time strong-arm his way out of any problem that might come his way. Yet, he, like countless others, played right into the devil's hand.

While Delilah plotted against Samson, he still assumed he would be able to escape. If Satan has any potentially commendable trait, it's persistence. Sin (which is Satan personified) is continuously knocking at our door. The Bible warns us to flee from fornication, but neither sin nor Delilah, sin's willing accomplice in this case, was willing to give up.

"Having put him to sleep on her lap, she called a man to shave off the seven braids of his hair, and so began to subdue him. And his strength left him. Then she called, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" He awoke from his sleep and thought, "I'll go out as before and shake myself free." But he did not know that the LORD had left him (Judges 16:19–20).

Sin deceives! The Bible tells us that before Jesus comes back many will fall away and be deceived by sin. *How many assume they have tomorrow to repent? How many assuage their consciences by assuring themselves of good intentions?* Intentions like: next week I'll become a Christian. Next week I'll start serving God. Next week I'll make a change in my life. *How many alcoholics and drug abusers have said to themselves...I'll quit next week?*

Consequence #3: Sin cost Samson more than he wanted to pay.

Not only did the Philistines capture Samson, but they gouged out his eyes and then used him like a mule to grind in the prison. His sin, observed by Israel's adversaries, caused them to spew spiteful words against God.

The Philistines worshipped their own god, Dagon, and proclaimed, "Our god has delivered Samson, our enemy, into our hands" (Judges 16:23). Verse 25 proclaims that while they were in high spirits, they shouted, "Bring out Samson so he might entertain us."

Samson was brought out for them to make sport. But as he was led through the crowd, he asked the servant to allow to him to stand between two pillars so that he could brace himself. Samson made one final request

of God: permission to perish with the Philistines. Then he pushed with all his strength and the roof groaned and caved in, killing not only Samson but the Philistines as well.

Let's examine once again the price Samson paid for his sin: That sin cost him his eyes, his freedom, his pride, his life, and his God.

These things were written for our admonition.

The pleasures of sin are too high a price for people to pay.

The joys of Christianity are too glorious for people to miss.

M. B. Welch, in his famous poem about an old violin, reflected as follows:

*And many a man with life out of tune and battered and
scarred with sin
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd much like the
old violin.*

*A mess of pottage, a glass of wine,
A game and he travels on.
He is going once, he is going twice
He is going—and almost gone!
But the Master comes and the foolish crowd
Can never quite understand
The worth of a soul and change that's wrought,
In the touch of the Master's hand.*

If you want to change, begin by confessing your sins.

We get locked into such pride that the admission of guilt on our part becomes unthinkable. Truly, the most difficult words for us to utter are “I am a sinner.” God isn’t surprised by our ability to sin, nor is he shocked by man’s wickedness. God understands that when we’re deceived, we’re naturally blind and prideful.

We remove that blindness by confessing with our lips that we aren’t perfect—yes, that we’re a sinner in need of a Savior. Jesus our Savior leads us into the very freedom for which we’ve been groping. Receiving Jesus *keeps us from* guilt, shame, and eternal death.

Don’t take what Satan wants to give you. Refuse it. Detest it. Detest what it has already done in your life. Detest what it has already cost you and where it has kept you.

Repentance is the surest, no, the only way to receive healing, wholeness, and a permanently changed life. Ask God to come in and change your propensity and desire for sin. Ask Him to make you a new person who seeks to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit instead. This is a day-by-day-dependence upon the Lord to change your internal appetites. Don’t ever give in, by giving up. Call on Jesus for the healing and deliverance He alone provides. He will surely do it for you!

CHAPTER THREE

THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF KNOWLEDGE

“*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline,*” Proverbs 1:7 tells us. The Hebrew word rendered *fool* in Proverbs and elsewhere in the Old Testament represents a person who is morally deficient. If God is so loving, kind, and compassionate, why does Scripture say we should **fear** Him? *What exactly is the “fear of the Lord,” and how does it relate to our walk with God?*

Properly understood the fear of the Lord brings positive results not negative outcomes into our lives. Those who are frightened of the fear of the Lord, (who in essence fear, the fear of God) need only to contrast the lives of God-fearers with those of worldly-minded individuals to understand what embracing this wisdom principle means. All through Proverbs Solomon contrasted two approaches to life. In his early adulthood Solomon was significantly impacted by the revelations of God. These wisdom principles stayed with him, though to a lesser degree, even into his later life.

Two kinds of fear.

The fear of the Lord is a greatly misunderstood concept, perhaps in part because Scripture itself addresses two different types of fear of the Lord. The first, mentioned in Isaiah 2:10, 19, and 21, is not a gift of the Holy Spirit, but the abject terror of an unrepentant sinner facing a just God.

Some translations render this as the terror of the Lord (Revised Standard Version) or the dread of the Lord (Revised English Bible). The original Hebrew word is *pachad*, which denotes a terrified dread or a dreadful terror. The book of Revelation contains a related passage, in which evildoers try to hide in terror of God's justice (Revelation 6:15–17).

The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil; the wise hate evil and the evil hate the wise.

We're seeing this truth played out in our legal, political, educational, and church systems. Like it or not, we're witnessing a remake of America during our lifetime. If the "evils" (the "nays," when it comes to the things of God) have their way, America will do a complete about-face turn from its foundational Christian beginnings.

Evil comes to steal, kill, and destroy that which God has set up in this world (see John 10:10).

Evil isn't content with letting us know its views. Evil not only comes from Satan; it personifies, or *is* Satan. And Satan comes *only* to steal, kill, and destroy. His sole purpose is to take and to deceive. He is the prince of this world and has no other goal than to trick, cheat, victimize, and betray his would-be subjects.

"The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him" (Revelation 12:9).

America is on his hit list, not because it's better or more godly than other nations, but because it was founded on God's laws and principles.

Proverbs 9:10, declares that, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”

Proverbs 2:1–15 says: “My son, **if** you accept My words and store up My commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and **if** you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, **then** you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge and understanding. He holds victory in store for the upright; He is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for He guards the course of the just and protects the way of His faithful ones. Then you will understand what is right and just and fair—every good path. **For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.** Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you. Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways, which delight in doing wrong and rejoice in the perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways.”

******* HERE LIES THE SECRET TO LIFE *******

In Proverbs 2:1-15, God lays out a contract for us: **If** you will store up **my** commands within you, **turn** your ear to wisdom, and **apply** your heart to understanding, and **if** you will search for it with all your being, **then** you will understand and find knowledge and understanding. **These are action words!**

This deceptively simple verse is both fundamental and profound. Here is encapsulated the secret to successful living.

People search the whole world over for weighty answers to life’s mysteries, yet most pass right over this simple formula. All that God requires is that we learn to shut out the world and to foster within our heart and mind a holy obsession with the Lord God Almighty, the One who created us and gave us life.

This message is straightforward and not at all complicated to understand, which is precisely why the “wise” of this world either miss or dismiss it.

God isn't complicated, after all, and His desire is to make Himself known to those who *yearn* to find Him.

He remains mysterious only to those who don't really want Him in the first place, or to those who don't wish to learn more about Him and His nature. In the simplest of terms, God is handing over to you the ***secret*** to knowing Him, the key to obtaining wisdom and knowledge. Be wary of allowing anyone or anything to clutter up His simple message to you.

Proverbs teaches us to hate what God hates and to love what God loves.

Proverbs 8:13 ***declares*** that, "To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech."

Proverbs 9:8 ***counsels*** us as follows: "Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you."

Proverbs 18:2 ***asserts*** that "A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions."

And Proverbs 1:22 ***asks***, "How long will you simple ones love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge?"

The Hebrew word rendered *simple* in Proverbs generally speaks of one devoid of moral direction and inclined toward evil.

Without the fear of the Lord...

We close ourselves off to the treasures of God's wisdom and knowledge.

We flirt with evil and find ourselves corrupted by it.

Our lives are likely to be shortened by our refusal to heed God's Word (e.g., we may suffer from sexually transmitted diseases because we fail to heed His Word on sexual relationships, or die before our time due to foolish choices that lead to addictions or practicing witchcraft and devil worship, or to obey God's command to honor your parents, etc.).

We forego that personal knowledge of the love of God that instills within us assurance and confidence of our salvation.

We fall into sin and aren't motivated to repent and turn to God.

We won't be motivated to work out our own salvation (this is different from *earning* that salvation) or to become mature in Christ.

We cannot please God, as Isaiah 66:1–2 points out (also Romans 8:8). Only the person who trembles at His Word can rest in God's promise that he will receive His tender mercy. (See Psalm 103:17–18).

“For whoever finds me (wisdom) finds life and shall draw forth and obtain favor of the LORD. But he who misses Me or sins against Me, wrongs and injures himself; all who hate Me love and court death” (Proverbs 8:25).

“And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the reverential and obedient fear of the LORD” (Isaiah 11:3).

The following have been called the “Seven-Fold Spirits of God.”

The spirit of the Lord.

The spirit of Wisdom.

The spirit of Understanding.

The spirit of Counsel.
The spirit of Might.
The spirit of Knowledge.
The fear of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:30 tells us that, “Jesus is made wisdom to us....”

And Colossians 2:23 asserts that, “All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are *hid* in Christ.”

Always searching...but never finding.

The Word of God tells us that there are people today who, though continuously seeking, are not seeking out real truth. They never come to the most rudimentary understanding of it. They think they’re well along the way to finding those elusive answers on the basis of their college and graduate degrees, vast knowledge of worldly kingdoms or politics, or association with the world’s elite. The sad truth for them is that without the knowledge and wisdom of God, and that *only comes from Him*, human beings remain absolutely void of understanding.

Proverbs 3:5–6 enjoins us to, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding. Acknowledge Him in all your ways and He will direct your paths.”

This is the only bona fide truth that leads to genuine understanding. And it is only this true understanding that unlocks the door to life’s many mysteries for us.

CHAPTER FOUR

KNOW WHO YOUR REAL ENEMY IS

You may equate your enemy with your spouse or boss, or identify your neighbor or a co-worker as such. But the real truth is that you have a much more dangerous adversary than the people who irritate you in life. That antagonist is Satan, the devil himself.

Satan is a fallen angel, “The great dragon [that] was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him” (Revelation 12:9).

Satan is filled with pride, revulsion for God, and a compulsion for revenge. He’ll do anything he can to get people to rebel against God, just as he did. In fact, since he’s so full of hatred, opposition, and hostility for God, his sole purpose is to get individuals and nations to join in his rebellion and hatred.

Is the whole world deceived?

If you were the devil and wanted to mislead the whole world, how would you carry out such an enormous task? You would first need to convince people that you didn’t exist. Then you would have to convince them that the source of information (the Bible) that reveals your motives and methods is little more than a collection of fables that have nothing to do with their everyday lives.

How this deception is carried out today?

Starting several centuries ago, and promoted by the theories of men such as Charles Darwin, who fabricated a way to explain creation without the Creator, many people began directly challenging the authority and inspiration of the Bible. They began to ridicule, to attempt to reduce to the realm of myth and superstition the existence of a spirit world, long accepted without question by those who believed the Bible. In the world's leading universities today, skeptics challenge the validity and accuracy of the Bible.

Humanity reveres scientific reasoning, much of which rejects anything that can't be distinguished by the five physical senses. Generations of leaders have been tutored to discard anything that can't be measured and quantified by these methods.

With the advent of two world wars, two successive generations saw fathers, husbands and sons lost on bloody battlefields in faraway lands. Neither war gained lasting peace. The mass destruction of lives, both military and civilian, and the aftermath of each of these conflicts in continuing violence and oppression caused many to let go of their belief in God, embracing instead the empty "consolation" that an all-powerful Supreme Being would never have allowed such bloodshed and suffering.

By keeping people blinded to the goodness of God, Satan prevents them from learning God's real intent for man's creation. The evil one has a vested interest in preventing people from knowing or understanding that God has a desire for family and relationship.

God's desire is to pour out His love upon His children beyond their wildest imaginings. Human parents aren't the only ones who adore their

children. Recognize it or not, we have the capacity to love and the desire for family, only because God first instilled those attributes into our being. Most of the time we think we're so clever and gifted, but we do well to ask ourselves who programmed these instincts, gifts, and abilities into our consciousness and mind? *Who are we patterned after?*

Satan knows that if we catch a glimpse of God's goodness and love we'll be lost forever to him. He knows he'll no longer be able to influence or steal away our lives from us.

There's no love in Satan—none at all, ever.

First, it's essential that we understand that Satan cares nothing for us. His battle is with God; his goal to be on an equal footing with the Divine. The devil is all too well aware that he has already been defeated through Christ's resurrection. Still, he continues to play the game until his time is up, to see how many of God's children he can take for himself.

Your problems aren't coming from God.

My desire is to give you enough information about Satan that you'll recognize that the problems that are tripping you up are coming your way because *Satan is behind them*—not God!

Many people erroneously believe that God is the source of heartbreak, pain, and suffering, and that He sends those things to discipline us. But when we truly get to know God, remembering that God is love and that Satan is hatred, we recognize how counterintuitive and patently false this notion is.

Actually, Satan would inflict much more pain on us if it weren't for God's restraining hand. Left to do as he wished, our enemy would totally destroy each and every one of us.

Satan became jealous after God created Adam. We know that Lucifer, (now Satan the devil), became puffed up with pride due to his own beauty. He chose to forget who had created him and who had endowed him with such loveliness. After pride had *entered him*, Satan decided that he wanted to be like God—not a mere created being. He not only wanted to **be** God; he wanted to rise **above** God in power and ability. Manifesting the epitome of arrogance, he desired to receive for himself **all** the glory that was due God alone.

It was only after Satan had turned from God and taken a third of the angels with him in his rebellion, that God created man in His own image. This must have infuriated Satan. God was now going to turn His attention toward man. Satan, savoring only hatred toward God, decided to pollute this relationship as well. The battle was joined. He was determined to turn into evil everything God created for good.

Angels are created spirits.

God's Word tells us that untold ages ago God, who is spirit, created many other spirits called angels.

"All the angels are spirits," declares Hebrew 1:14, and "God makes his angels winds, His servants flames of fire" (Verse 7).

Like God, the angels are disembodied (without human form). Their form is compared with that of wind and fire. Humans, in contrast, are composed

of body, soul, and spirit. God created more of these spirit beings than anyone can count.

On high, in His presence, are “many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand” (Revelation 5:11).

God, who has no limit, created for Himself thousands upon thousands of beautiful, good, and wise angels. The Scriptures tell us that while the angels have great power, they also have their limitations. Unlike God, they aren’t all-powerful. Nor can they be everywhere present or all-knowing. They’re mere creatures—just as they were created to be.

What God is.

Only *One* is without limits, and that *One* is God. When God created the angels they were holy creatures, all of them. God created the angels, but He didn’t create any evil angels.

God can do anything—well, let’s make that *almost* anything. *God cannot do what is evil*, for the simple reason that this would be contrary to His nature. An absolutely good God can’t create what is bad, nor can a perfect God make mistakes. Sin can’t emanate from Him, because He is pure holiness. Everything that God thinks, says, and does is flawless. Scriptures tell us that,

“God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone” (James 1:13).

Why did God create the angels?

Scripture teaches us that God created these spirit beings so that they could be with Him to love, praise, and serve Him in the joy of Heaven forever. Like people, angels aren’t all alike. Some are more beautiful or

wiser than others. Some surround the throne of God in Heaven. Others help and protect people. Still others, like Gabriel and Michael, are sent forth by God to accomplish special missions on earth. Some angels oversee others.

The story of Satan.

Have you ever heard the name Lucifer? The Word of God tells us that there was a time when Lucifer was the chief angel. If you know the story of Lucifer, you know the history of Satan. Scripture tells us that when God first created the angels, Lucifer was the most beautiful, the most powerful, and the wisest of them all. In fact, the name Lucifer means “*the shining one.*” Lucifer was superior to all the other angels in knowledge, wisdom, power, and authority. God had bestowed upon him beauty and intelligence beyond measure. In response, Lucifer should have worshiped, loved, and obeyed God forever. Yet in the writings of the Prophets we read that Lucifer showed contempt for God, that his heart was ***filled with pride:***

Lucifer said in his heart, “***I will*** ascend to heaven; ***I will*** raise my throne above the stars of God; ***I will*** sit enthroned.... ***I will*** ascend above the tops of the clouds; ***I will*** make myself like the Most High!” (Isaiah 14:13–14).

Incredible! Lucifer, who had *nothing* apart from what God had given him, wanted to usurp the glory that belonged alone to God Most High. Not only did Lucifer rebel against God, but he recruited one third of the angels who were with him in Heaven to join forces with him. These glorious beings chose to follow Lucifer into sin, rather than to give praise to the God who had created them (Revelation 12:4).

Satan will always hate God—even to the end.

After Lucifer had sinned, his name was changed. He was no longer called Lucifer, “*the shining one*,” but Satan, meaning “*adversary*.” Lucifer had become God’s archrival and enemy. Satan and his angels still reject God and all that is good. They continue to reject the Word of God, although as we see repeatedly in the Gospel accounts, they know better than to deny its truth. Satan, despite his inevitable defeat, sealed once for all when Jesus’ tomb was unsealed, still fights against God and tries to thwart His plans.

Again, Scripture tell us that after God expelled Satan and his angels, He prepared for them the fires of hell—the lake of fire that can never be extinguished. There is a day coming when God will cast into that fire Satan, his angels, and all who follow them.

Thus it is written: “They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:10).

God will triumph over Satan.

Satan has not yet been relegated to the lake of fire. He’ll meet his final destiny at the end of time, when God will once again rule unopposed. In fact, all those who believe in God will rule with Him in eternal perfection over the *new heaven* and *the new earth*. God’s eternal purpose and plan will have come full circle. He will bring to completion that which He started in the Garden of Eden. The world as we know it now will cease to exist.

What you and I need to know is that until “that day” God allows Satan to function as the prince of the air, permitting him some lingering power on earth. God allows him to roam both the air (the space above the earth) and the earth itself. Because God has already provided humanity a way of escape from his clutches. By sending His Son Jesus to die on the cross to

atone for our sins and then to rise victoriously, He conquered sin and death once for all. When we accept Jesus as Lord, we inherit what He died to give us—power to rule over the evil one.

God allows Satan to play *limited* havoc in people's lives because it serves His greater purpose.

What is that purpose?

God is always in control, but He has permitted Satan to dictate humanity for two basic reasons.

First, Adam and Eve, our first parents, *chose* Satan's domination over them.

Second, God wants all of humanity to learn that “the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). God tests the character of every person.

Paul wrote, “We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts” (1 Thessalonians 2:4).

Moses explained to the ancient Israelites, “Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger [a form of suffering] and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (Deuteronomy 8:2-3).

God allows men and women to learn, partly by firsthand experience, that the only way of life that will work is the way of life He reveals in His Word, the Bible. That lesson will not be complete until all of humanity learns that “every word” of God's revealed instructions is vital to our

physical, mental, and spiritual well-being (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 5:29).

No alternative way of life achieves God's purpose or ultimately leads us to happiness. People can review thousands of years of heart-breaking and tragic history by reading the Bible and compare it with the blessings of Christ's rule. The Bible reveals that when this occurs the overwhelming majority of people will reject Satan's deceptions and enthusiastically embrace every word of God.

When Jesus Christ returns to earth, God will remove the delusion of Satan. God then will begin, on a grand scale, the process of reversing the damage Satan has done. Eventually, none of the devil's influence will remain.

There are two spirits in this world—one good and the other evil.

There are ***two roads*** from which every person has to choose—one good, the other evil. Every one of us gets to decide for ourselves (for we were created with a free will) whether or not to willingly accept God's free offer of escape from Satan's destruction. If people don't wish to understand more about their existence, about God, and about His purposes for His children, He allows them to remain ignorant, but only after relentless nudging by the Holy Spirit to reconsider their destiny. Know that deliberate ignorance can be more toxic for us than blatant sin. Hosea 4:6 tells us, in poignant words from God Himself, that

“My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. ***Because you have rejected knowledge***, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children.”

Sin, if confessed, can also be forgiven.

Opting to remain ignorant of God and His ways prevents Him from working on our behalf. God provides us with every opportunity for enlightenment. In spite of our willful ignorance, He makes every attempt to make Himself known to us, though He will always stop short of forcing a person to accept Him.

God has provided through the created order, a glimpse of His breathtaking power and majesty. In addition to this “general revelation,” He instills within each of us the capacity to see and hear. We can choose to avert our gaze, or to look up, see, and hopefully acknowledge. Ultimately, then, God consents to let each of us choose our own destiny by filtering what we see and hear, what we accept as truth, and what we elect to believe.

God is giving us the opportunity to reap the results of our own choices and belief system, which decide our eventual, eternal destination. It won’t matter after we’re gone whether or not we believed in an afterlife. It simply isn’t about what **we** think is truth. God alone is divine, implying that we’re not, never will be, and cannot know all truth this side of eternity.

God always provides a way out of Satan’s deception and work.

God can permit Satan, the destroyer, to remain on earth because His plan has included a way out of his snare. Satan’s purpose, of course, is diametrically opposed to God’s purposes for us. We’re embroiled and often defeated in battle because we choose to remain ignorant. Rather than deciding to be knowledgeable, obedient, and to place our trust in God’s better way, we believe that we have the better way.

Satan's works are about destroying God's work. Satan wants all people, whom God created for Himself, to perish and spend eternity in hell in his company. When we fail to understand this, we fail to comprehend that we're living in a war zone. We can't fight to win if we don't first concede that a war is taking place for our very soul and eternal destiny.

The Word of God makes it clear not only that most people are under the control of Satan, but that they fail to comprehend this because Satan is a deceiver. In Paul's words,

"Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14).

He tries to deceive people so they won't pay attention to the Word of God. That's why one of God's prophets warned us to,

Be alert! Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

God in His mercy provides a plan of escape.

God provides a way of victory for us; but we need to recognize first, that participation in the battle is often a matter of choice. Then, after we recognize that we're in a war zone, it's up to us to discover how to overcome in the battle and, ultimately, to win the war.

God provides us with the armor and other battle gear we need to fight to win. It's our duty, though, to locate and utilize this battle gear. He provides it, but He won't put it on us; He expects us to do that under our own God-given power.

In war, as in the rest of life, we have the opportunity to be in partnership with God and with others. We have war buddies, personal allies who watch

our back just as we watch theirs. It's about accountability.

God's offer of escape comes when we ask Him for it. Then we must **receive** it. He doesn't just stand there and hand it out, as He wants us to grow into Christian maturity. He's not willing to function as our enabler in terms of our old, ingrained habits, looking the other way while we continue to do life as usual. That would ensure our sure defeat. God wants to make us into a soldier who fights to **win**. We can praise God, as He's given us His Word which is our armor, to escape Satan's power.

As Jesus Himself declared in John 8:32, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free!"

Do you know that truth can free you from the terrible devices of Satan?

Let's not forget the sobering truth that Satan is wiser than we are. Lest you become discouraged, though, be assured that God is infinitely wiser than Satan. While Satan is stronger than we are, God is immeasurably stronger than Satan. You can defeat Satan by assimilating God's wisdom. The Bible contains the truth about God and His plan for your delivery from Satan. This truth makes you wise, then and only then can *you* become wiser, and stronger, than Satan.

Do you know the Word of Truth that can deliver you from Satan's power?

Why do people refuse to listen to the truth? It's because the devil has deceived them. To be sure, the truth isn't always pleasant to hear. But if you know and believe the truth of God's Word, you'll be free from Satan's power. God's truth can liberate people from Satan's lies. Our responsibility is to know that truth and then to believe it!

“Dear friends, do *not* believe every spirit, but *test the spirits to see whether they are from God*, because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

“Do not treat [the words of the prophets] with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:20–22).

Do you really know what the prophets of God have written?

Do you understand the Word of Truth? Do you believe it in your heart? Many otherwise intelligent people perish due to their own ignorance. Those who embrace the philosophy of humanism fall into this category. Such people want to exalt themselves and become like God. They don’t want to submit or even to see themselves as created beings. The truth is, that none of us creates himself or herself. Apart from God, we enter the world with nothing, and, without a relationship with Jesus, we end up with exactly nothing in death.

With pride comes blindness. This blindness causes us to be duped into believing we’re all-powerful and all-knowing. In the end, as fallen humanity believes these lies, people mirror Satan and will reap his eternal destination—the pit.

James 4:14 reminds us, “Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”

How we’re tripped up.

When we’re unaware and uneducated about Satan and his ways, we’re also unconscious about how he’s working to destroy us, or even that he wants to meddle in our lives. We get tripped up by all the little stuff and become preoccupied with things that hold no lasting value. This is stealing our life from us. We settle for mediocrity when God yearns to give to us

abundance. Multitudes fail to grasp that there's another way to live. God stands waiting to exchange all the ugliness of life, for His eternal beauty. He gives that abundant life to anyone who simply seeks and asks for it.

Which God will you choose?

There are **two** gods—the small-*g*, god of this world (Satan, or the trappings with which he entices us) and the God of the Universe, the Creator of Heaven and earth.

God waits for those who are willing to open themselves up to receive Him by faith. God is in the giving business. Our response is to ***receive and believe*** that He'll do precisely what He promises to do. He alone has the power to turn our life around. Remember that *you*, armed with the power of God's Word, can defeat Satan. So equip yourself with the wisdom and knowledge to stand triumphant against your real enemy. In doing so you win big! In doing so you win life!

CHAPTER FIVE

CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES OF REBELLION AGAINST GOD

God cannot, and will not, overlook rebellion in his people. Rebellion has distinct character and behavioral manifestations; some of which are intimidation, force, manipulation, deceit, arrogance, pride, slander, stealing, immorality, greed, hatred, and murder. Solomon and the other Old Testament wisdom writers lumped these traits together, all of which are characteristic of one who is both lazy and wicked under the term *folly*.

Notice with me that these traits are the direct opposite of wise, humble, and godly. Since God is Holy, He cannot overlook evil or rebellion. Rebellion is from the enemy and in the end everything that belongs to the devil will be destroyed.

“For a man’s ways are in full view of the LORD, and He examines all his paths. The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast. He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly” (Proverbs 5:21–23).

Proverbs 6 fleshes out the portrait of “the wicked man.”

Proverbs 6:12 depicts the wicked man as “worthless” and having a “perverse mouth.”

Proverbs 6:14–15 goes on to say that, “Perversity is in his heart, he devises evil continually, he sows discord. Therefore disaster will overtake him in an instant; he will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy.”

God hates six things.

Proverbs 6:16–19 informs us that, “There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him:

1. haughty eyes,
2. a lying tongue,
3. hands that shed innocent blood,
4. a heart that devises wicked schemes,
5. feet that are quick to rush into evil,
6. a false witness who pours out lies,
7. a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.”

The patriarch Jacob manifested some of these serious character flaws and God dealt with him on that account. Going back a generation, Abraham’s son Isaac had married Rebekah, who gave birth to Jacob and Esau. Jacob eventually manipulated the birthright away from his brother Esau, who as the firstborn twin was entitled to this special privilege. Esau lacked a proper appreciation for his birthright, which he willingly gave away, all because he was hungry and more interested in the immediate gratification of eating.

Genesis 25:32–34, tells us that Esau had a disregard for and that he in fact “despised his birthright.”

Later Rebekah aided Jacob into deceiving his father Isaac into granting him the blessing that was intended for the firstborn, Esau. She showed favoritism toward Jacob, and sadly, we see mother and son plotting

together to deceive father and brother. Not once, but twice Esau was manipulated and taken advantage of by his scheming brother. Rebekah was a good teacher, tutoring her son well on the arts of deception and manipulation.

Genesis 27:18–19 informs us that Jacob, “went to his father and said,” “My father,” “Yes, my son,” he answered. “Who is it?” Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game so that you may give me your blessing.”

The consequences of this family drama: Jacob’s expulsion from the family to avoid possible death, since Esau now hated him.

Later in life Jacob was himself manipulated and tricked numerous times by his own father-in-law, Laban. The moral of the story: We can expect in this life to be treated in the same way we have treated others.

God gave us the Bible in part to show us how to live. And Jesus gave us parables to demonstrate the consequences of making right or wrong choices. There’s a way that seems right to people, yet in the end it leads to death (Proverbs 16:25). And, we can add, there’s a way that God tells us is right, which in the end leads to life.

Jesus understands our lost condition.

Jesus knows that we’re lost without Him. In Luke 15:1–32, He reveals this understanding by giving us three distinct illustrations of lostness:

1. the lost sheep (verses 4–7),
2. the lost coin (verses 8–10),

3. the lost son (verses 11–32).

The chapter is essentially one distinct parable that reinforces its point using three different illustrations. Jesus reveals, that as the Son of Man, He came into the world to seek and to save the lost. The sheep, the money, and the son—all lost—and all worth saving!

The issue of our rebellion has a solution.

Rebellion, or the act of rebelling, may variously be described as *revolt*, *open resistance to*, or *defiance of any authority or control*.

“For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you [Saul] have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king” (1 Samuel 15:23).

Rebellion includes things like witchcraft, magic, astrology, mythology, psychic powers, metaphysics, spiritism, pseudo-science, supernatural phenomena, and demonology. The word occult comes from the Latin *accultus*, which means: *clandestine*, *hidden*, *secret*, referring to the ‘*knowledge of the secret*’ or ‘*knowledge of the hidden*.’

Our rebellion towards a Loving God is a repeated theme of Scripture. Rebellion is pride, and God hates pride. God knows what our defiance will cost us. And He knows that our stubborn, immovable, willful, and rebellious heart will destroy the very people He has called to Himself. He knows that sedition will deny us entry into His Kingdom—(because God will not and cannot allow anyone into His Kingdom whom He cannot rule!)

When we presume to know more than God, or consider ourselves superior and higher than the Almighty, we are in effect making ourselves *a*

god. The word *presume* carries a slightly different nuance of meaning in Hebrew than it does in English, where at its most basic it simply means to *assume, to take a matter upon oneself*. In the Old Testament (and sometimes also in our English usage) presumption carries the idea of *acting arrogantly*. It means to do something with audacity, overstepping boundaries and daring to act in defiant disobedience. A presumptuous, headstrong person willfully disobeys—fully aware and informed of what he’s doing, but choosing to do it anyway.

When we commit sin, while oblivious to the fact that it is sin, we haven’t disobeyed willfully or presumptuously, and God’s just nature allows Him to forgive it. But when we sin deliberately, with presumption, He *cannot*, based on His nature, overlook it.

Jesus entered the world based on this very dilemma. He gave Himself as the agreed sacrifice to free us from our rebellion.

In New Testament usage, the Greek word rendered as *presume* comes closer to the basic meaning of the word in English: to “think” or to “suppose.” However, according to the context in which the term is used in the New Testament, it still incorporates the idea of dealing proudly, defiantly, and recklessly. Presumption implies looking down upon someone or something. The word continues to imply tremendous pride. Once again, though, there is Good News:

God “is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”
(2 Peter 3:9).

God doesn’t want anyone to spend eternity in hell, the destination reserved for those who absolutely refuse to turn from their wicked ways.

Rather, His desire is that all accept His free gift of salvation.

God's gentle way.

God endowed people with natural inquisitiveness and curiosity. Because of our sinful nature, this intense interest is often undisciplined, needing limits and proper management. When we refuse to tolerate being managed, we find ourselves in rebellion—determined to explore what God told us to flee from. We have a natural, inherited bent toward refusal to believe God, a tendency to defy, as Adam and Eve did. We don't want to listen to God's counsel or adapt our behavior to His. This stubborn inclination to do it our own way keeps telling us that we know better than He does.

The Bible permits us to know God intimately and this includes knowing what pleases and displeases Him. It's His love-letter to us in which He reveals His heart and motives and explains why He died for us.

God wants us to move beyond merely *knowing* how much He loves us. He wants to *prove* it to us. By taking part in the good plans He has for us, we can enter into intimate fellowship with Him. He not only has the capacity, but actually longs for relationship with us. He does this by wooing us with His love in spite of our rebellion.

Often, when we lack a positive image of ourselves or focus only on our failings, we assume that God sees us in the same way. But reading His letters of love to us will confirm that this is entirely false. Without reading the Word for ourselves, we place ourselves at the mercy of someone else's opinion of God. While you were growing up your family and others influenced your beliefs. Maybe they were negative toward the things of God and you picked up the same bias.

Unless we make a deliberate point of seeking out the truth for our self, we'll never know what we've been missing. God gave each of us a brain to search out truth and to think for ourselves.

God wants you to know Him and He wants to call you “friend.”

God knew that we couldn't respond positively to someone who didn't love us, or to someone we didn't know well, so He left us His Word. We can know God's nature by reading what the Bible tells us of Him.

Many have only an intellectual knowledge that God loves them. The opening lyric of that intergenerational favorite “*Jesus Loves Me, This I Know... for the Bible Tells Me So*” is true. As a trusting young child, uninitiated in the ways of sin, you may even have believed it. But as you grew older, you may have convinced yourself that He didn't really love you after all. You may have chosen instead to listen to the enemy, who told you that God didn't love you and only wanted to punish you.

It's typical for people to decide on their own not to care about God and His Son. In their simplicity, they fail to comprehend that what they've been taught might convey a distorted image of Jesus. Even people who have called themselves Christians for a long time can have misconceptions about the Lord.

Do you know the real, authentic Jesus?

Most of what we think we know about Jesus has nothing to do with the real Jesus. Anytime we take *miss*-information and choose to build our lives around it, we're taking a huge risk. We may be presuming something to be

truth that simply is not. Our future depends on what we accept as truth about Jesus.

Despite our age, we frequently conduct ourselves like children, or like teenagers. Some in their teen years begin to think that they know more than their parents do and rebellion and hardness of heart begin to surface.

Like adolescents, we often think we've arrived and that we know more than God does. We think that we can handle life well on our own. But self-sufficiency makes our heart rigid and soon rebellion follows.

Jesus doesn't want to make our lives miserable. He isn't trying to squelch our fun or dampen our enjoyment in life. He merely wants to reveal to us that without Him, we can't live the *abundant* life.

When we fall in love with that special someone, we want to spend a great deal of time with him or her. In doing so, we're responding to our felt need for intimacy with this person. In the same way Jesus craves personal time with you. Because He loves you so much, He's ever intervening on your behalf, continually praying for you and lifting you up before the Father. I invite you to pause for a moment to listen:

“...where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf” (Hebrews 6:20).

“For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; He entered Heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence” (Hebrews 9:24).

And in the words of Jesus Himself in John 14:23, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

The only way to enjoy intimacy with someone is by spending both quality and quantity time together. An acquaintance remains just that until

we spend the necessary time to get to know the person better. It's only after a period of association and companionship that an acquaintance becomes a friend.

God wants to move from being your acquaintance to being your friend. Not only that, but He longs to be your *intimate* friend—your *lover*. No one will ever love you more or for a longer duration than this divine Lover of your soul. No one else will ever love you forever. God knows you far better than you could ever know yourself and He wants you to know Him back.

Jesus wants to be your friend.

Our lives are incomplete if we never learn that Jesus desires to befriend us. Conversely, He knows where our lives will be if we don't experience this closeness with Him.

Proverbs 18:24 addresses this issue: "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

Our friend is Jesus. When others fail you or give up on you, rest assured that Jesus never will. Never! As your friend, He wants to be anything but a mystery to you.

Psalm 8:4 asks rhetorically, "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"

The psalmist's question emphasizes the transcendent nature of God. God is holy and mighty, while we are flawed and impotent. *So why is God concerned about the affairs of human beings?* David elaborates on his question in the next two verses of Psalm 8:

“You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet.”

And the author to the Hebrews picks up the thought, beginning with a quote from Psalm 8: “You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet. In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him” (Hebrews 2:7–8).

These passages point us directly to the *person* of Jesus Christ. God the Father orchestrated a natural birth and prepared a fully human body for His Son. Jesus lived His life on earth as a man and was crowned with glory, honor, and power based in part on His willingness to forego his divine prerogatives (Psalm 8:5–6; John 1:14; Romans 1:4; Hebrews 10:5–6; and 1 Peter 3:22).

God’s concern for people is unique in that God Himself took on our human nature to become a man. He initiated this identification with us long before we were ever mindful of Him.

Who are your real friends?

It’s when we find ourselves in deep trouble or adversity that we can usually identify our true friends. Jesus lets us know that He was born for adversity. As such, He’s much more even than our friend; He’s our brother.

“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Proverbs 17:17).

Jesus has us covered on both fronts!

Will you accept the “real” Jesus?

If we really desire to know Jesus better, we’ll seek Him out. Many, including those who call themselves Christians, are so caught up in their

own lives that they have little desire to do so. The cursory glance they've taken at the Christian message leads them to the conclusion that it's dull and boring—when in reality Jesus is the most fascinating and exciting individual who has ever lived. It's humanly-devised religion that has made Him boring. It's only when we get beyond religion and manmade rules that we're freed to fall in love with the *real*, not just the religious, Jesus.

Many may know a good deal *about* Jesus, or a smattering of Bible stories about Him, but the tragic reality is that the vast majority of people lack experiential knowledge of God's Son, or of what He has done for them personally. If they were to get to know the authentic Jesus, their lives would be so drastically altered for the better that they would regret all the days prior to this life-altering relationship.

Do you recognize yourself in these words? If so, ask yourself this question: Do I sincerely want to know this Jesus, the One who suffered and died for me, in order to exchange my way of life for the better one He wants to give me?

You may not know just how much Jesus loves you, in part because you've never stopped long enough to think seriously about His love for you. If you tell Him you want to know Him better, He'll respond by revealing Himself to you. He's the **only** authentic, real deal. He's waiting for you *now* to call on Him, to invite Him into your life, to be your best and most trusted friend, a friend who will never, ever leave you or forsake you.

If you sense that God is calling you right now, choose to respond in the affirmative. The opportunity may not come again. None of us knows what tomorrow brings. If you choose to deny the invitation, make sure you're

making an informed choice. It's immeasurably costly, as I've said before, to sense that He's knocking on the door of your heart but to decide not to respond. The Holy Spirit both woos and enables us to respond to that call. Response isn't even an option apart from the Spirit's nudging.

Through the prophet Hosea, God tells us that "my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6).

Proverbs 1:29 and 31 together issue a solemn warning: "Since they ***hated knowledge*** and ***did not choose to fear the LORD***...they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes."

Don't let the opportunity to belong to the family of God pass you by. Make your opportunity count right now, today—*this minute*, while you're yielded, tender, and focused.

Understanding Scripture and salvation.

Salvation begins with a positive response to the person and work of Christ, as revealed in Scripture.

The Scriptures, says Paul, "are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15).

Non-Christians can't accept the things of the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:14) because they don't have that Spirit.

Unless a person is in a relationship with Jesus, she can't understand His Word. By the same token, we need to grow in this relationship to increase our capacity to understand Scripture. Our fellowship with the Lord is dependent upon our obedience (John 15:14–15). Disobedient Christians simply can't accept the solid food of the Word (1 Corinthians 3:1–3).

G. Campbell Morgan once observed that, “If we persist in the things against which we are warned, the Bible becomes a sealed book, and we can neither know it nor teach it.”

CHAPTER SIX

DEVELOP GREAT FAITH

Being willing to learn from past mistakes is what sets winners apart from losers. When faith is our goal, the Holy Spirit will show us things that may be keeping us from reaching that goal. God is pleased by our faith. If we'll pursue Christian maturity, we can mature to the point that we develop "great faith." God wants you to grow in your knowledge and appreciation of Him. He wants you to grow in grace and love towards yourself and others. Sometimes loving others is difficult until we first learn to love ourselves. Ask God to show you what may be keeping you in shame, guilt, unforgiveness, or a lack of love. Then give these things to Him so He can move you toward freedom. Making a truthful assessment of what isn't working will help you eliminate most of the negative thoughts, behaviors, and attitudes that are hindering you from reaching your full potential.

The heart of confession and repentance.

A repentant heart makes things right with God. Confession is evidence that we long to have an uncontaminated heart towards Him. By asking God for His wisdom to live properly—we keep our heart right. A humble, teachable spirit gives the Holy Spirit permission to work on our behalf. God loves humility. Its root word *humble*, means low in station, meek, or modest in manner. It follows, then, that God also loves the humble. Some Old Testament wisdom verses bear this out:

"The fear of the LORD teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honor" (Proverbs 15:33).

“When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom” (Proverbs 11:2).

“He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His way” (Psalm 25:9).

“He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble” (Proverbs 3:34).

We need the Holy Spirit’s help to live wisely. Humility brings the Holy Spirit to our aid. This transforming process begins when we’re contrite and humble. Transformation of the mind begins when we’re willing to *continually* evaluate our life, thinking, behavior, and past belief systems. Cooperation with the Holy Spirit makes change possible. When we become indifferent or complacent, we see little change. When we go to the Father and ask Him to show us how to live, He’ll do exactly that.

Fertile ground produces good fruit. We can expect a good harvest when we ask the Holy Spirit to change us.

Is your heart good soil?

Our heart is the repository for our attitudes. It follows, then, that our heart must first become fertile ground for us to produce good fruit. In this way, God’s blessed people become a blessing to others. The harvest comes to those who’re willing to do the necessary work to bring it in. When we initiate the process we reveal our “good-faith” (as in *earnest*). In real estate transactions we typically put down a sum of money on a property as good faith or earnest money. This lets the seller know we’re serious about our offer, that we’re even willing to lose our earnest money if we change our mind. This action demonstrates our *intent*. In this same way we reveal to God through our *actions*, that we’re in earnest.

Repentance brings us to faith.

To *repent* means to *turn from*, as in turning our back on sin. The Holy Spirit shows us when we're going the wrong way. A repentant person will see the need to do a "180," and is willing to receive correction. Repentance is the first step toward growing our faith.

After Jesus had recounted to her everything significant she had done in the past, He told the woman at the well to "go and sin no more." Notice that He didn't condemn her for her past; He merely told her in so many words, "Now that you've encountered Me, go on your way, in the opposite direction of your prior life of sin."

God doesn't expect us to know all things. Acquiring knowledge and wisdom takes time. For that matter, change of any kind takes time. God understands the principles, interactions, and sequence of seed, time, and harvest. Without a seed, we can't expect a harvest. We can't put nothing into the ground and expect something to come up. Nothing produces nothing!

The seed doesn't have to be large to produce an abundance of that something. Faith as diminutive as a mustard seed can yield a copious harvest—as long as that bit of faith isn't mixed with unbelief. We can't plant seed today and expect a harvest tomorrow. Increase takes time. Reaping a harvest requires something from us. We must till the ground, plant good seed, provide nutrients and water, and keep the weeds out. God provides the sun for growth, and time (also thanks to God) does the rest.

God hasn't left us without help or wisdom. We don't always know what's hindering our growth or ability to change. That's where the Holy Spirit comes in—to make these mysteries known to us.

In return, we can expect:

1. ***More favor.*** God's favor indicates that we're on the right path. A lack of His favor could signify that we've wandered into a "no trespassing" zone. This lack of evident blessing could be our warning not to venture further from the path marked out for us. Both angels and the Holy Spirit are God's appointed navigational guides to direct and protect us from harm.
2. ***More peace.*** Inner peace is a confirmation that we are indeed headed in the right direction. When we fail to sense God's peace, we need to stop until He reveals a course correction or gives us the go-ahead to resume our journey. Unrest in our spirit is the Spirit's way of informing us of what our mind hasn't yet picked up. The reality is that our mind is much slower on the uptake than our spirit. Since our spirit picks up nuances and nudges much more quickly than our mind does, we're wise to stay tuned to it. Our inner spirit, precisely because it's attuned to God's Spirit, leads us into hidden truth that others might not readily pick up on or understand. It's our compass, pointing us in the direction of God's perfect way for us.

Confusion may signify that a deceiver is present.

The Holy Spirit provides us with step-by-step direction and information essential for our well-being along the way. He gives wisdom and knowledge to those who seek and ask.

Confusion is evidence that information or knowledge is being withheld from us. It may be an indicator that Satan is at work trying to block truth

from reaching us. Ask for wisdom to dissolve your bewilderment and bring you clarity and revelation. Ask God for His peace in any and every situation. If you don't sense His peace, don't proceed until you get the all clear.

Be aware that God doesn't *need* anything from us to work in our lives. He doesn't even need our confession. Yet confession and a contrite heart will keep us from slipping into haughtiness. The longer we go without reflecting on our relationship with God, the greater our inclination to go astray, to give in to the temptation to live life by our own efforts. Before long sin comes knocking and we're ripe for the taking. Staying tender and yielded keeps the Holy Spirit close by and working on our behalf. When circumstances get harrowing, we may need His guidance on a minute-by-minute basis.

You do need to know that the Holy Spirit is ultra-sensitive. Sin not only grieves Him, but causes Him to move away from us. The Holy Spirit is a person and not an "it"—a person who deserves to be treated with dignity, honor, and respect. We must come to value His presence and to refrain from offending Him with coarse talk and sinful habits. We develop greater faith and resist grieving the Holy Spirit when we continue learning God's ways.

A man whose faith was pure, not mixed with unbelief.

The centurion, in the book of Matthew, provides us with an example of someone who possessed an exceptionally pure and remarkable faith.

As recounted in Matthew 8:5–10, "When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible

suffering.” Jesus said to him, “I will go and heal him.” The centurion replied, “Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, “I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.”

Jesus was so impressed with the centurion’s faith that He remarked that He hadn’t observed such great faith in Israel—as in the entire Jewish nation. This man wasn’t even a Jew. In fact, he was an officer in the Roman Army, whose military occupation of the region was viewed with disdain by most Jews.

This example illustrates that it isn’t necessarily the religious leaders who aspire toward spiritual insight. Often the humble, common, everyday person, demonstrate the most remarkable degree of faith in God. The gospel is a simple message for *every* person regardless of standing. It requires no special credentials to believe it.

Matthew doesn’t mention the centurion’s name, but we know from his rank that he was an officer with authority over 100 men. Most likely he was already a believer when he approached Jesus as he expressed such unusual comprehension of Christ’s identity and authority (Matthew 8:8–9).

Note that at no time did the centurion actually ask Jesus to heal his servant. Instead, he came to the Lord with a solemn report of his servant’s suffering. Perhaps he was hesitant about how Jesus would respond to the request of a non-Jew.

Without hesitation, Jesus willingly went out of his way and offered to “come and heal him” (Matthew 8:7). There was at that point no need to

question whether or not it was the Lord's will to heal the servant. What encouragement it must have been for the centurion to sense Jesus' compassion and to witness His eagerness to bring relief and healing to a sick man of lowly stature.

The centurion's humble but confident response is also noteworthy. In essence he said... "Lord, I'm unworthy to have you as a guest in my home, but because I myself am a man of authority who is accustomed to giving orders, I understand your authority and know that all you have to do is speak your word for my servant to be healed" (Matthew 8:5–10).

Four vital principles to great faith.

1. ***Great faith begins with following Jesus.*** We must know Jesus personally and acknowledge His divine authority. It's obvious that the centurion came to Jesus with an unusual perception of Christ's position and authority (the fear of the Lord, as we learn from Proverbs 9:10, is the beginning of wisdom). It's likely that he had been first an observer and then an admirer of Jesus for some time. This demonstrates that the first step to great faith is having a proper relationship with Christ, a relationship that allows us to approach Him confidently with our needs.

"Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:21–22).

1. ***The motives of great faith are pure.*** The centurion boldly brought his need to Jesus. Far from being presumptuous or demanding, he demonstrated in his approach reverence, humility, and submission. As for his motivation in coming, it's notable that his concern wasn't

for himself but for the suffering and need of someone else. In this case a servant who was considered to be among the lowest of the low in this society.

It's necessary for us, too, to seek out and determine the will of God with regard to our desires and requests. Scripture clearly indicates that God answers those prayers that are in accordance with His will. For us to receive the desired results of our prayers, our requests must be in synch with God's purposes. Prayer is communing with God. It's our time to come to Him not only to voice our praise, concerns, and requests, but perhaps more importantly, to listen to what He has to say to us. Effective prayer moves far beyond asking God for things. The motive of great faith is "relationship."

You wouldn't want your friends to come to you only when they have requests. You want your friends to come based on friendship and because they enjoy spending time with you. If the relationship goes no further than addressing their needs, you'll most likely lose interest in the high-maintenance, low-fulfillment association. God is no different. He wants you to approach Him because you desire to be with Him and enjoy spending time with Him.

"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).

God reveals His will to us through His Word. Has it ever occurred to you that you can first request and then claim, in confident faith, everything He has promised you in that Word? If we want God's

provisions, He expects us to bring our needs before Him. James reduces this to the basics, stating:

“You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God” (James 4:2).

However, James also warned that some prayers go unanswered because of improper motives.

“You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:3).

Lust is carnal and self-willed, an evil desire of the flesh and one of the major reasons for ineffectual prayer. Many of our requests are for selfish interest or materialistic gain. We must ask ourselves, *Is my faith directed towards asking God to help me become more spiritually mature, more sensitive to the things He wants me sensitive too? Am I sensitive about winning the lost for Christ and making disciples? Am I concerned for others who have experienced crisis or endured tragedy? Do I desire more money to give to the ministries that can reach the people groups I can’t? Do I desire money to meet the needs of the sick, the oppressed, the poor, the widows, and the homeless?*

Without doubt, we aren’t to refrain from mentioning our own needs to God but our motives are to align with God’s expressed will for us. It’s essential to become a student of God’s ways and know what that will is. Unless, we leave behind our selfish desires we’ll never fully experience God’s greater plan for us. It’s through the spiritual maturation process that we obtain all the riches God has for us. Growing in grace and in our knowledge of Christ must be the substance to great faith.

1. ***Great faith stems from a humble heart.*** Our faith grows when we're full of gratitude toward God for His love and blessings. The centurion demonstrated sincere humility coupled with high esteem for Jesus. He confessed his unworthiness, expressing his belief that he didn't deserve to have Jesus step into his home. We're totally dependent upon God for His mercy and strength. What God does for us in response to our requests has nothing to do with our merit. It's on the basis of *His* love and grace. God is love, and He's a good God—all the time. Answered prayer is a result of who He is, not of who we are.

“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6).

The writer to the Hebrews invites, “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrew 4:16).

1. ***Great faith trusts implicitly in God's dependable Word.*** We must accept God's Word as true without demanding evidence and despite unforeseen circumstances. The centurion was so thoroughly convinced of the authority of Jesus, the incarnate Word, that He didn't find it necessary for Jesus to personally visit his servant. He was unquestioningly confident that if the Lord would but give the command, the healing would follow. He didn't need to see or feel anything to bolster his assurance. He believed completely and unconditionally in the power of the Word.

Such were the characteristics of Abraham's faith. He believed God's Word of promise (for a child) even though all natural circumstances were against him.

“He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform” (Roman 4:20–21).

God’s Word is completely trustworthy and the foundation for our faith. The believer must surrender total allegiance to the Lord and trust Him without reservation. His Word is reasonable, even when we see no evidence or proof. His Word is reasonable and our trust is warranted, because He’s the *One True God* and there is no other like Him!

CHAPTER SEVEN

MAKE TODAY YOUR CHANGE DAY — THE RISK OF TAKING NO RISK

Don't despair over your past mistakes. We've all made them, every one of us. Besides, you have someone who's there to correct all the mistakes you've ever made. That person is God!

As sinful human beings we don't know how to be perfect and blameless. What we do know, from the time we're very small, is how to make mistakes and sin.

We will one day be *sinless*, but that won't take place until we're resurrected with Christ at His second coming. On "that day" everyone who has received Him will be made perfect as He is. We'll then be brought back to our original condition, to once again enjoy the perfect relationship we had with our Creator in the garden. Until that day we need a Savior who can save us from our mistakes and propensity towards sin.

The God of the great turn-around.

The Holy Spirit gently makes our sin known to us so we can turn to Jesus for salvation. Jesus is the only help for the sin problem against which we continuously strive. Once we trust Him and put our lives in His hands, He'll go to work on our desperate condition. Jesus shows us how to turn around and go in the right direction.

As His Word tells us in 2 Timothy 3:16,

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.”

Sin brings untold difficulties into our lives. If you find yourself discouraged, bear in mind that seasons change. If you'll but turn to Jesus instead of despairing over your problems, He'll make that seasonal change in your life and turn the bad into good.

Don't make permanent decisions based on the impermanent. Don't make decisions when you're tired, frazzled, unfocused, or overly emotional. Ask God to clear your mind and heart so you can think through your situation with a clear and stable mind.

Moving from sin requires a transformed mind.

A renewed mind comes when we so immerse ourselves in the Word of God that we discover for ourselves what He has to say regarding both our present circumstances and our future. After our mind has undergone renewal, our heart and emotions will follow suit.

“I have hidden your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You” (Psalm 119:11).

“Your laws are my treasure; they are my heart's delight” (Psalm 119:111).

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a **sound mind**” (2 Timothy 1:7, NKJV).

Only God can truly change a person from the inside out.

How frequently do we feel hopeless when we find ourselves unable to problem-solve a way out of our dilemma? Again, the good news is that we

don't need to know all that much or have all the wisdom in the world. We need only to know the *ONE* who can change our situation around for good. That person is God. He alone makes that positive, permanent difference in our lives.

If you turn inward relying on yourself, or turn outward depending on others, you'll most likely end up cycling right back into the same situation. Lasting change is possible only through the One who knows us better than anyone else, including ourselves. God was intimately acquainted with each of us from our conception and before.

If you know the Lord, you have reason to rejoice! You have a bright, blessed future ahead of you filled with hope in Him. If you don't know Him, but you want a great future and a life filled with hope, you may need an introduction.

Many denominational backgrounds do a commendable job of teaching us what we'll gain in the afterlife. The truth is though, that countless people want to know about this present life. Not everyone is satisfied living 60, 70, or even 80 plus years without knowing how to overcome trials and temptations, or how to live with joy for that number of years.

Our generation is expected to live much longer than our ancestors. Modern medicine is making immense advancements and we benefit from this medical knowledge and technology. Most of us, conditioned as we are to instant gratification, simply aren't content to know we have eternal life in the hereafter; we want to know how to live an abundant life *now*, while we're still alive and can enjoy it.

Determine to grow in knowledge, wisdom, and grace.

Become a life-long learner. If you desire more, or desire to lead others, know that all good leaders are also learners. Not just learners first and leaders later, but leaders and learners simultaneously. Leaders are readers. Digging deeper increases our understanding. There are essential truths in the Word of God that we absolutely need to know. A lack of knowledge in certain areas could conceivably bring about our premature death. It's crucial for us to search out ***all truth*** for ourselves.

In Hosea 4:6, God laments, "My people are being *destroyed* because they don't know me" (NLT).

And in the (NIV), "My people are *destroyed* from lack of knowledge."

You're extremely valuable to God.

It's vitally important for you to know that you're extraordinarily valuable to God. He sent His only Son to die on the cross so that ***you*** could live in freedom with Him forever. Isn't that teaser enough to find out the *why*?

You're valuable, not because of whom you are, but because of *whose* you are. You were purchased and redeemed at enormous cost and you belong to God on that basis alone. When you accept His offer to become His child, you receive His inheritance as well.

You can spend your time, waste your time, or invest your time.

God has given us a gift called *time* and He lets us spend it how we wish. Although God determines the length of our days He doesn't tell us how to use them.

Most of us understand that homes, cars, and our physical bodies require maintenance, and that deferred maintenance always costs more than the

preventive kind. Many expensive repair jobs can be avoided simply by keeping up with the necessary upkeep in the first place. Being passive about required maintenance won't make them go away and only creates greater repairs for us down the line. When we ignore what's needed and important, we eventually lose value in our investment.

A passive stance regarding the maintenance of our spiritual life doesn't come cheaply either. Everything in life requires care. It's a law of reality in a fallen world. Life requires maintenance because God created a world in which things, both living and nonliving, are subject to decay.

Our choices need our due diligence—the decisions we make and the ones we choose not to make. Due diligence in legal terms means *appropriate carefulness*. In other words, what we neglect will either depreciate or decay and what we feed will grow. What we *faithfully* feed and maintain, will eventually flourish. Our spiritual life requires the same diligent maintenance for it to thrive. Those who wonder why they can't kick a bad habit or sin need look no further than to what they're feeding.

The risk of taking no risk.

One obscure and captivating account in the Bible is the story of a man who eventually became King David's bodyguard. He rose to the position of commander in chief of Israel's Army, the second most powerful station in the kingdom. His success can be traced back to a decision that shaped his destiny: fight or flight, run away or give chase?

The writer of 2 Samuel tells us that Benaiah chased a lion down into a pit. Then, despite the snow and slippery ground, he caught the beast and

killed it (see 2 Samuel 23:20). His life's story is summarized in three verses (20–22). We have no detail on what he did before or after this incident.

However, we do learn that in his day, as in ours, this gut reaction went against the norm. Most of us, when we encounter monumental, threatening situations in life, choose flight over fight. In many instances this is in fact a prudent decision, one that preserves our life. But Benaiah chose instead to be a lion-heart. He either didn't realize (which is highly unlikely) or chose to overlook the obvious problem, the size and strength of his opponent. He simply grabbed an opportunity when it came his way.

Young David did the same, choosing to disregard the risk to himself. Not only did he tackle a bear and a lion that were threatening his sheep, but He went after a giant rather than cowering along with the Israelite army. That giant was 9' tall and in full body armor. The adolescent David felt movement-impaired in the armor of King Saul, so he decided against wearing it. David was strong in His mind. His thinking was strong, for his faith in God was strong. He knew beyond doubt that with God on His side he couldn't fail. He knew that God would come through and make him victorious to deliver his people.

From the purely natural perspective David seemed an unlikely opponent. The giant, faced with the ludicrous sight of a young boy with his slingshot, threw back his tremendous head and laughed. We get cocky, don't we, when we think we already have it in the bag? But David neither overestimated the giant's ability, nor underestimated his own. David could risk all since he was confident in God's power. He understood that the showdown had nothing to do with him. He needed only to step up to the plate and show both sides what his God could do *through* him.

This is what God requires of any of us. Few are willing to take the risk. By declining to step out in faith, we forfeit the glorious opportunity of watching God bring in the victory and the trophy. Gruesome as it sounds to us today, the trophy for David was the giant's decapitated head.

David was a problem-solver. The problem was the giant. David stepped out in faith and took care of the problem. David revealed to the people that his trust was in God, it was his witness to them. His enduring trust brought God glory but moreover increased his faith.

Regrets and omissions.

Most of us at the end of our life will have to come to terms with regret. Regret over all the missed opportunities we opted not to chase down. In the short term most of us regret some of our actions, but in the long term many more of us will significantly regret our *inactions*.

That's the beauty of deciding that *today* is the day to change. It is better, to have tried and failed, than never to have risked dreaming. Missed opportunities and unrealized dreams invariably end in regret.

Even the church has gotten caught up in short-term thinking regarding destiny and holiness. Religion becomes fixated on the sins of commission (the kinds of sins that we *do*, that we actively commit: Don't do this, don't do that.) The intention is to prevent us from doing wrong, and that in itself is admirable. But we could conceivably live a very inactive, uninvolved life and still not be doing what's right.

Holiness entails so much more than refraining from doing wrong things. This legalistic view fixates on our outward behavior, not our heart

condition. It has nothing to do with a personal, intimate relationship with our God, or the love God has toward His people. When we experience the quality of His love firsthand *we won't want to sin!* What we will want is to reciprocate that love and grace on the basis of our gratitude, by reflecting it back in our dealings with God and others. This Christ-like view keeps us in intimacy with our Heavenly Father, our *Abba*, our daddy.

People often respond complacently to sermons about free and radical grace apart from a personal relationship with God. Because they've never experienced God's love in an intimate way, they assume that anyone told about grace will take advantage of the slack to go and sin more.

The apostle Paul addresses this very argument in the book of Romans (Romans 6:1). People don't need permission to go and sin more. They already know how to do that and don't require a second invitation.

What they need to know more about is the unconditional love of God and the grace He offers on a personal level in conjunction with it. When people experience the true, unadulterated, no-strings-attached love of God, they're transformed from within. They don't need behavior modification, because change occurs naturally on the outside after the inside has been supernaturally transformed.

Our present and our future.

At some point many people stop forging ahead toward their future, reverting instead to reliving and repeating their past. Many people simply stop learning after they've left high school or college. Many no longer dream; they're too preoccupied with the end-of-their-nose demands of life. Gradually reality takes over. Instead of dreaming about the future, they

spend their time scheming about ways to get ahead in the short run, willing away their time with the popular game of *Acquisition*. Striving for dominance fills the void once populated by dreams.

God endowed us with our imaginations, but we opted to stop using them, preferring to rely instead on memories. At some point we stopped chasing lions, deciding to make our homes in the suburbs to avoid the dangerous terrain.

We all have the choice, as Benaiah and David did, to shape the rest of our life. We can make the decision to give chase to the things God is calling us to chase, or we can opt for perceived safety, running away from our true destiny by choosing not to give chase and not to risk.

If you do elect not to risk, be forewarned that you'll live an ordinary life, not the extraordinary life God has planned for you. If you're content with the ordinary, there's nothing wrong with that. But if you want the exhilarating, electrifying life God alone can give, you'll prefer to risk it all, to throw caution to the wind, and go for it.

Many are called, but few are chosen.

Many people hear the call of God which comes first through His nonverbal revelation of Himself in the creation and through the conscience He has instilled within each of us (Matthew 22:14).

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun. It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course. It

risers at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth” (Psalm 19:1-6).

His “special” revelation in the Bible, of course, fills in the gaps of our knowledge of Him. The few who will respond are the ones who are truly listening. Jesus repeated the following several times in conjunction with His parables, which, though deceptively simple, remained peculiar and mysterious to many:

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Matthew 11:15).

The vast majority of people have ears that are functionally intact, but only a few choose to *listen* and *respond*. Listening to hear God’s voice requires tuning out competing voices. Much of the noise is meaningless chatter. Noise, so prevalent in our world, can easily prevent us from hearing God’s voice. When we seek to hear, we wait in eager anticipation of actually hearing from Him. When we quiet our spirit, regardless of the clamor around us, we **will** hear Him. If we aren’t willing to be still and listen, we’ll hear many voices, but won’t know which one is His. In addition, we won’t know which one to answer.

Not everyone who hears the gospel receives it. That distinction is reserved for those few who, having ears to hear, do listen and take notice. Many may in fact hear, either without interest or with outright antagonism toward God. God must draw the hearts of those who come, and only those hearts that are tender and yielded will allow it (see John 6:44).

Wisdom questions to ask yourself:

Have I experienced religion rather than salvation?

Will I hear and respond to Christ's calling?

Will I seek intimate relationship with Jesus, as opposed to religion?

Will I stop living in fear, or in the past, in order to embrace a new future?

If your answer was yes, what steps or actions will you take now to embrace this new future?

Am I willing to inquire of God to see what He has in store for me?

Have I decided that today is the day when, with God's help, I'll begin to make that change in my life and risk all?

CHAPTER EIGHT

KEEP MOVING FORWARD WITH GOD

Have you come to believe that your current plight is permanent? Remember Joseph's and David's stories of having to wait patiently to receive what God had for them and their future? I'm sure they had days when they felt the same way, but, in reality, every day of adversity was simply a stepping-stone toward the future God ultimately had for them. Each stepping stone was a "test" from God. Once they passed all the required tests, they were *then* prepared for the astounding responsibility and purpose God had for their lives.

God requires us to pass His tests, for patience and character are needed to reach our final destination.

Don't allow your current situation to determine all of your tomorrows for you. Today's place isn't permanent. It's merely a stage you must pass through to get to your enduring place—a place full of the blessings and favor of God. Don't abort your assignment by failing to understand how God works in His people. God works much more slowly than we do so we're inclined to believe He's not working at all. But this is never the case.

A season of preparation is needed before serving.

If we're promoted too quickly to greatness, or beyond our current ability, we frequently fail to possess the critical maturity and humility required for the position. Falling from public stature can be extremely humiliating. God

provides us with the time we need for maturity and growth to take place through His instruction so that our shortcomings won't be obvious to all. We're much less likely to cause damage to the Kingdom after an appropriate period of preparation.

In our immaturity, we may fail to understand the need for seasons of preparation before service. We tend to believe that it's all about *equipping*. When we discover that we have spiritual gifts that can be of Kingdom use, we want to plunge right in. However, this impulsiveness to serve without seasoning means that our method will usually be fleshly. Nor are we prepared at this early stage to persevere to the end. We don't yet understand what it means to abide. We don't yet comprehend where our strength and power come from or realize that there will be a battle that will require us to be fully armed. Time teaches us how to stay in the fight and win the battle. Time allows us to identify the enemy's tactics. Only time-built humility keeps Satan at a more comfortable distance and keeps us in the game.

The often complicated logistics of war simply don't permit a private first class to make the kind of battle-savvy decisions made by seasoned generals. Why, then, don't we understand that great service will require great and continual testing, preparing us at any given time for service at the next level, the next rank?

Be careful not to move ahead of God. Wait for His perfect timing and direction for your next step. This will ensure your victory. Failure to acknowledge the need for His permission and timing, on the other hand, is a recipe for defeat. It reveals immaturity and that pride is still a large component of our being. We need sifting to reveal the impurities that are still in us. God at times permits the enemy to test us, to teach us how to

overcome and to rid ourselves of the impurities that keep us from moving forward. We're called to endure and to exercise our faith, befitting Christ's command for us to persevere.

If we'll wait upon the Lord to accomplish His perfect work in us according to His perfect timetable, we're guaranteed to pass all the required tests. With the proper seasoning, which patience and humility brings to fruition, we'll stand firm in the face of opposition.

Don't worry about failing God's tests.

If we fail the tests God gives us, He's willing to let us repeat them until we pass them. Then and only then will we be ready for that "big, bold, daring" call on our life. God tests us with the smaller tasks with which He's already entrusted us. Don't resent humble beginnings; with God they're always the first step to the top. God knows our heart and our faithfulness, but many of us need this testing to show us who we are apart from the Holy Spirit's assistance. It encourages us when we know we have been tested, found faithful, and then moved beyond our current capabilities. If our faith is lacking or weak, this very testing will build it up. Then we are confident knowing that the Lord has prepared us for our future.

God arranges the preparation we need.

God will let us retake the test not three times, but as many times as we need to show ourselves faithful. He isn't interested in asking us to do something He hasn't first prepared us to do through His power. Keep in mind that if God were to assign you a task you could do just as easily on your own, you wouldn't need Him. He won't ask you to do anything in

which you don't need Him for success. Any accountability He assigns in those early stages will invariably be beyond your natural capabilities.

At first your obedience may be coupled with fear, but in due time, the task will become easier and seem more natural to you. In fact, you'll know then that you were born to do it. The key to losing the fear is that point at which you realize that you can indeed do the job, but only with the Holy Spirit's help. That's when you become victorious like David.

During your season of testing, remember to keep moving forward with God. He hasn't given up on you or on your destiny merely because you've sinned or gotten sidetracked. Many of God's servants introduced to us in the Bible got sidetracked and even sidelined, but God still used them.

Never let the enemy convince you that God can no longer use you because you've sinned. Remember sinners sin. The Savior saves, because sinners sin and need saving! That's the gospel put simply.

Bear in mind that God didn't choose you because of *your* ability, but because of His ability to get it done through you. His testing is for your benefit, to bring you to the understanding that you can do nothing apart from Him. When you firmly lay hold of that principle, He can trust you not to move forward on your own without waiting for Him or accessing the power that comes from Him, the Holy Spirit.

Recall once again that seasons change and that God isn't time conscious. Time is meaningless from His perspective—a mere concession to our inability to grasp infinity. We often become impatient because we fail to understand that God doesn't work according to our sense of time. Although God is the creator of time, He isn't bound by it.

God is interested in perfecting His people.

Perfection takes time. God isn't willing to give up on His goal of perfection for you to relieve you of your impatience. Interested as He is in your continual and long-term success, He's willing to take as long as you need and He doesn't grow impatient in the process. He won't abandon you merely because you need more time to mature than someone else might. He isn't comparing you to others at all. He's interested solely in you and in what's best for you.

If you feel as though reaching your dream is taking too long, simply ask Him whether you may be undermining your own success by failing to cooperate with Him. Perhaps He's trying to teach you something and your lack of cooperation is hindering your learning process. Let Him know that you desire to fulfill your purpose. If you're willing to cooperate with Him by attempting to see things from His perspective, you're already halfway there.

If you choose to become angry at God's timing and think He has forgotten about you, you'll only delay the process. If it seems that you and God are at a gridlock, ask yourself if you are the one who's keeping your life from moving forward.

Joseph ended up spending two additional years in prison after he had asked the baker to put in a good word for him with the pharaoh. God wanted His chosen servant to trust in Him alone rather than depending on others to rescue him. After Joseph had learned all the necessary lessons, when the immaturity of his past was at last fully behind him, he emerged as the *man* God could use. God transformed a promising boy into a

responsible man by putting him through the crucible of testing and waiting. Joseph had to grow up before God could use him mightily; to go from boyhood to manhood and from there to godly manhood.

Failure to understand how God works will set us back.

Acquainting ourselves with God's methods through His Word, as well as through the examples of lives He's changed, will school us in how to respond appropriately to Him. Be sure to consider New Testament examples, remembering that the work of atonement has already been done in Christ. We no longer need to plead with God to work on our behalf, as did His Old Testament people who were still under the law. Once again, as borne out in the verses to follow, the key concept is patience.

"I know your works, your labor, *your patience*, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and *have patience*, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary" (Revelation 2:2–3).

"Here is the *patience* of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12).

Once Jesus came and satisfied the wrath of God for our sin, He ushered in for us a whole new world of opportunity. Unlike the Old Testament saints, we don't need to work for the blessings of God. In terms of our readiness for service, we need only believe that through His power, we can do what He says we can; that we are, what He says we are; and that we have at our disposal, what He says we have.

The operative word here is ***believe: Only believe!*** Don't mix your belief with works, or mix your belief with unbelief. Many have come from church backgrounds in which the law has somehow become intertwined with the

new covenant of Christ Jesus. This only confuses people and keeps them from reaching for their dreams or realizing their full potential as they somehow believe they have to earn or beg for every good thing God stands ready to give them. They fail to understand that He longs to give us good things because *He is good*, and because He has already paid the price, freeing us up to access and receive all good things from Him. God's infinite store of goodness is already ours for the taking, free and clear, with no strings attached, other than abiding in Him.

If this concept is so foreign to you that you can't wrap your mind around it, ask God to make it clear to you. If you feel as though for your own good, He doesn't want you to have too much, then understand that you're listening to old tapes. This kind of teaching is tied to the first Adam, the Adam who fell into sin. Jesus was the second Adam, the One who came to turn the course of human history back around in the direction of God. Jesus made our situation right once again, for all time. He doesn't need to pay the price over and over again. It's a done deal.

Rest and freedom comes to those who “receive” from Christ Jesus.

Rest will come to your soul when you realize that what you possess is yours precisely because you are in Christ. When you conclude that you no longer have to work for His blessings, that all you have to do is *believe and receive them*, you'll have no trouble expressing gratitude, praise, and adoration for Him. You'll know that you're free—free from having to work for every good gift from God. Freedom from having to prove to Him again and again, that you're worthy of them. That won't work anyway, because in and of yourself, you aren't worthy; none of us is! What He gives you has

nothing whatever to do with *your* worthiness; *it has everything to do with His*. Bottom line: You receive because *He* is worthy.

If your “receiver” is malfunctioning, take it to Jesus and let Him show you what’s wrong with it. He’ll heal your heart and mind if you just ask Him to. Ask Him to take everything out of you that’s hindering your ability to receive and believe in Him.

Time is your friend, not your enemy.

Season’s change, as do people and circumstances! Expect change—supernatural change, that is! Tomorrow is coming. Your time is coming. Your future will be wholly unlike any of your yesterdays. It took Jesus 30 years to prepare for the ministry that was before Him, and Moses spent 80 years developing into a great leader.

Time is your friend, not your enemy. Time is preparing you for your final calling. Its slower passages allow you to become broken, seasoned, compliant, flexible, developed, and humble. Don’t look at your ever-advancing age and despair that God may pass you over for His service. Being “old,” though seen as a drawback in Western culture, is an advantage with God. God can do more with a malleable older person in a very short time frame, than with a younger, less surrendered individual. God holds time in His pocket and He can make things happen instantly if He wishes.

Be open to changing your conception of how God operates and you’ll become less concerned about the number of years of usefulness you have left. *Has it ever occurred to you that God can extend your life?* Whatever your family history in terms of longevity, or the lack thereof, God can make

an exception with you. It is, after all, God who gives long life (Psalm 91:16).

God can make you more useful and productive in one year, than if you move out ahead of Him and try to serve in your own strength for ten. I personally find great excitement when I see ordinary people, part of the initial wave of Baby Boomers who are now in their sixties, being powerfully used by God. I grow even more encouraged as I see how influential and effective those who are entering their 80s remain. They prevail with vigor, stamina, and passion for their Lord's work.

God wants to bring all people, of all age groups, to Himself. He needs workers from every season of life to bring in the harvest. Many workers will be needed for the end-time harvest; multitudes will become receptive to the gospel when they see calamity upon them. We need to be prepared to disseminate the Good News, the authentic word of hope so many long to hear. Don't ever let the devil convince you that you're too old to be used in the kingdom of God. Instead, use the time for preparation. Take heart, allowing yourself instead to become encouraged and excited about the future things God has for you.

Patience is our weapon against failure.

Patience is the weapon that forces deception to reveal itself. Seldom are we aware of the deception that has infiltrated our own heart. God gently takes His time to expose it to us so that we'll allow Him to purge it from our lives. It's only when we acknowledge that we've been deceived by the enemy that God can co-labor with us. At that point we can walk with

confidence into our new assignment, with Him not just at our side, but out in front of us.

Five of Jesus' letters to the seven churches from Revelation 2–3 contain the command to repent, and the word patience appears four times in three of them, a good indicator of the importance of patience for God's people and for the church, especially at the end time.

Don't get caught unprepared for the future. Patient endurance will bring you in line with what God has to those who've been waiting for Him to come back for them.

CHAPTER NINE

TELL SOMEONE WHAT JESUS HAS DONE FOR YOU

Simply telling others what Jesus has done for us is a built-in opportunity to witness for Christ. *Has Jesus impacted your life?* Then tell somebody so. *Has He delivered you from fear and anxiety, from addictions and despair, from guilt and shame?* Then tell them how you've received a new life of freedom in exchange for your condemnation and guilt. Tell them how He exchanged your pain and sorrow, for hope and joy.

How many people aren't emotionally wringing their hands, wishing they knew how to witness more effectively? Although some believers possess in extra measure of the spiritual gift of evangelism, the truth is that any of us can evangelize simply by giving testimony to the change Jesus has brought into our life. Some believe they must have an extraordinary testimony to share it with an individual or group. But this kind of thinking actually reveals that our thoughts are on our selves. Salvation isn't about us or about what we did to receive it, which, no matter how gripping our story of rescue, is absolutely *nothing*! Salvation is a miracle all by itself. You need no additional miracles for sharing your salvation story. A transformed life is evidence enough.

Our faith flourishes every time we speak of Jesus, and especially when we tell others what He's done for us. The more we give God praise and thanks for what He's accomplished, the more joy-filled our heart becomes.

Gratitude is the key that exchanges our heart of stone for a heart of love. Our faith becomes contagious to others when they see our joy and love.

When we refrain from speaking to others about our problems, sharing instead with them our certain, experiential knowledge that Jesus is the answer to our every problem; we've shared our faith. It's that basic and that natural. This is the testimony the world needs; that of our trust and faith in *His* ability and character.

Jesus didn't let the man who He freed from demons go with Him, instead he told him,

"Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you" (Mark 5:19).

We don't need to know *how* God will resolve our dilemma or even the timetable. What counts is our assurance that ***He will do it!*** We don't need to *see* the answer to believe in His ability to work on our behalf. In fact, we can thank Him the moment we hand Him our problem. Trust Him. He's at work even before you realize it or see the evidence. That is, after all, what faith is; *believing before we see*.

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see" (Hebrews 11:1).

Consider how and why you pray.

There are many prayer models, none better known than the prayer our Lord taught us in Matthew 6:9–11. It's common for people to use prayer as a time to repeat to God everything that's going wrong in their life, as if He weren't aware. But a more helpful model is to mention your problems for a *few* minutes. Then spend *three times* that amount of time proclaiming your

faith in God's ability to answer your prayers. Your words of faith are speaking forth your future (see my chapter on *Speaking Faith Words into Your Life*).

As you mature in your relationship with God, you'll learn to give Him praise and adoration *first*, before bringing any requests to Him. When you do get around to petitioning, express your requests simply without whining or unnecessary elaboration remembering that He is already aware of your needs. The time you spend with Him will be so much more productive if you lift your arms to Him in praise and gratitude for *who* He is: the great "I am that I am," the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. Be awestruck, not only by His identity, but by the very fact that *you* get to spend time in His presence.

Get the bigger picture of what God is doing in your life. He's merely using your circumstance to change you. This is more important to Him. When you learn to conform to His patterns for you, you may see quicker results to your prayers. But with conformity, you'll notice that your prayers have changed too.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

When we acknowledge who God is, we can enter into His presence with the thanksgiving, adoration, and reverence He alone deserves. We lose sight of the wonder by focusing on ourselves.

Jesus recounts to Simon, in Luke 7:40-48, the story of the woman who loved Jesus lavishly (out of gratitude for being forgiven of her many sins) by the washing of His feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair. She could not stop kissing his feet and poured expensive oil on them. Jesus

contrasted Simon's response to Him upon entering his home, (in verse 44-47).

"You did not give Me any water for My feet, "You did not give Me a kiss. You did not put oil on My head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

The Bible teaches us how to worship God, what to think about Him, and what and who He is. Those who go to Him for their forgiveness and healing, who accept and receive it, have no problem telling others about the goodness of Jesus.

This is more than enough to share with someone. Jesus is the *Good News*. There has never been anyone like Him. No one else has changed people's lives as Christ has and continues to do. No one else can give us the healing we so desperately need or forgive us of our sins. No one else has prepared a place in Heaven for us or will come again to escort us; His church, the bride into His glorious Kingdom.

Jesus *deserves* our praise. True worship humbles us as we see our lowly state and His transcendent majesty. He alone is entirely worthy of honor and praise!

If you're the recipient of salvation, you have personal experience with the greatest miracle of all. Tell someone about it today. One miracle is worth a thousand sermons for that someone God has placed in front of you; that disenchanted individual who's just *dying* for some Good News.

Remind people that God is the Creator and that we're the creation (believe it or not, they might not identify this). As such He is infinite, all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere-present. There's *nothing* beyond

the scope of His knowledge or care. God delights in performing the impossible just because He can. He's the master of the about-face, capable of turning our heartbreak into joy and laughter. He fills our emptiness with His fullness. He exchanges our sickness for His divine health, our worry and anxiety for His peace and rest.

The whole Bible is a witness to Jesus.

The entire Old Testament points ahead to Jesus and the New Testament tells His story. In a sense then, everything comes down to our witness for Christ. What are we called? Christians! Our whole lives are to be focused on manifesting Jesus *in us*.

Our success and witness consist in our ability to overcome this world.

God loves *overcomers* and He rewards His people for their resolve to faithfully overcome this world.

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the Tree of Life, which is in the paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7).

“He who overcomes will *not* be hurt at all by the second death” (Revelation 2:11).

“To him who overcomes and does My will to the end, I will give authority over the nations —‘He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery’ just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star” (Revelation 2:26-28).

“He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will *never* blot out his name from the Book of Life, but will acknowledge his name before My Father and His angels” (Revelation 3:5).

This is God's definition of success because it achieves His purposes. We have a knack for making things complicated, but with God they're not. By our faithful overcoming, God is glorified. It's how we witness to the world and reach maturity and perfection in God's eyes. This is the essence of our witness; that we *overcome* the evil one and take our just reward.

Was Jesus successful?

Let's examine Jesus' motivation for coming to earth in human form. Jesus declared,

"My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work" (John 4:34).

Jesus often found Himself weary from ministry, but He knew how to refresh Himself. Jesus didn't have a motivation problem because He fully understood His mission statement: *to do the will of the Father*.

His Father's assignment was of utmost importance to Him. So important, that He tuned out every unnecessary distraction. He allowed nothing to get in His way. This was His secret to rejuvenation every time physical weariness threatened to overcome Him. He renewed His energy by spending quiet, one-on-one time with His Father.

Jesus' sustenance came from knowing His assignment and from knowing the Father behind the assignment. He knew His Father's Word backward and forward and that Word fed His soul. It provided the replenishment He needed to forge ahead.

Jesus understood that while physical food would meet His need for the moment, real, sustaining fare was to be found only in His Father's presence. This was food that couldn't be taken from Him.

When we understand completely what it is we're called to do, we too will become energized and invigorated for the work. We'll find ourselves renewed to do the Father's work when we understand and seek out the true source of our sustenance.

Our purpose.

Jesus has done so much for us that it should surprise and concern us if we don't feel a compulsion to talk about Him every chance we get. *Is your life a witness to those around you because you're a faithful overcomer?*

Decide not to waste any more time on anything that lacks eternal significance. Resolve not to engage in low-level living that does nothing to fulfill your purpose: to do the will of the Father by sharing with others what He has done for you. Someone else's eternal destination may depend on you.

Our mission statement to *tell the world* is of primary and sole importance in our Christian lives. Our command is to go out and *make disciples*. God is concerned for every individual in this world, and He wants *all* to have the opportunity to hear and respond to His message of life.

A Christian's calling is his or her life's work, and our task is to witness for Christ on His behalf. In the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“‘I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no Savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed—I, and not some foreign god among you. ***You are my witnesses,***’ declares the LORD, ‘that I am God’” (Isaiah 43:11–12).

CHAPTER TEN

RESOLVE TO PURSUE THE WISDOM OF GOD ABOVE ALL ELSE

Wisdom in general, or the world's wisdom, calls to mind such descriptors as: shrewd, perceptive, levelheaded, reasonable, cautious, and good judgment. General wisdom doesn't incorporate moral codes of conduct, guidelines, or laws.

Such general wisdom isn't necessarily bad or evil just because it doesn't incorporate a moral component. In fact, such common-sense wisdom is typically good, even though it isn't tied in directly with God's moral laws.

This is the kind of wisdom that's universally available to the world—to those who don't know God personally and don't possess the Holy Spirit that comes by knowing Him. When Solomon wrote in the book of Ecclesiastes about wisdom, referencing everything “under the sun,” he had in mind that which is apart or separate from God's thinking.

God's wisdom, in contrast, is inseparable from His morality. It's always guided by morality, the commands of God, and the way of God. When Solomon wrote in Proverbs 1:7 that, “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the LORD,” he was referring specifically to godly wisdom.

As we see in the book of Ecclesiastes, penned also by Solomon, a person can benefit from the biblical principles of godly wisdom without

following God at all. Simply reading the Word and applying it will help people gain some wisdom. Non-Christians, by applying and living by godly standards, do reap the benefits of a blessed life (e.g., giving their tithe, helping the poor, and honoring their parents). God's laws are written down for the blessing and benefit of every individual, whether or not the person following them has accepted Christ as personal Savior.

Still, those who don't know the Lord personally can't be expected to operate within the confines of godly, spiritual wisdom. The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts when an individual gives her life over to Christ. Godly wisdom is one of those gifts.

What then is spiritual or godly wisdom?

Definition: Just as wisdom in a more general sense is *knowledge rightly applied*, so the spiritual gift of wisdom is the supernatural ability, received at the time of a person's conversion, to apply knowledge already possessed, regardless of how one has obtained that knowledge. It's knowledge rightly applied by the Spirit. It's God showing us the *What? Why? Where? When? and How?* of a problem. It's the supernatural solution to trouble.

Application: Godly wisdom is a quality needed by every person who works with other people. We're all different, with different needs, personality traits, and backgrounds. These differences can present difficulties in terms of working with and understanding one another. Godly wisdom allows us to see beyond our differences and beneath the surface. The Holy Spirit provides this insight to better understand people's hidden needs and equips us to meet those needs. A believing mother needs this wisdom as no two children are alike. It's needed by every husband and

wife, as built-in differences often keep us from seeing the needs of our spouse. It's something every pastor, teacher, and church leader needs, since not every church member responds in the same way.

Methods: Godly wisdom may come to us in a wide variety of ways: through God's Word, a vision, a dream, a revelation, our conscience, a sense we might refer to as intuition, the guidance of a wise person, a written or spoken source, a whispered voice in our heart, or an audible voice, to name only some. God speaks in many ways, and the Holy Spirit operates with diversity in His methods (1 Corinthians 12:6)

Purpose: Godly wisdom builds the church and invites revival.

What about the spiritual gift, Word of Wisdom?

The gift "Word of Wisdom" is a distinct and special gift of the Spirit (to be distinguished from the spiritual gifts all Christians receive from the Spirit, or from the general wisdom received at salvation). The Word of Wisdom is exactly that: specific wisdom (often just a word) that is needed at a particular time, and for a particular situation at the very moment when it's necessary for the believer to know what to do.

What the Word of Wisdom is not:

It isn't learned by the natural mind. The supernatural Word of Wisdom isn't learned by the natural mind. It can't be gleaned through education, training, or methodology; it isn't natural wisdom in any sense. An individual without the Spirit may use problem-solving methods that may prove to be either helpful or harmful. What works beautifully in one situation may not be effective in another. Many of us, however, have

problems that only God can solve. The obvious question then becomes, “Why not go to God in the first place?” Why would we let others, including speakers at secular conferences and seminars, provide us with “answers” when the real solutions are known only to the Spirit?

It isn’t spiritual insight. The gift of Word of Wisdom isn’t an ability to impart spiritual insight. One may be mature in God’s Word and have many years of experience in interpreting the Word of Truth, and yet not possess this supernatural spiritual gift. There’s a vast difference between spiritual fruit and spiritual gifts. A fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, etc.) is a goal toward which we apply ourselves with dedicated effort. Spiritual gifts (leadership, giving, mercy, teaching, exhortation, helps, hospitality, etc.), in contrast, are dispersed and manifested as the Holy Spirit wills.

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7).

It isn’t psychology. Godly wisdom, again including the Word of Wisdom, isn’t something we learn in a classroom while studying the natural tendencies of people. It isn’t connected to the science of the mind. It isn’t earthly wisdom at all.

It isn’t simple wisdom. Godly wisdom that is asked for, and the gift of Word of Wisdom, isn’t basic or simple wisdom, which every believer gleans from studying God’s Word or receives at the moment of salvation. Solomon had wisdom from God, but only once or twice did he receive a Word of Wisdom—a special revelation unique to a special problem and moment in time. One of the most famous biblical stories of the superior and dazzling wisdom of King Solomon which won the expression “The

Judgment of Solomon,” relates to an insolvable dispute between two women. According to 2 Kings 3:16-28 each of these two women (prostitutes) who lived in the same house came to King Solomon. Each had given birth to a baby, but one of the babies had died when the mother rolled over during the night and suffocated it. Now each of the women claimed that the living baby was hers. They brought the living child to Solomon and asked that he, in all his wisdom, discern which mother would keep the living child. Solomon thought for a moment and ordered that the baby be cut in two, and half the child awarded to each woman. One woman agreed that this was the fair thing to do, that way both women would share in the grief of a lost child equally. The second woman, however, begged the king to spare the baby’s life and told him to give the baby to the first woman so that it could live. Solomon gave the child to the second woman because she would do anything to save the life of the child, and he discerned that she was indeed the baby’s mother.

A young convert may receive the gift of the Word of Wisdom for a particular situation but still possess very little biblical wisdom because of a lack of knowledge or spiritual maturity.

It isn’t the sum total of God’s wisdom. The Word of Wisdom isn’t the same as the broader category of godly wisdom. God speaks to us, giving us a “word,” a designated portion of His wisdom applicable to the moment; He doesn’t give us the whole storehouse of His wisdom.

It isn’t just for pastors and church leaders. This gift isn’t just for preachers of the Word. It’s for all who, having received the Holy Spirit, face problems beyond their own understanding.

It isn't a hunch, a guess, or a new idea. This gift isn't just a conjecture, a novel approach, or an idea that pops into one's head. That kind of experience happens just as frequently to lost people who don't have the Holy Spirit. (www.joywell.org)

What will godly wisdom, including the gift Word of Wisdom, do for us in our daily life?

Any of us as a Christian can possess and use godly wisdom regardless of our educational level or IQ; the Spirit distributes this wisdom impartially.

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17).

“He who leans on, trusts in, and is confident of his own mind and heart is a [self-confident] fool, but he who walks in skillful and Godly Wisdom shall be delivered” (Proverbs 28:26).

Godly wisdom can help us in countless ways, among them:

By overcoming depression.

By healing the hurts from our past.

By assisting us in dealing with loss and grief.

By instilling within us true freedom and inner joy.

By improving our self-esteem and self-confidence.

By removing roadblocks and empowering us to move forward in our lives.

By connecting us to our Heavenly Father so we can enjoy intimacy with Him.

By reducing stress and allowing us to enter into God's rest.

By clearing away limiting and erroneous beliefs and replacing them with new and empowering beliefs the Spirit reveals to us.

By resolving emotional guilt and shame and exposing the demons that bring them: issues such as anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, promiscuity, fear, and depression.

By bringing us emotional and physical healing.

By allowing us to exchange unhealthy habits and behaviors for lives full of life and freedom.

By enabling us to conquer anxiety, fears, and phobias—for good.

By awakening our deepest passions and revealing the purpose for which we were created.

By bringing to fruition our Spirit-inspired dreams.

God delights in hearing His children ask for the gift of wisdom as young Solomon did. He gladly complies, for without godly wisdom, we're ill-prepared to defeat our enemy.

God wants His children to impact the world, and godly wisdom equips us to do just that.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

LET THE HOLY SPIRIT MENTOR AND TEACH YOU

God has gifted each person with a remarkable brain. Consequently, we have an astounding capacity to learn. Since we were created in the image of God, who possesses *all* knowledge and understanding, we have a remarkable aptitude for both. This capacity was programmed into us. Additionally God created people with three distinct dimensions of their being: emotional, physical (including our five senses), and spiritual. These three components work together to assist us in computing information. We not only can receive information, but internalize it as *our* knowledge. Only humans have been created with this spiritual capacity. When we add understanding to knowledge, we end up with *wisdom*.

Those with “knowledge” are able to access, collect, and remember information.

Believers who immerse themselves in the Word will *know* the Scriptures. The Word is in them. It is, however, quite possible to possess knowledge but lack understanding. Countless individuals know all about the Bible, including Satan and his demon hosts, as well as scholars who study the Bible as literature, yet have not internalized the Word. *Why is that?* The missing ingredient is: *understanding*. It takes more than facts per se to know how to apply data. Knowledge alone doesn't accomplish this.

Those with “understanding” are able to glean the implication from the information.

They see through the facts to the dynamics behind them. The definition of knowledge is *cognition*: the psychological result of perception, learning and reasoning. Those with this kind of understanding are equipped to become teachers. Understanding brings facts into focus. It clues us in to the result of information, guiding us in terms of what to do with it. We might say that if knowledge answers the *Who? What? When? Where? Why?* and *How?* of an issue, understanding addresses the *So what?*

“Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself. Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you” (Proverbs 26:4-6).

The above verse connects wisdom with understanding. In reality, however, those with wisdom are able to move a step beyond understanding; to know which principle to apply now. Understanding without wisdom can appear contradictory. *When others tell you to do something they perceive to be wise, yet you feel inclined to do something that you believe the Lord is telling you to do, how do you know which choice to make?*

Those with godly wisdom know what to do next, and if they *listen* they’ll do the right thing. In contrast, there are many who, despite vast knowledge and understanding, consistently do the wrong thing. Godly wisdom, we might say, is our goal, and knowledge and understanding are avenues toward accessing and receiving it. Godly wisdom teaches us how to *act* on information received and understood.

Beyond our natural ability to receive and understand general information, God has instructed us to ask for wisdom from Him. With wisdom we have greater insight into spiritual matters, which gives us enhanced under-standing. Despite unwise or foolish living, God wants us at

any time to ask Him for wisdom. It's not given because we deserve it, but because we **ask** for it.

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

Learning new things about God and His ways is exhilarating. Determine to change your priorities by learning more about Him, and He in turn will reveal more of Himself to you. In doing so, your mind will open up like a blossom exposed to the morning sun. The darkness keeps our mind closed, just as a flower closes up its petals during the night. Knowledge received from God's Word, when accepted and acted upon, invites more disclosure from God. This increases our wisdom quotient as increased revelation from the Lord cause us to blossom. We can produce *good fruit* when we're nourishing our mind and soul. Give a plant food and you stimulate it to grow. The same applies to us. Our mental and physical health flourishes when feeding on God's Word.

God gives us the Holy Spirit to prune and perfect us.

The pruning process invigorates us just as proper nourishment does. The Holy Spirit prunes us through the learning process. We start to shed some of the things that *don't* belong in our Christian life, in order for the plant, that is our self, to grow healthier and produce more fruit. A sucker shoot is an offshoot or secondary shoot that grows from the base of a plant and steals energy from the main plant.

Obsessions, compulsions, and addictions are to us what a sucker shoot is to a plant. Until the “sucker” is cut off, the plant will remain anemic and

stunted in its growth. As long as the sucker shoot hangs on and is *not* pruned away, the plant can't produce as it was created to do.

“Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls”
(Proverbs 25:28).

Such a person is defenseless against destructive forces that pressure her to submit. To do right by acting in agreement with truth, requires discipline and self-control, for virtually everything in life works against our fervent submission to God. We must continually ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to us what we're to be doing and thinking, as well as not doing or thinking, that will keep us yielded and sensitive toward Him. This continuous quest will keep our *sucker shoot* under control, allowing us to thrive as we were intended.

Our lives follow this same growth law. We can't be ignorant of or apathetic toward the things God holds dear, live and think as the world does, and still expect a flourishing life. The world functions as a sucker shoot for us. It must be cut off, and quickly, for it simply doesn't belong to a person who wishes to have an intimate relationship with the Savior. It doesn't belong to the person who desires to have a different kind of life—a life filled with expectation, understanding, and wisdom. Often we seek the things of the world because we haven't yet learned how to go about seeking the One who is infinitely more rewarding, more fascinating, and more satisfying. When we wholeheartedly seek after the Lord, the Holy Spirit will reveal to us the things that are our “sucker shoot” and in need of pruning.

Once you receive the Holy Spirit, learn how to keep Him near you.

If we've been converted by receiving salvation, we can't thereafter live in a vacuum. When we're swept clean by God's forgiveness, something has to be done to keep our vessel clean, holy, and separated from the world. Our vessel must be filled with the things of God and the Holy Spirit, for an empty vessel is a target to the enemy. Putting on the full armor of God is how we protect ourselves.

Luke 21:36, "Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

Ephesians 6:10-17, "Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on ***the full armor of God*** so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to ***stand your ground***, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with ***the belt of truth*** buckled round your waist, with ***the breast-plate of righteousness*** in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from ***the gospel of peace***. In addition to all this, take up ***the shield of faith***, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take ***the helmet of salvation*** and the ***sword of the Spirit***, which is the word of God."

No person can serve two opposing masters. We simply can't give our allegiance to the world and to God at the same time. God requires that we choose.

Matthew 6:24, "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."

In Revelation 3:15–16 the risen Christ addresses the church in Laodicea with these scalding words: "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of My mouth."

Decide to let the Holy Spirit teach you how to be a life-long learner of the things of God.

Many people become bored with life and look for diversions because they haven't developed an appetite for drinking in the things of God. Our learning need not stop just because we've finished our formal course of instruction. Actually, fun learning can take place since we get to decide which areas of knowledge we want to pursue. Those who choose to learn more of God and the good things He longs to bring to their lives are using their God-given minds for their own advancement and well-being.

Let the Holy Spirit teach you how to use your extra time.

We are continuously taking in and processing information. Some elect to use their time on the Internet and elsewhere, to ***look***, instead of ***learn***. Some waste their God-given time on the phone or on electronic gadgetry, rather than picking up a book and taking in something fresh and inspiring. And some are news junkies. This isn't, of course, wrong in itself; depending on what kind of news (or trivia) we crave. *Do we prefer to rehash old news, read material that has little or no value, or immerse ourselves in gossip—which is “news,” substantiated or otherwise, about someone else?*

Of course the best use of our time is engaging our mind. When we choose to learn more about the God of all wisdom, our relationship with Him and others is enhanced. We can never exhaust this opportunity; far from limiting His revelation to the written Word only, God continues to reveal Himself to us in new ways. We'll never become bored with this adventure. Boredom will only set in if we assume we already know all there is to know about God and the Bible. *Ask yourself would you rather know about someone, or know that someone personally?* When you decide that you've exhausted all the available store of knowledge, be assured that Satan is waiting on the sidelines with an alternative for you.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, “But seek first his Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

What precisely are “all these things?” They’re the good gifts from God that you need to endure and prosper in life. God is well aware of your basic needs, and the Holy Spirit goes so far as to reveal *to you* the things you need from the Father—just in case you’ve missed something.

The Holy Spirit will reveal to you that God is your provider.

When we’re unaware of the manner in which God provides for us, we spend our time intent on providing for ourselves, with the result that there’s little quality time, let alone energy, left over to spend with Him.

God as our Provider works in quite the opposite way. He directs us to focus our time and energy on *His Kingdom*—meaning that we’re to not only learn about Him and how His kingdom operates, but that we come to take our rightful place in that kingdom. Make it a point to spend time focused on Him, not just on *your* work or on the logistics of making a living. Be sure to *study Him* in order to know Him more intimately, not just *about* Him.

He has promised that if we’ll put our trust in Him, He’ll take care of us. That includes our daily provision. This doesn’t imply that we aren’t to work, or that we spend all day, every day getting to know Him. What it does mean is that we refrain from putting ***all*** of our faith in our employer’s ability, or our own, to meet our daily needs.

God is your promoter too.

We don't need to look only to our employer for promotions, either. Our boss may indeed give us a promotion, but we can rest assured that God is working behind the scenes on our behalf. God sees to it that we receive the promotions He has for us, even over those more qualified; that's part of His provision. One of His many names is *Jehovah Jireh*, which means "the Lord *will* provide." Not "the Lord *might* provide," provided you're good enough. The truth is much simpler and more basic: Provision will come from God, when we trust in Him to be our Provider. Jesus asks a rhetorical question in Matthew 6:26.

"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"

Don't let Satan steal the Word from you.

Matthew 13:22 gives us the picture of a "sower"—a farmer. The example is of seed being sown into a field that, despite having been plowed, is already home to a fresh crop of weeds. This portrait represents a person hearing God's Word, but then allowing that Word to be stifled by weeds, representing the cares of this world.

When we permit this to occur by failing to understand that Satan comes immediately to steal the Word in us based on our lack of understanding, the crop of weeds will grow tall and full. In short order our garden will be overrun with weeds to the detriment of fruit. Jesus says that the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches *choke*—*smother* in the Greek.

When smothering cuts off oxygen to the brain all functions and thinking are impaired, with death soon following. Oxygen is essential for brain and

other bodily functioning, just as the Word of God, the *bread* of life is essential for our internal, spiritual sustenance.

Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty” (John 6:35).

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

We’re living, my friend, in the *end of the age*, and in these tumultuous times we fall prey to the accompanying pressures. Many people will do nearly anything to escape these ever-present stressors. It’s Satan’s goal, particularly during this end-time period which he knows to be his last stand, to so deprive us of spiritual oxygen that we’re snatched away from God. It’s crucial that we *not* surrender, that we refuse to be spiritually flat-lined by allowing the cares of this world to overtake us.

“And Jesus answering, said to them: Take heed that no man seduce you” (Matthew 24:4).

Let the Holy Spirit be your preeminent teacher.

God has given us the Holy Spirit so we can see what’s happening and take corrective action. Without the Holy Spirit’s presence working in and through us, we’re susceptible to the temptation to live as the world does, reaping not spiritual fruit, but the crop of weeds it produces: stress, anxiety, heavy workloads, abandoned families, and endless routine, all in an attempt to meet our own daily needs.

“For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul?” (Mark 8:36).

God has given us the Holy Spirit to counsel, comfort, and guide us. This means that during our struggles He’ll show us how to live with less stress,

not as the world lives, but as effective witnesses **to** the world. God has given us His Spirit to teach us *how to live*, not just survive. We must view the Holy Spirit as our paramount and unsurpassed mentor and teacher.

What the Holy Spirit does for us.

Some facts about the Holy Spirit to jumpstart you on your new life and educational undertaking:

The Holy Spirit will positively affect your communication with others (Acts 1:8).

He will give evidence of His presence in your life by changing your patterns of conversation. For example, if you've been shy or weak, He can make you strong and bold (Acts 4:8, 10, 12–13).

He will teach you what you need to know to function effectively as God's representative in the world (John 14:26).

He will counsel you about the sin in your life (Isaiah 1:18).

He will communicate with you about your future. He'll instill within you comfort and strength to face the days to come (John 16:13).

He will forewarn you about the ulterior motives of others around you (Acts 11:12).

He will help you differentiate things of importance from things of non-importance (Acts 15:28).

He will tell you about the place of provision and supply (1 Kings 17: 3–4).

He will tell you that if you want to hear from Him, you'll need to move away from the distraction and interference of other voices. Solitude is necessary for intimacy, impartation, and transformation (1 Peter 5:8).

He will prepare your heart for coming into God's presence (Isaiah 2:3).

His words to you will impart life and energy (John 6:63).

He will talk to (intercede with) the Father on your behalf (Romans 8:26–27).

He will both reveal and confirm to you that you belong to God (Romans 8:16).

How the Holy Spirit anoints us for service (Psalm 89).

He'll establish you.

He'll strengthen you.

He'll defeat your enemies for you.

He'll give you authority.

He'll give you the power to influence the world.

He won't allow Satan to touch you.

This anointing is given *without measure* based on God's command that you'll never lack it. The Holy Spirit both anoints and equips you for ministry service.

There are three levels of anointing.

For salvation.

For ministry.

For authority.

God unleashes the Holy Spirit to work fully in our lives.

In the words of Paul, "The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:10).

Possessing this kind of power requires that we permit the Holy Spirit to fully examine our heart. When our motives are pure, He can reveal to us what we need to know, thereby benefiting completely from His presence. The apostle Peter made clear that God gives the Holy Spirit to "those who obey Him" (Acts 5:32).

God's approval of our obedience comes in the form of blessings. When you make a decision to leave the world behind in favor of following the Lord, you're being obedient. Be careful not to let the world suck you back into worry, fear, or disobedience. Hold dear your hard-won status and enjoy the benefits of being mentored by the Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER TWELVE

AVOID THE COVER-UP

Most of us would just as soon blame others for all kinds of behaviors that in reality we ourselves both *permit* and *choose*. Sometimes this trait is developed in early childhood; in that case especially, it can be difficult in adulthood to eliminate.

Like it or not, failure to take responsibility for our own actions keeps us functioning at an elementary level. We find ourselves stuck in an emotional and spiritual state of immaturity. Maturity, by its very nature, demands that we leave behind childish and irresponsible behavior.

An adolescent character shouts to others that we haven't grown up yet. It doesn't take a long look around to see people well along in years who've never grown up. They're merely maintaining the thinking, behavior, and nature they developed while still in school. Getting older isn't the same as gaining maturity.

Take responsibility for your own maturation.

Your quality of life is largely the result of your own choices. Name your weakness, as well as what you've permitted in your life and you've identified an area of difficulty, both for you and for those who live with you. No one else is responsible for "growing you up" once you leave your parents home. It's your responsibility to see that this takes place.

If you didn't come from a wholesome home environment with positive role models, as many have not, that's most unfortunate. Satan has so perverted the family structure that few in fact grow up with everything they need. The truth is, though, that once you leave your parents' home or enter into your adult years—whichever comes first—it's your responsibility to become mature.

Any time you recognize juvenile behavior in yourself, or someone points out something adolescent in you, be willing to accept it. Remember that we're all flawed. We all need work—and each of us is a work in progress. None of us has arrived. The only way most of us can grow up is through the power of the Holy Spirit working in our life. Ask Him to help you grow into maturity so you can be mentally, socially, and emotionally stable. Ask Him to heal you from your inadequate past, and let Him be the perfect parent to you.

If you respond well to correction and criticism without becoming defensive, you can both learn a great deal about yourself and do something about what you've learned. Give the situation to the Lord and ask Him to mature you in the areas where you're lacking. Ask Him to reveal to you any other areas about which you need to be conscious so that you, together with God, can get to work on them. We can't permanently change ourselves, but we can ask the One who can effect change in us, to start the process.

Don't allow yourself to become overwhelmed if you find that you have many areas that need work. The Holy Spirit is gracious and kind, and above all else, He's patient. He'll gently move you in the direction of leaving behind old behavioral patterns, so that you can embrace your new identity,

which will be more reflective of the image of Christ. This won't happen overnight, but with a consistent willingness to be renewed, you'll get there in God's time. Don't delay the transition by wasting time and energy in denial or by being unwilling to mature as an individual.

There's no lack of helpful information on Christian Internet sites, in Christian magazines, books, and on tapes. You can find worthwhile Christian help from all of these sources and others. If money is an issue, keep in mind that libraries carry Christian books as well as secular. In addition, the Internet can answer many questions about the Bible and Christian principles. Numerous free Bible studies and theology sites can provide you with all the knowledge you need, without the cost or time constraints of going back to school.

What wouldn't previous generations have given for the wealth of data on all topics available on the Worldwide Web? Ask God for wisdom and spiritual discernment before engaging with any new web site, book, or magazine, however, and always check what is being taught against the Word of God to ensure accuracy. The downfall of a barrage of unfiltered information, especially for new Christians, is that they don't always recognize truth when they see it. It takes time to be discerning.

We live in an information age, and this information can help us learn the necessary life skills we may have missed in our developmental years. That was then, but this is now. The question to ask ourselves is: *What am I doing today that will help me gain maturity, knowledge, and wisdom?* A willingness to be honest will go a long way in determining our victories.

We all lack something from our childhood, because we were all raised by others who lacked something from their own childhood. Once Adam and Eve left Eden and entered the big, open world in its fallen, sinful state, earthly perfection was no more. You and I have no ability in and of ourselves, to produce perfectly in any area of our life. That's why God sent His Son to die and rise in our stead, so that we could share in *His* perfection. As Christians we *are* perfect in God's eyes. We're made perfect because Jesus is perfect, and He's in us.

"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48, NKJV).

Godly wisdom recognizes that we can't attain perfection without Christ. It teaches us all we need to know but couldn't possibly have known previously. Jesus will also restore the lost years to us. He'll take what the enemy meant for harm, and turn it around for our good.

"'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11).'"

God, our Restorer.

There are no wasted experiences with God no matter how difficult the suffering we may have to undergo. God will provide us with the opportunity to use what we've learned to instill hope in someone else.

When dreadful things occur in our lives, the enemy wants us to believe that we've been singled out, that we're the only one who has had to endure such tragedy. But by letting others know what you've gone ***through***, and how God restored to you what was once lost, gives them hope of receiving

the same blessing. Talk about what you're going *to*—not just what you're going *through*.

As God's Word assures us in Psalm 30:5, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." We can count on this.

"Be glad, O people of Zion, rejoice in the LORD your God, for He has given you the autumn rains in righteousness. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before. The threshing floors will be filled with grain, the vats will overflow with new wine and oil. I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten—the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm, my great army that I sent among you. You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed" (Joel 2:23–26).

Let Jesus heal your battle scars.

Perhaps your past has been a succession of difficulties, heartbreak, victimization, and constant battles. Maybe you even carry around the battle scars to confirm how tough it's been. Jesus is in the "turning around" business. When we give Him our future, He'll turn our lives around and set in motion a series of victories. It's a matter of choosing to leave the past behind, to embrace your new future *with Him*. This is how we gain freedom, victory, and maturity.

Don't rehash your memories; they'll keep you from your future. Instead, seek relief and healing from the Master of healing, the Lord Jesus Christ. Ask Him to keep your memories in your past, where they belong; you don't want them to inhabit and determine your future. Ask Him to heal you, so that you can walk away from the oppressive memories *forever*. Life is not about what you've experienced in the past, but about what you do about your future. When you choose to give Jesus your future, He'll bless you for trusting Him with it.

Are you character driven or emotion driven?

Mature people are character driven, while those who stay behind in immaturity tend to be emotion driven. When we're willing to acknowledge to God that we've been wrong in the way we've managed some aspect of our life, we give Him the consent He needs to turn it around for us. He both longs to and can make something good come from what was bad.

Character-driven people do what's right, not just what feels good at the moment. Successful people are character-driven individuals. They're leaders. They value commitment and honor, and they ask, "*What are my responsibilities?*" That's the face of maturity.

If you have children or others for whom you're accountable, and you take seriously your responsibility to care for them, you, too, are showing the world the face of maturity. When you turn from self and look to God to instill His character within you, you're showing the face of maturity. Choose not to blame others for *your lack* of maturity. Childishness is unattractive in an adult. Childishness is especially unattractive in a believer as it isn't a godly character trait.

While we're in the midst of the problem, what do we do?

Yes, there is a right answer, and it's: ***endure***.

"For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise," asserts the author of Hebrews 10:36.

Endurance is the ability to keep on pressing on, without giving in to weariness. It is: stamina, forbearance, courage, fortitude, stability, and the determination to stand. The Christian maturation process requires a healthy

dose of endurance. Without the endurance to persevere, which flies in the face of the world's persistent enticement to do only what feels good, we'll neither mature nor reap the just reward God has for those who do.

Biblical endurance goes beyond being the last person standing. Derived from the Greek *hupomone* which suggests cheerful endurance or hopeful waiting, biblical endurance speaks to the attitude with which we wait as much as it does to the act of waiting itself. It's more than just making it across the finish line; it's the outlook we maintain while we run the race.

Cheerful endurance is a powerful attitude that says "God not only *can* change my circumstances; He wants to and will!" It's a mindset overflowing with compelling confidence, trust, expectation, optimism, and assurance *in Christ*—not in ourselves. Hopeful waiting and cheerful endurance won't allow us to give up our dreams or let go of our hope; instead, these perspectives call us to a deeper level of faith and maturity.

Make the first "right" choice.

Essential to attaining the goal of right living is making the first right choice, Jesus Christ. Not by attempting to make right choices under our own power, but by choosing the One who can make all things right in the first place.

You've heard it again and again, today is the beginning of the rest of your life. You're the only one who can take responsibility for your new future by choosing to go with God. If you summon the courage to call on Him, He'll give you the strength you need. He'll make the great exchange—your weakness for His strength.

Keep in mind that we've all fallen short of the glory of God. Jesus didn't *confront* the woman at the well who had been married no fewer than five times. He merely recounted back to her the basic facts of her past and agreed with her that the current man in her life wasn't her husband. After this exchange, He instructed her to go and sin no more. In any of our lives, sin is a given. The key is to *go and sin no more*. Something we're empowered to do, only after we've had an encounter with Jesus.

Only the foolish will try to convince themselves that they're without sin. Repentance is the one tool that will prevent us from becoming hardened to sin, to the point that we can no longer turn ourselves around. Jesus knew the hopelessness of the sin spiral. That's why He came to extricate us from sin and its dire consequences. He also knows, experientially, how relentlessly Satan tempts us, and how he attempts to lure us away with empty promises.

When you justify your conduct, you cancel out your ability to change it.

The difference between losers and winners is that winners get back up again after they've fallen. How does a person get back up after failure? They begin by admitting their blunder.

Our willingness to reach toward God, from there on the ground, signifies our humility and desire to change. It reveals our desire to get up, and never give up, so that we can become a winner—God's winner! God grants us the ability to carry on. This enablement is His gift to those with humility, the secret weapon He gives to the humble. Alternatively, God withholds the ability to change from those who are unwilling to admit that change is needed.

The wisdom principle here is straightforward: Once you've had an encounter with Jesus, you need to ***confess*** and ***turn away from your sin***, so that others may see by your thinking, words, and lifestyle that He has transformed you into His likeness. Only through the confession of our sin, do we take up the responsibility that is ours alone. He won't make your transformation happen, after all, unless you permit it.

Determine to change into who God created you to be.

It's only when we become truly uncomfortable with who and what we've been, that we can embrace the change needed to become who and what God means for us to be. If we encounter Him but don't change, it's a sure sign that we're still engaged with the enemy. God's truth and wisdom will lead us to see the folly of our ways; the first requirement to turning from them.

The prerequisite of honesty.

God uses those who seek to conform to His will for them. The truth of the Bible is radical. We're often tempted to twist it to fit our preconceived opinions or to tone down its message to make it more comfortable. We don't like to be confronted, exposed, or shown to be lacking in *any* area. The Bible is convicting and many of us have no desire to be convicted. What we fail to recognize is that this conviction is for our own ultimate good, never for our harm, or even for the negative sounding "for our own good" as many believe.

Deception is always involved when we believe that something intended for our well-being, is actually going to hurt us. We must be honest before the Word. This means being open to new insights and to give up

longstanding beliefs that may be incorrect. To do otherwise makes the Bible irrelevant.

Remember as you search for knowledge that the “experts” don’t necessarily know any more than you do. Human wisdom is never superior to godly wisdom. Even a very young person in Christ can ask for and receive godly wisdom. When we’re operating with this kind of wisdom we’ll have more discernment than non-Christians. Reading good information to learn life and social skills is helpful, but it’ll never replace getting into God’s Word where we’ll receive divine mentoring.

Seek out strong Christians who can teach you excellence. But in the end, bear in mind that they, too, are human. Don’t lean too strongly on people, who may at any time disappoint you. Before we’ve matured in our faith, it’s easy for us to hold mere humans in high esteem. We may respect them, but we may never give them more adoration than we give to our Lord. The only one who can’t and won’t fail us is Jesus.

Learn from your mistakes and move forward.

By taking an honest look at ourselves and learning from our past mistakes, we *can* move forward and succeed. Don’t avoid or fear the truth, for it’s your teaching tool. We can begin to confront our demons and look at ourselves afresh when we stop blaming others for our own faults, immaturity, and poor decisions. With help and insight from the Holy Spirit, we can mature and take responsibility for our own Christian growth.

Leave the denial behind and choose to move into maturity. We’re never more beautiful than when we’re mature and reflect our Creator—when we move from victim to victor.

“If you falter in times of trouble, how small is your strength!” (Proverbs 24:10).

“A wise man has great power, and a man of knowledge increases strength” (Proverbs 24:5).

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ABANDON TOXIC AND ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

King Solomon had a lot to say about relationships. His teaching emphasizes the value of applying wisdom principles to *all* of our associations. The God who stated that it isn't good for man to be alone created us for interaction. Given the importance He places on the relational side of people, we can reason that from His perspective, life is *all* about relations. Additionally, our relationships and friendships reveal something about us. They reveal to others the quality and character we look for in our friends.

If you have friends who build you up and encourage you, you're letting others know that encouragement is of value to you. The implication others can draw, is that you'll treat people in the same way. *Are you aware that people tend to surround themselves with others who convey their own qualities and values?* Are you a merciful person? Then you'll draw other merciful people to yourself. Are you a teacher? Then you'll attract others who like to teach or who value learning.

Seek out mutually edifying friendships.

In Steven R. Covey's book, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," Covey refers to the seventh habit he advocates as "sharpening the saw." This author emphasizes the importance of principled values to achieve change in our lives. The seven habits he promotes aren't simply a veneer

we can apply to ensure outward success. These habits together constitute a systematic model that empowers us to make decisions and act in such a way that we're always moving toward a known destination, as opposed to reacting to whatever is happening to us at a given moment.

Simply put, we need to keep ourselves sharp so we don't become dull. To *respond* rather than *react*. And yes, this is *our* responsibility.

When we allow ourselves to get dull, we benefit no one. Not even ourselves. Good friends keep each other challenged and sharp. We spur each other on to become better people. Christians in particular are to hold each other accountable; making sure that the enemy doesn't gain a foothold into either of their lives.

Sharpened people know they can't go it alone. Highly driven people who ignore this important principle are prime candidates for burnout and Satan's temptations due to their failed attempts to fly solo. Moderation with a focus on excellence, keeps us functioning at our full potential. Burnout is an abrupt way to stop functioning at all. Understand that the devil ***drives***, but that God ***leads***. If we feel ourselves driven beyond balance, we're wise to check who's in the driver's seat.

Contentious relationships bring us nothing but trouble.

If our associations are contentious and we position ourselves around troublemakers, we'll continually experience trouble when we're around them. They're not invested in our welfare and offer us no encouragement during our down times. Troublemakers want companions who will help *stir things up*. If we're around angry people, their anger will rub off on us, till we wonder why we're so easily enraged. The Bible makes it clear that we

should seek godly, righteous, and wise friends. Solomon makes a rather startling statement:

“By pride comes only contention” (Proverbs 13:10).

Pride produces not one single good fruit. Lucifer’s arrogant, vain, and self-important pride, brought him into contention with God. One-third of the angels rebelled with Lucifer against God and were cast down to earth. They were banned from the heavens. These demons, as well as billions of deceived humans, willfully submit to Satan every day. The habit of thinking more highly of themselves than they ought, has perverted the judgment of such people in all areas of life.

“A righteous man is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray” (Proverbs 12:26).

If we aren’t cautious in choosing our friends, we’ll rapidly be led astray. We’d like to believe otherwise, but it’s undeniable that our friends have a powerful influence on us.

What kinds of friendships should I avoid?

Proverbs admonishes us to avoid *evil associations of all kinds*.

Avoid the prideful.

Blinded by arrogance, Satan exalted himself. This set into motion a reaction to God that continues on the part of the devil and his demon hosts to this day. Since this same prideful spirit now works in humans, “the sons [and daughters] of disobedience,” (Proverbs 30:11-13 and Deuteronomy 28:24-46) its little wonder that the world sees continual warfare. Satan’s arrogant nature, as manifested in unregenerate individuals, is evident to all.

Since the carnal mind adheres to the mantra of survival of the fittest, the stakes are life and death for individuals and nations. Both the animal and the human realms are characterized by strife as God hasn't yet reconciled the earth to Himself. There will, as the prophet foretells in Isaiah 11:6, come a day when the wolf and the lamb will coexist in peace. But until "that day" we must learn how to deal with contentious people and nations.

"Haughty eyes and a proud heart—the unplowed field of the wicked—produce sin."
(Proverbs 21:4).

This verse confirms that pride, which can seem so harmless, gives birth to more substantial sins. Just as plowing prepares the earth to produce, so pride prepares the heart to generate other sins. Pride is at the heart of idolatry.

In Isaiah 2:6–11, 17–18, God addresses His prophet in a vision: "You have abandoned your people, the house of Jacob. They are full of superstitions from the East; they practice divination like the Philistines and clasp hands with pagans. Their land is full of silver and gold; there is no end to their treasures. Their land is full of horses; there is no end to their chariots. Their land is full of idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their fingers have made. So, man will be brought low and mankind humbled—do not forgive them. The eyes of the arrogant man will be humbled and the pride of men brought low; the LORD alone will be exalted in *that day* and the idols will totally disappear."

Avoid violent people and....(Proverbs 1:15)

Those with ***perverted speech*** (Proverbs 2:12), ***fools*** (Proverbs 14:7), the ***proud*** (Proverbs 16:9), ***gossips*** (Proverbs 29:19), ***drunkards*** (Proverbs 23:20), ***hot-tempered*** people (Proverbs 22:24), and ***gluttons*** (Proverbs 28:7).

Proverbs 1:10, gives the first bit of practical advice from father to son: “My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them.”

Perceptive parents are acutely aware of the powerful influence on a young person of his or her peers. I once heard about a man being interviewed on his 100th birthday. Asked about the advantages of living so long, he quipped that he no longer has to worry about peer pressure. Unfortunately, until we reach that milestone, the rest of us do.

Be aware that there are four specific types of people Satan uses to distract, demoralize, and discourage us.

1. ***Those who refuse to acknowledge our reason for being.*** Such people completely fail to comprehend the things of God or to understand how He works in His people. They won't pray for us and can't offer us the encouragement to persevere in our God-given dreams. Their only influence on us, in fact, is pressure to give up on our dreams and on the things of God. If we follow their advice, our hearts will gradually grow cold toward God. Rather, we need to seek people who understand and respect spiritual principles and concepts. Seek individuals who will pray for and encourage you to stay in the race and focus on the finish line. Seek someone who understands and responds to the same language you do. In this way you can mutually encourage each other's spiritual growth. When we fellowship with others who seek after God's heart, as we do, there's shared insight and excitement about the things God reveals to those who pursue Him.

2. ***Those who disrespect our assignment or what the Lord has spoken into our life.*** Has God placed a calling on your life? If others don't understand this calling, they'll counsel you to pull away from it, telling you that it's

foolishness to follow the Lord and do what He asks of you. They know nothing of God planting godly dreams in the hearts of His people. Rather than living with trust in the One True God, they opt for mediocrity and want to pull us back into that same status. Instead, we're to choose wise friends who will respect what we, with God's help, are doing with our lives. They understand that God is the dream-giver. Their desire is to help us reach those dreams. They feed our faith, not trample it to the ground.

3. ***Those that won't protect our assignment.*** When we respect someone, we seek to protect them. David defended the position and calling of Saul. He refused to dishonor Saul's reputation or undermine his influence, even though some of Saul's actions were foolish, to put it mildly. Saul went so far as to try to kill David, but David refused to retaliate or to deviate from safeguarding Saul's calling in life. Because of this, David's discretion and loyalty became legendary. An entire nation saw a man of integrity, honor, dignity, and grace. This protection on the part of David didn't mean that David condoned Saul's behavior; he was merely giving honor to what God honored, and that included the person and position of God's anointed king. God's work on earth is always done in conjunction with flawed individuals; there isn't anyone else. Since we all have failings we need to look beyond the weaknesses and honor them the way God does. It isn't our place to dishonor those God has chosen to honor.

We must move away from people who, unlike David, refuse to protect our name and calling. We're to select friends who will honor our calling in spite of our weaknesses. Choose friends who understand discretion. Even when we're making flagrant mistakes, or are engaged in sin, such friends understand that our life isn't over yet and that God isn't finished with us either. By offering us protection until we can see the error of our ways,

such a person proves trustworthy—the very best kind of friend. We can trust Jesus to be this caliber of friend, one who will be there for us through the whole process of our development and maturation.

4. *Those who don't expect us to accomplish our assignment.* Such people have little or no faith in us or in our ability. Remember David's brothers? His own family, most likely unaware of his slaying of the lion and the bear, viewed him as a no-account kid putting in his time as shepherd boy. Because they expected him to fail, they couldn't visualize him as a winner or as anything other than their kid brother.

Joseph's brothers responded to him in much the same way. In this quite different story, they had contempt for him because he was their father's favorite.

And Jesus received the same kind of response in his hometown. Surely *he* couldn't be Israel's long-awaited Messiah. Why, these people had known this unassuming kid since he was a lad apprenticed to become a carpenter.

People may not be able to make the perceptual jump from your past to your potential either, especially if they knew you before you became a Christian. If they viewed you earlier in your life as a failure, they may lack the capacity to relate to you now as a victor in Christ. Instead of trying to force them to see the truth, expend your energy on more worthwhile endeavors. Don't attempt to persuade foolish and entrenched people about the wise things of God. Instead, bear in mind that time will validate your calling.

Some verses to keep in mind as you select your friends or rethink friendships that may no longer serve your best interests as a believer:

“The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception” (Proverbs 14:8).

“For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight” (1 Corinthians 3:19).

“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

“The good man is covered with blessings from head to foot, but an evil man inwardly curses his luck” (Proverbs 10:6).

“Curses chase sinners, while blessing chase the righteous” (Proverbs 13:21).

“Be with wise men and become wise. Be with evil men and become evil” (Proverbs 13:20).

“Keep away from angry, short-tempered men, lest you learn to be like them and endanger your soul” (Proverbs 22:24-25).

Determine not to be drawn away.

Focus your energy on solving the problems God puts before you. Stay God-centered and determine to spend your time and energy in pleasing Him, not other people. God will do the promoting, so you don’t need to strive for position. The joy and vibrancy you exude in response to your calling and vision will be all the testimony you need. Refrain from retaliating or seeking revenge. Keep your spirit pure. Remember that people are merely channels; God alone is your source.

In terms of your work life, your boss is only the supply person. You receive your paycheck from him, but God is the One who supplies the employment and provides for all your needs. If you need a new job, God

will supply that too, or give you the contacts and creativity you need to locate another, in many cases, a better one. Or, He'll open the necessary doors for you to be self-employed, if that's the better option. Provision is an important aspect of God's care for us. Don't make the mistake of looking to other people for what God alone can supply. Remember too, that we can't take comfort in God's promises to us in this regard, if we don't know what they are.

In the words of Deuteronomy 8:18, "But remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms His covenant, which He swore to your forefathers, as it is today."

All people who come into your life will fall into one of the following four categories:

1. Those who ***add*** to your life. They want what is best for you.
2. Those who ***subtract*** from your life by depleting you, or taking from you without giving back. They continuously bring up your weaknesses and shortcomings to make you feel diminished.
3. Those who ***divide*** you by refusing to support you. They bring nothing to your life but conflict and strife.
4. Those who ***multiply*** and bless you by bringing you encouragement. They intercede on your behalf through prayer. They manage to uplift you every time you're with them. Such people increase you by affirming to you your strengths and speak good things about, to, and even *into* you. They speak words of faith that build you up.

Take an inventory of the people around you. *Into which category do they fall?* Maybe it's time to purge the relationships that are serving to deplete, rather than enrich you. Ask God to bring into your life new and wise friends who can build you up.

How does the Bible describe true friendship?

The Lord Jesus himself gave us the definition of a true friend:

“Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:13–15).

Jesus is the pure example of a true friend, for it was He, and He alone, who laid down His life for us—His friends. What’s more, anyone may become His friend simply by asking Him *in faith* to come into their heart. We must ask and want Him to be our personal Lord and Savior—this is how you make Jesus your friend—*by receiving His free gift of salvation to you!*

Another biblical example of true friendship is that between David and Saul’s son Jonathan, who, in spite of his father’s pursuit of and attempts to kill David (who, let’s not forget, was Jonathan’s rival for the throne), stood by his friend unconditionally. (1 Samuel, Chapters 18–20).

Some wise words from Proverbs on the topic of friendship:

“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity” (Proverbs 17:17).

“A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24).

“Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses” (Proverbs 27:6).

“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17).

The prophet Amos also speaks some rational words on the subject of friendship:

“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3).

What is a true friend?

True friends are like-minded individuals who choose to be in relationship. We might define a friendship as a relationship that is entered into voluntarily by two or more individuals, bearing in mind that the relationship is only as good, or as close, as those individuals choose to make it.

Someone has said that if you can count your true friends on the fingers of one hand, you're blessed. A friend is someone with whom you can be yourself and never fear that she'll judge or reject you. A friend is someone in whom you can confide with complete trust. A friend is someone you respect, and who respects you, not based on worthiness, but on like-minded values and concerns.

Excellent commentaries on the ultimate in friendship come from the apostle Paul and the beloved disciple John:

“For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:7–8).

“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends” (John 15:13).

Now that's true friendship! It's important for us to remember that if we want quality friendship for ourselves, we need to reciprocate in kind. Like attracts like, so, if you know it's time to change friends, look at yourself first and ask honestly, "*What kind of friend am I?*"

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

CREATE A CLIMATE OF FAITH IN YOUR LIFE

The atmosphere you create around yourself matters. Truth is, if you don't control your atmosphere, it'll control you. Your setting affects your work and your thinking. Your surroundings are vitally important because they affect your overall mood and establish the climate in which you'll make decisions. Remember that it's a succession of daily decisions that determines your ultimate success, and success in current decisions predetermines future success.

Since this is true in the physical world, how much more so in the spiritual? The setting in which we place ourselves today will determine the degree of development of our spiritual life tomorrow. Developing spiritual maturity is even more important than developing physical growth, for spiritual maturity affects our overall outlook on life. It reveals what's in our heart. Taking this a step further—that which we've invited into our mind and heart determines our perspective on God, ourselves, and others. It influences what we do and how we feel about what we have. It also determines the kind of future we'll see. All of our outcomes spring forth from the well that's within our heart and mind.

I personally am greatly affected by the atmosphere around me. I have a gift for interior design and am an accomplished seamstress. This allows me to decorate my homes by creating my own draperies, pillows, bed skirts, etc., to achieve a designer look on a budget. With a husband who's been in

the military for more than 30 years, and myself having grown up in a military family, I have over the years called many different places home.

I've taken great care to make every house we've lived in, rented or otherwise, feel like a beautifully designed *home*, worthy of a magazine cover. While I recognize that this aspect of life may not be of interest to you, my point is that I haven't been willing to wait 30 plus years for our military lifestyle to end before making our environment feel like home.

Because I consistently gave attention to the *atmosphere* I was creating, my husband and our children felt as though every place we lived has been home. The kids enjoyed bringing their friends home because they were proud of it and felt comfortable in the atmosphere we had created.

I also thrive in an orderly and quiet home. I dislike disorder and chaos. Clutter distracts and unsettles me, and I don't feel as though I can learn in that kind of environment. Paying attention to the details of our surroundings determines to a large extent how much time we'll want to spend at home. Desiring as I do to live in an atmosphere of peace, I don't permit screaming and continuous discord in my home. My home is my sanctuary, the place I go, or stay, to retreat from the world.

Create an atmosphere around you of faith and hope.

If we create an atmosphere that's conducive to spending time alone with God, we foster a place for our faith to grow. Time spent in God's company is crucial for spiritual enlightenment and transformation, for it's in serenity that He unfolds our future to us. Reading His Word in an atmosphere of faith is guaranteed to reveal something new. Something we've never *seen* before.

Faith produces hope, which in turn gives birth to a brand new start, even when circumstances appear bleak. Hope, like faith, is centered in God, understanding that nothing can be produced apart from Him. Hoping in Him and in His ability to work things out for our good, allows Him to speak directly to us. He can give us a *word* that will change everything. In this kind of atmosphere He'll exchange our worry and anxiety, for His peace and rest. The faith atmosphere in which we immerse ourselves is our sanctuary from the world. Focusing on God and looking to Him and His goodness builds our faith. Watching Him come through for us increases that faith. And *remembering everything He has done for us* increases it exponentially. This is how we mature our faith and eventually achieve great faith.

In an atmosphere of praise, worship, gratitude, and faith, our focus turns to God and His goodness. Our mind and heart become a storehouse of faith, faith that allows us to move beyond asking to receiving. God desires nothing more than for us to know Him better. He thrives on giving. But it's only when we prepare the setting so that we can receive by faith that the Holy Spirit can bless us. If we surround ourselves with a stable, faith-filled atmosphere, we will receive from Him. Remember, though, that it takes vigilant maintenance to keep that atmosphere strong and viable. Don't let anyone, or anything snatch it from you. Don't let contentious people come in and shatter it. And above all else, don't disrupt your own atmosphere by being double-minded with unbelief. Faith and unbelief can't reside together since they don't seek or achieve the same results.

Disorder, conflict, excessive noise, clutter, and a dirty, unkempt home will break your concentration and undermine your desire to sit still long enough to spend time daily with the Lord. If you neglect Him, your life will

spin off into undesirable places, much as a top does when it starts to wind down.

Is your atmosphere soft and pleasant, or harsh, loud, and demanding?

Have you noticed that when you walk into a fast food restaurant the music tends to be loud and often disturbing? On the other hand, when you enter an elegant restaurant, the lights are dimmed and the music is soft and romantic. Crisp, starched linen graces the table. Flowers and candlelight create a pleasant, soothing ambience. The colors and decorating are tasteful and classic. The staff is courteous, the servers going out of their way to provide superb service with beautifully presented food that is both pleasing to the eye as well as the palate. *Why all the attention to detail?* They want you to experience a pleasant, exceptional, and memorable dining event so that you'll return repeatedly. Such an establishment desires to be uncommon.

In the same way, we need to go out of our way to create an atmosphere conducive to keeping us in faith. Praise, adoration, and worship keep us in God's presence, training our focus on Him and not ourselves. A worshipful attitude creates the right atmosphere for our King to dine with us. Our praise and adoration of Him (equivalent to music, tasteful decorations, crisp linens, and candlelight) set the tone and provide the appropriate setting for telling Him that He alone is special. This is our way of extending an invitation for Him to join us. We guarantee ourselves a memorable audience with the King when we take time in advance to attend to the details of making Him feel welcomed and honored. The King of kings is the VIP of all VIPs. We should be ever mindful of how precious and special He is, and treat Him accordingly.

Ask yourself: *Do I approach God as if I'm in a fast food take-out lane? Do I expect to give the order and receive what was asked for?* You won't have memorable exchanges with Him if you treat Him as common, fast food.

Complaining, unbelief, and ingratitude are like taking Jesus to a fast food establishment. Ask yourself some basic questions: *Is the music loud and offensive? Am I taking Him to a place that's worthy of a King? Am I treating Him with disrespect, ignoring the fact that He's God by failing to take the time to create a more suitable environment? Do I even think about where I'm taking Him and the kind of atmosphere I'm asking Him to enter?*

If we're forever complaining and dissatisfied in His presence, we shouldn't be surprised at not seeing His blessings in our life. Further, an atmosphere of complaining will keep the Holy Spirit, who is sensitive, from wanting to stay around us. We draw Him closer through our worship and praise, as we're in need of His continual presence to overcome in this evil world. Worship also unlocks the door for miracles to happen in our life. Worship brings gratitude, as we focus on Him and not ourselves. His peace falls upon us as we bask in His presence, care, and love. The words we speak and the atmosphere we create, have everything to do with our ability to *receive* from God.

When David played his harp for Saul, evil spirits departed from the palace. Anointed music is one of the spiritual keys to creating a climate receptive to miracles. Determine today to start listening to music that praises the Lord and extols His unwavering goodness to you. Stop listening to music that removes you from His presence. It has no place in the believer's life. Godly music drives out evil spirits and ushers in peace.

Be mindful of what you “invite” into your life.

Most people, including many Christians, fail to understand that they invite evil spirits into their lives by their choices in viewing and listening. The messages to which we subject ourselves through entertainment, media, and music come with spirits attached to them. If you participate in the ungodly things of this world, you’re actually giving permission and even inviting these spirits into your life. This is how we develop *strongholds* that hold us captive.

Jesus will soon return for us. Signs are that the time is drawing short. Don’t let yourself be caught by surprise. By preparing your heart and building up your faith, you’ll ready yourself for the final exam.

Even if you don’t believe the time is short, your personal time most definitely is. None of us knows when that time will come or even whether we’ll live to see tomorrow. One thing is sure: If we don’t develop the habits that lead to a good outcome for our lives, we have no one to blame but ourselves.

We can combat depression by maintaining an atmosphere of faith.

God has given us the fundamental understanding we need to face trials and endure to the end.

“In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the Day of Judgment, because in this world we are like Him” (1 John 4:17).

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining

toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me Heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12–14).

When Jesus returns, will He find faith on the earth?

Luke 18:8 records Jesus as asking, “When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” Determine today that you won’t be one of the faithless. By maintaining your faith atmosphere you can ensure that you’ll endure to the end.

“As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in Him. For who is God besides the LORD? And who is the Rock except our God? It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; He enables me to stand on the heights. He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great. You broaden the path beneath me, so that my ankles do not turn” (Psalm 18:30–36).

Determine to remain faithful by maintaining a proper atmosphere into which to invite Jesus. Straying off into Satan’s territory and dining at his table will neither protect you nor keep you in perfect peace.

Only dining with the Savior, the King, who loves you beyond what you can imagine, will give you the love and acceptance you crave. Satan’s atmosphere exudes unbelief, chaos, fear, perversion, darkness, agony, defeat, bondage, and death. It’s filled with offensive music and those who are like-minded with him, drawn to evil.

Instead, enter into God’s perfect peace and love by creating the atmosphere that invites Him, with all that He possesses to settle into your heart.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ALLOW YOURSELF TIME TO CHANGE

People change little by little and day by day. If we determine to change and stay with it, we'll see the eventual rewards. God is exceedingly patient with His children. He tolerates our immaturity and understands our human frailty. He recognizes that it takes time for us to discover and get in harmony with the incredible things He has for us. Determination and perseverance are the only inroad to the change we seek. Let God change you, for when *God* changes us, the process starts from within. In contrast, when we try to change ourselves, we start from the outside. Outward change alone is never lasting.

It starts with the mind first, then the heart.

Change occurs when our thinking is first changed. Initial change becomes permanent change through *transformation*—and transformation comes through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will help us change our thinking when we ask for His help in this. This kind of change starts small as we gradually consider God's way instead of our own. Changed thinking, in turn, alters our daily habits. New daily habits produce changed behavior, which ultimately produces changed character. Our belief system, too, is gradually transformed as the result of our changed thought patterns. Progressive change takes time. While we're in this earthly life we can't expect to advance beyond works in progress, but we should always be making forward progress.

God is patient.

God was extraordinarily patient with Israel. He took 40 years to train His chosen leader, Moses. If He invested this much time into His chosen people and their leader, we know He'll take the time necessary to make us into the person He intends us to be. None of us will have the distinction of being His first exception.

Every leader God has ever used has failed Him in some way. Jesus is the only one who didn't fail God. Anyone can be exceptional by developing an attitude of perseverance. On the other hand, anyone can be common; all it takes is giving up.

Sometimes the very thing we want most takes the longest to achieve. Perfection takes time. Mastering something takes time. Impatience with God will only prolong our wait. Many times our impatience causes us to quit prematurely because we don't see the amount of work God must first do in us. We usually believe we're ready earlier than God does, since He sees what we don't yet see in ourselves. Let God take that impatient spirit out of you. It will protect you down the line. God doesn't want you to delay your good outcome by your unwillingness to grow in patience. Many positive changes are already taking place in you whether or not you recognize them. Allow yourself to rest. Be assured that God does notice your progress.

The purpose of studying the Bible.

Scripture tells us that reality comprises two realms: the seen and the unseen. The first is the realm of *apparent reality*, the world we know through our mind and experience with our five senses. If it weren't for

divine revelation, we would be locked in this level with no way of breaking through to the second realm, *ultimate reality*.

Bound by the finite, the relative, and the temporal, we would be unable to find the meaning and purpose we long for. Meaning and purpose that can only be realized on the level of the infinite, the absolute, and the eternal. We would have no hope of finding answers to our fundamental questions of life: *Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? Where will I end up?*

God gave us His Word to deliver us from the domain of darkness and to transfer us to the domain of light. (Colossians 1:13). The Bible reveals the full spectrum and extent of the Lord's creative and redemptive plan for His people. Only in its pages can we gain a perspective on our past, present, and future, and begin to recognize the significance of our new identity as recipients of every spiritual blessing in the Heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3).

Only by persisting in the regular reading and study of God's Word can our entire value system be upgraded from the realm of the temporal to that of the eternal.

The study of Scripture "sets our minds on the things above"—on the source all life, both physical and spiritual" (Colossians 3:2).

Bible study enables us to "look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

This is the heart of wisdom: plugging in to the realm of the light, life, and love God has for us. Through godly wisdom we can understand the precepts and principles of the Bible. We then gain the most essential skill of

all: the ability to live each area of our life under the dominion of the King. The Bible doesn't tell us to *live and learn*; it exhorts us to *learn and live*.

The pathway to a better life.

There are several reasons for getting into the Word and for letting the Word get into us. Here are six:

1. *Nourishment and growth.*

The Bible is unique in terms of its *production*, *preservation*, *proclamations*, and *product*.

- a. In its ***production***, the Spirit ensured a unified message of redemption, despite diverse authors and circumstances.
- b. In its ***preservation***, God's Word has miraculously withstood the ravages of time, persecution, and criticism, and continues to be the bestselling book in the world.
- c. In its ***proclamations***, the Bible stands alone in its revelation of God's eternal plan and in its life-giving message.
- d. In its ***product***, this Book has changed the course of history, reaching more people and transforming more lives than any other single source. In spite of all this, the Bible is too often read for *information*, not transformation.

“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man

of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

While the Bible is an inspired revelation from the living God, it requires our response before it can impact our lives. God loves us and desires nothing less than our highest good: conformity to the character of His Son. A dynamic relationship with the truth of His Word provides the spiritual nourishment we need to change and grow into maturity.

2. New priorities and values.

The study of Scripture delivers us from the bondage of temporal thinking. Living only for today is foolish. We gain insight into an eternal value system by discovering God’s world through His Word. By frequently “renewing our minds with the Word,” we bring our thinking and behavior into conformity with God’s view of significance, purpose, identity, and success (Romans 12:2). The pursuit of God’s values leads us out of darkness into the light, and brings fulfillment and joy. In contrast, we experience constant frustration when we don’t understand that God has a different operating system than the world.

Take into consideration that the world’s value system has degenerated rapidly during the last 20 to 30 years. What had for generations been considered off-limits, appalling, horrific, and perverted has become more acceptable and commonplace in our recent society. Our desires, appetites, and demand for perverse sin have become insatiable. Younger and younger children are being exposed to the increasingly twisted and dark ideals running rampant in our world. They are being damaged, sometimes irreparably, and sacrificed to satisfy the lusts of evil people. As appetites

continue to grow, so does the degree of perversion. We have become, as in the days of Sodom and Gomorrah, given over to perversion.

Our governing body no longer recognizes or lauds good, decent, and honest morals or behavior. Apart from the transforming power of God's Word *within* us, we have no hope for a good future. Only with God is there hope. (Psalm 5:11; 16:5–8; 105:3–4; Jeremiah 9:23–24; Matthew 6:33; 2 Corinthians 4:16–18; Philippians 1:21; and Colossians 1:10–12.)

3. *The power to overcome temptation.*

The study of Scripture provides us with both corrective and preventive medicine. It warns us in advance of the kinds of temptations we can expect (Proverb 4:10–27; 5:1–23; 1 John 2:15–16), clues us in about the process of temptation (James 1:12–17), and shows us how to deal with temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13; Ephesians 6:10–18).

4. *Guidance for decision-making.*

The Scriptures reveal God's moral will for every area of life. A working knowledge of the commands, prohibitions, and principles of the Bible gives us the wisdom and guidance we need to make the decisions that will shape the course of our lives (Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 1:2–5), as well as a divine perspective that enables us to respond rightly. This is the only way we can rise above our circumstances (James 1:5).

5. *Knowledge of God.*

The Bible is a progressive revelation of the person, plan, character, mind, love, and will of our Creator. We cannot hope to know Him and His ways

apart from time spent in His revealed Word. The Word isn't just our guidebook; it's God's gift of hope to us.

6. *Knowledge of ourselves.*

The Bible cuts through the facade of appearances and lays bare our secret motivations and plans (1 Samuel 16:7). As we read it, the Word becomes a mirror that exhibits our true character, exposes areas of self-delusion, and exhorts us to change (James 1:21–25). *(Adapted from Bible.org).

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

God's revealed Word and the presence and working of the Holy Spirit in our lives is our only means to long-term change.

Sincerely asking God to transform us ensures that any change that occurs is lasting and that it glorifies our Creator.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

FEED YOUR FAITH DAILY

Faith in God is confidence in Him and in His ability to come through for us. Ask yourself: In whom do I put my faith? In whom do I delight? Whom do I seek after? The answers to those questions will reveal the true **recipient** of your faith.

Then ask yourself: *What do I have faith in? In what do I delight? What do I seek after?* The answers to those questions will reveal the true **object** of your faith.

Most often we're unaware of who, or what, holds our faith and trust, because we don't search our heart diligently. We excel at self-deception. Still, asking the right questions and answering them honestly will give us a good clue as to what we value highly. It's necessary to know this, for what we value, will create and grab hold of our passion.

Do you find yourself searching for meaning?

It's surprising how many people fail to grasp what's behind their dissatisfaction with life. If we don't seek after God daily with our whole being, it'll only be a matter of time before emptiness creeps in. Our hearts are quickly and easily turned away from the things of God when we allow our gaze to turn from Him.

Only by carefully cultivating what we want to produce can we receive the expected harvest. Think of your life as a garden. Your heart is the soil

of your garden. The type of soil will determine how well things grow in your life.

Your daily decision to follow Christ will bring about your desired future. If you want what you've never had before—you'll need to do something that you've never done previously. If you'll diligently develop your faith, as opposed to starving it, you'll become passionate about God and your future.

Passion fuels our willpower and keeps us on target. Passion for more of God keeps our heart from growing cold. Passion to find His grace and mercy, and then actually *finding* them, fills our hearts with overflowing gratitude. When gratitude flourishes, our appetites are controlled and our passion for Him becomes all-consuming.

A simple illustration will make this clear. Imagine being the root system of a fruit tree, responsible for producing the fruit that will issue forth from the tree. The tree draws moisture and nourishment from the soil, up through the trunk and into the branches. Later, when the tree has reached some maturity, it produces fruit. If the necessary minerals and nourishment aren't in the soil to draw upon, the tree will neither grow hardy nor produce abundant fruit. If the soil is poor and there is no water for life, the tree, despite your best intentions, will soon wither and die, producing **no** fruit.

Faith and God's Word work in much the same way for our spiritual lives as water and minerals from the soil do for the fruit tree. They nourish our spirit. If we don't feed and water ourselves by hearing the Word, or tend our garden and pull the weeds by the reading and *studying* of the Word, we'll wonder why in due season we fail to produce good fruit. We'll

wonder how the weeds got so lush and tall, not recognizing that our own neglect has permitted them to flourish. Neglect stifles the faith we once had. We can't neglect what's essential and expect an abundant harvest. A good return requires diligent attention from the farmer.

You control your own garden.

We have a measure of control over the quality of our life by what we decide to feed our soul. Faith produces fruit, while unbelief leaves our field a barren wasteland. When we work at producing faith, by properly nourishing and cultivating it, it will come. It may take some time, but it will grow. In time, that faith produces evidence of the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, etc.) in our lives. People will recognize what kind of tree we are by the fruit we exhibit.

Guard your affections.

Solomon teaches us about guarding what's in our heart. We don't know for certain at what life stage Solomon wrote his various proverbs, but we're well aware from the history of his reign that he knew firsthand the dangers of being pulled away from God. What might have been the outcome had he not tolerated his wives' idol worship? Solomon's heart turned from God. His cold heart was a natural result of marrying women not of his same faith. It's why the Bible admonishes us to not be unequally yoked together.

Solomon teaches us to guard our affections because they control and dictate everything we do:

“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

Are you diligently guarding your heart?

Countless people pay little regard to where their attention is directed. But we won't build up our faith unless we're diligent about doing so. Solomon warns:

“He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich” (Proverbs 21:17).

“Do not love sleep, lest you come to poverty” (Proverbs 20:13).

Ironically, the *sluggard* must expend valuable energy explaining why he hasn't been productive. King David instructs:

“Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart” (Psalm 37:4).

“If you...call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing (*going*) your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, *then* you shall delight yourself in the LORD” (Isaiah 58:13–14).

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

Jesus knew the power of habit.

Jesus had the habit of doing nothing outside the will of the Father. His passion to obey, took Him to His destiny and provided all Christians with immeasurable benefits. *We must decide what we want out of life.* If it's a life blessed by God, we must strive to please and obey Him.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:8-10).

We can produce good works only when we submit to God and relinquish our stubborn will. When we do, we see the positive desired results, the

fulfillment of deep, previously unsatisfied desires.

Cultivate a positive attitude toward daily faith building.

If you've become negative towards yourself and life in general, turn it around by immersing yourself in the promises of God and the good things He has to say about you. Eventually by making this a habit, your thinking will change and you'll become more positive as you begin to see yourself as God sees you.

We must be proactive about fasting from our negative thought patterns. Left to themselves, those patterns will produce a thriving crop of weeds in our garden. Too many weeds and we no longer have a garden, certainly not a garden that produces anything good. Keep your feet out of that rut by making progress in your daily faith walk with God. Set a goal every day of learning something new from God's Word. This will nourish your soul and you'll become hopeful about your future.

Keep a journal of your spiritual journey and growth. This will serve as your reminder to keep thinking rightly, by holding to right priorities and building up your faith daily. The journal will remind you in a tangible way of just how God is answering your prayers and working on your behalf.

Faith is an "action" word.

Faith is both a *gift* and a *work*. It's a *gift* because the Son of Man offers it to us and a *work* because we need to exercise it. *Faith requires action*. Passive faith simply won't produce. Faith won't be present in us, unless we work to cultivate it.

“Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval” (John 6:27).

“Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent” (John 6:29).

Your life will eventually produce a bountiful harvest when you choose to feed your faith daily. God will see to it that you receive a good return on the investment of your time and effort. Nothing else comes with that priceless guarantee.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

BEGIN THE HABIT OF SITTING AT JESUS' FEET

Most of us start our day with breakfast. The word breakfast means to break from your fast. We start the day by breaking the fast from the previous night's sleep. Breakfast provides for our physical need, but the Word of God provides us with the nourishment we need to sustain our life. Without it, we're starting a new day unprepared. The Word prepares us to withstand the onslaught the enemy has for us each and every day.

Instead of stealing a few extra minutes between the sheets, decide to get up 15 minutes early to renew your mind with the words of Jesus. In Matthew 26:41 Jesus directs Peter, James, and John in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

Most of us have to fight our flesh to achieve any of our goals. Satan will tell you every reason why you don't need to sacrifice. Sleeping later pleases our flesh because it's natural to us, but we won't see the change we desire if we continue doing what comes naturally to our flesh. A new life requires breaking away from "old" habits and replacing them with new ones.

Starting the day with God's thoughts changes our thoughts. We get our mind in alignment with God's mind through the reading of His Word. Approach the Word with that thought in mind. Don't read it for information

but for transformation. The Bible is the storehouse of God's messages to you. If you want to hear God's voice, go to His storehouse.

The benefit of God's Word to us (Psalm 19).

As expressed by David in Psalm 19:7, "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul."

God's law restores the hearts of His saints (Psalm 19:10; 119:103).

It brings the lost to salvation—the ultimate restoration of the soul (Romans 10:14–17).

God's Word communicates wisdom to us.

David declares in Psalm 19:7, "The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple."

The Word shows us how to obtain wise counsel (Proverbs 1:5).

The Word directs us to turn away from evil fools (Proverbs 14:16).

God's Word cheers our heart.

"The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes" (Psalm 19:8).

God's Word enlightens our eyes.

David, in the latter part of the same verse (Psalm 19:8) says

"The commandment of the LORD is pure, *enlightening the eyes*" (NKJV).

"I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?...for that would be a fire that consumes...and it would burn to the root all my increase" (Job 31:1, 12; 31:1).

God's Word protects our body, mind, and heart.

When our eyes are cleansed from the infection caused by sin, we can see clearly again. If you can handle the image, think in terms of raw sewage

being ground into your eyes. When we fail to guard this gate carefully, we risk becoming septic, with bacteria coursing unchecked through our bodies. When we become too casual about what we let into our eyes, ears, mind, and heart, we invite pollutants to come in and contaminate our bodies. This opens us up to great deception, as we become dulled to what is actually happening to us. Most people are totally oblivious to the real cost of such carelessness. We fail to recognize the cost *before the fact*, when it's still early enough to curb the effects.

God's Word endures forever.

"The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever" (Psalm 19:9).

Deuteronomy 6:2 and 8:6 both make the claim that fearing the Lord keeps us from sin.

God's Word champions righteousness.

"...The judgments of the LORD, are true and righteous altogether" (Psalm 19:9).

In the words of Jesus to the Father, "Sanctify them by the truth; your Word is truth" (John 17:17).

God's Word, when heeded, gives warning.

It warns us of impending danger (see Psalm 19:11).

As David points out in Psalm 14:1, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good."

David's son Solomon speaks in a similar vein in Proverbs 28:26: "He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe."

God's Word, when obeyed, brings rewards.

"A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense" (Proverbs 19:11).

“By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward” (Psalm 19:11)

“If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward” (1 Corinthians 3:14).

“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with Me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done” (Revelation 22:12).

God’s Word is our spiritual food.

Read the Word as though you are taking in food—spiritual food. If you typically have your devotional time in the morning, consider it your spiritual breakfast for the day. This is how we get the world out of us.

Before reading, ask God to reveal to you what you need to know for that day. If you mindlessly read a given number of verses to complete an obligation, you’ll have completed a “task.” Tasks that can quickly become drudgery, don’t typically elicit delight in us.

God desires for you to *spend* time with Him. Not to *put in* time, or worse, *do* time, dutifully pushing our way through a passage. He wants us to spend time with Him so He can reveal Himself to us. He wants us to discover for ourselves just how much He loves and cares for us, for He knows that when we experience His love firsthand, we’ll be changed forever.

God wants to give you rest for your toil.

When we read God’s Word, we discover that He never intended life to be so difficult. This was something we brought on ourselves by choosing to listen to Satan’s messages rather than to Him.

“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food” (Genesis 3:19)?

We push ourselves unmercifully because we don't receive God's messages to us. We lose sight of what's really important; what holds real value. We don't understand that God asks us to pursue Him, not the things of this world, because we have a good outcome when we do. We have a Heavenly Father who has promised to care for us *when we seek Him first*. This isn't something we can understand in advance. When we seek Him, we'll be amazed at being rewarded by the God who prompted:

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Jesus has liberated us from the necessity of laborious effort. As the perfect sacrifice, He removed the curse from us. Since we're no longer under the curse, continuing to live as though we were, signifies that we don't fully understand what Jesus did for us, or the benefits we derive from embracing Him and His truth.

Toiling away at life, trying with our own strength to make something grow out of thorny clay, is a nearly impossible task we set for ourselves. That's precisely why Jesus came. The work we're trying so hard to accomplish has already been done. Past tense! Blessings are for those who accept Jesus' finished work on the cross. When we give God our burdens He takes them upon Himself. With our burdens lightened, we experience rest.

Sin brought shame, guilt, pain, endless hard work, and separation from God.

Jesus paid the price on our behalf. His sacrifice made possible our restored condition before the Father. Jesus' death took away our guilt,

shame, pain, and the need to constantly toil away at life. He makes total freedom possible. But we must want it and take it for ourselves. We receive this when we accept Him as Savior. He's the only One who provides us with abundant life. This should make us fall on our knees with complete gratitude to Jesus for loving us so.

We're rebellious and live *without* because we don't fully comprehend what our Savior did for us. These truths, often hidden in deceptively simple parables, constitute *the secret things of God*. They're anything but obvious to those who read the Bible merely for information, or who don't read it at all. The nuggets of gold lie tantalizing close to the surface, accessible to those who will make the effort to look deeper for the promised reward.

Seek fresh manna for fresh ministry.

Pastors and teachers who base their teaching on their own interpretations don't receive the full anointing the Spirit grants to those who seek Him out for fresh manna. Without His anointing on our life, it's difficult to find those *hidden treasures* that empower us to influence others in profound ways. Too many Bible studies and sermons merely skim the surface, pointing out what is already obvious. Many well-intentioned promoters of the gospel fail to understand why their method for winning lost souls is often fruitless.

Could it be the absence of fresh manna? Maybe the truth and methods of yesterday are being used to produce today's harvest. Maybe the message needs an infusion of new insight. Perhaps it needs fresh life, conviction, passion, and a transparency that enables others to see beyond the words.

Only then will they want what we have. The Holy Spirit is the giver of this fresh manna, this fresh revelation. Ask for it by name!

Jesus already knows what you're in need of.

Because Christ wants you to discover all the good things He has in store for you, He (the Holy Spirit) woos you into a marvelous relationship with Himself. You'll keep coming back for more when you discover He's infinitely fascinating and satisfying. At first He gives you just enough to whet your appetite, to keep you interested. He knows how to play the love game, for He invented it. He knows how to satisfy your parched soul, to heal you and make you whole so you're in a position to receive. He knows what it will take to extract you from your past so you can enter unimpeded into your new future. He knows how to prosper and promote you. He knows how to make you fall madly in love with Himself.

Receive the "better thing" that can never be taken from you.

Like Mary in another deceptively simple Gospel story recounted in Luke 10:38–42, you'll learn that the spiritual food Jesus provides is totally satisfying to the empty soul.

Martha, the impeccable hostess, recognized only physical food and was entirely caught up in its preparation. Jesus informed this more practical of the two sisters that she was worried about *many* things, but that Mary had chosen the *better* thing—the spiritual food with which He was satiating her soul. Mary chose to sit, rapt, at His feet, for she comprehended the invaluable treasure stored up in Jesus, a guest in the sisters' home. What an unforgettable experience she chose to avail herself of. *Did Martha*

squander this same opportunity to be enriched? Did she too end up filled and fulfilled, or just exhausted and harried?

It's easy for us to lose sight of the reality that these sisters had access to Jesus in human form. We no longer have the tangible Jesus, but we have something better in *His Word*, and in *the Comforter*, who is the Holy Spirit.

Jesus resides in our hearts 24/7, and has promised to never leave us. That Spirit is in you right now—not in the next room, but in your heart. His words are accessible to you moment-by-moment as they're recorded in the Bible. Unlike Jesus' contemporaries Mary and Martha, we can go to His Word any time we want to commune with Him.

Mary received from Jesus that which couldn't be taken from her. When we identify the extraordinary circumstances and people that Jesus brings into our life, we're able to receive from Him because we **see**. We see that He's extraordinary, that He's the true treasure. We find our rest in Him when we sit at His feet and receive what He alone offers.

Martha didn't appreciate this reality since she was focused on her *work*. But Martha had the same opportunity to witness what Mary did. Martha failed to grasp that she wouldn't always have Jesus with her in human form. Mary chose to **rest** in Jesus. Martha chose to **toil**—and missed out on an extraordinary blessing.

The parables teach us what to value. We can focus our whole lives on our work, our toil, or we can focus on Jesus, and receive relief from our constant striving. Once we learn to fall in love with Jesus by comprehending and coming to appreciate what we have in Him, the world

is no longer of interest to us. Nothing in it, after all, can do for us what Jesus can and has.

When you teach yourself to sit at His feet, your understanding opens up like an unfolding blossom—as does your spirit. You become deeply enthralled, captivated, and awestruck in Him alone, all at once. Most people don't seek and pursue to this degree; therefore, they go *without*, and their lives show the deficit.

Ask Jesus for clarification on anything you don't understand. Tell Him you want to know Him more intimately through His Word and that you desire to enjoy Him. He'll instill that appetite within your heart. Eventually you may sense an *overflowing* of His love toward you. Some express this experience of His love as the sensation of “liquid love” flowing from their head downward. This is a manifestation of being *baptized in the Holy Spirit*.

Remember that God is a “rewarder” of those who diligently seek Him. His overflowing love toward you is His confirmation that He's pleased with your desire to seek greater intimacy with Him. You can rest assured He won't withhold one good thing from those who **see**!

Renew your mind daily on the Word of God.

Don't get “hung up” on Greek or Hebrew, theology or doctrine. Just meditate on His Word and the things He reveals to *you*. Plug your name into any promise you find there. You'll see the Bible come alive as you experience great excitement over what He has in store for you. Consider His Word a balm for your wounded spirit. Derive hope from its words and

messages. Savor it. Take it in like a medicine, assured that it will provide you with health and wholeness.

Renew your mind daily, especially if you're a new Christian, because the world has a way of dumping its garbage on you. Without the Word transforming your mind, it collects dust, becoming cluttered with mindless distractions that are intended for your destruction.

The Word of God washes you clean, renewing and refreshing your mind and spirit. Keep yourself hopeful and focused by daily dips into God's Word. Receive what Jesus died to give you, freedom and health. When you see that Jesus is your only real treasure, you'll not want to return to your former life without Him.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

MAKE TIME TO PRAY

Jesus intimately knows our suffering, weaknesses, and temptations. If you've ever found yourself puzzled about how prayer works, Jesus gives us the key to God-pleasing prayer in John 15:1–6.

By itself, a branch has no power to abide or remain in the vine, nor can it join itself to the vine-stock. Like a vine, Jesus' living Word both commands and enables us to live attached to Him. When we meditate on His Word we're *abiding* or *continuing* in Christ. This is the secret for developing a prayer life that works—in the sense of achieving results. We can be confident that we'll obtain mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need when we seek to remain in Him (Hebrews 4:16).

Many people, despite having some vague or general concepts about prayer, haven't remained or continued in Christ long enough to reach the place where prayer is effectively working for them. When we continue by not giving up, regardless of what circumstances look like on the surface, we build up our faith. Faith believes in God no matter what! Trust believes that God is working, even when it appears from our natural perspective that He's not. Faith moves us beyond the natural to the supernatural, which is where God works. Perseverance allows us to push through. Pushing through, when the going gets tough, is what separates the hardy from the weak, the uncommon from the common. *Do you wish to be robust and extraordinary?* Then learn to push through.

Does God really answer our prayers?

We pray in response to God's loving invitations "Call upon me" (Jeremiah 33:3).

"Ask and it shall be given you" (Matthew 7:7).

According to Isaiah 65:24, we pray because God has promised to hear us.

In Genesis we're told that all things were created not only by God, but also *for* Him. Amazingly, God created people because He wanted a family. God is relational and He is love, and love by its very nature begs to be given away. God wanted people to be recipients of His love.

Jesus tells us, "I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me. My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:14–15).

In verse 27 of the same chapter, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me."

These verses tell us that Jesus hears the prayers of those who *know* Him, not those who only know *about* Him. When a person is a child of God, Jesus both knows them and hears their prayers.

The next obvious question we must ask: *Do I know this Jesus personally and does He know me? Do I have a relationship with Him that warrants His answering my prayers?* If God is just a distant concept to you you may not know Him personally. You could be directing your prayers to someone who may not be listening because He doesn't *know* you!

How to pray: the foundation.

First, we must respond to God by seeking a relationship with Him. Imagine yourself needing a down payment for a mortgage. You decide to

approach the CEO of the mortgage company and ask him to cosign the loan for you. How likely is it that he'll cosign on a loan for someone he doesn't know? Not very. But if that same CEO's daughter asked her dad to co-sign on a loan for her, a problem would be less likely because *relationship* matters.

This is how prayer works for the believer. We're linked to God through our relationship with Him. He's our Father and we're His child. God longs to hear and do for His children. When we're His daughter, why wouldn't He?

"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you" (see John 15:7 and Acts 17:11).

Qualifiers:

Our willingness to listen and obey keeps us in fellowship with Jesus. Only then can we ask Him for whatever we want. There's another qualifier: Jesus answers our prayers *according to His will, His wisdom, His love, His holiness*, etc. When we've been transformed into His likeness, we have little problem praying for things that are in His will.

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of Him" (1 John 5:14).

God's understanding is unlimited.

We frequently err in assuming that we know God's will for us. We believe that *His* only purpose is to answer *our* prayers the way *we* want them to be answered. Just because we want something badly enough doesn't make it good for us. Since we operate with limited knowledge,

we're often convinced that there's only one right answer to a specific prayer. We fail to grasp the possibility that there may be a strategy other than the one we imagine.

How an event will play out in the course of our life is something only God knows. He has purposes for us far beyond what we can imagine. God isn't going to do something in our lives simply because we determine it to be His will. Habitually we fail to see around the next bend in the road, especially in situations that deal with our emotions.

If God answered all of our prayers the way we wanted Him to, our future would be compromised. Only in hindsight, do we see that it was good that God did *not* answer many of our shortsighted prayers in the affirmative. We're too inexperienced, immature, and unseasoned to know what's good for us. Since God is good and wants only the best for us, He won't let anything get in the way of our intended destiny, to include saying no to requests that counter His plan.

The entire Bible is a description of the kind of relationship God wants us to experience with Him.

"Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; He rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for [trust in] Him!" (Isaiah 30:18).

We have a God who is both compassionate and a judge.

God shows compassion toward you because He's a God of justice. *Has it ever occurred to you that compassion is a part of justice?* How do we receive that compassion? By waiting upon Him and trusting in His timing, for we know Him well enough to know His timing is always perfect. We

know that He doesn't forget about us or our prayers. God's greatest display of his love and commitment to you is this:

"Greater love has no one than this, that He lay down His life for His friends" (John 15:13).

"What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?" Since God did not spare even his own Son but gave Him up for us all, won't God, who gave us Christ, also give us everything else?" (Romans 8:31–32).

God instructs us to hand over our concerns to Him, even if the situation remains bleak. Psalm 55:22 directs us to:

"Cast your cares on the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous fall."

When the whole world seems to be falling apart God can keep you together. We can be immeasurably grateful for knowing a God who cares so completely for us.

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in **everything**, by **prayer** and **petition**, with **thanksgiving**, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you" (Philippians 4:4–9)

Jesus will teach you how to respond to temptation.

Here's another secret for you: When we learn something about Jesus through the reading or hearing of the Word, we learn how to respond to life. We see through Jesus' example, how to respond to daily temptations and irritations.

We must assimilate the truth He taught and the examples He gave us into our own lives. Knowing the concepts isn't enough; concepts aren't relational. Only a vital, authentic relationship with Jesus allows us to receive and assimilate His truth.

His Word assures us we can flee from temptation just as He did. How? The above Scripture says that instead of being anxious we're to hand over everything to Him through prayer and petition. We don't need to beg or barter. There is a prerequisite, though: absolute confidence in Him! He has provided what we need by giving us the secrets to life in His Word. Now **we** must go to work, to work it all out, through faith and trust in Him.

God's Word isn't a collection of crusty religious sayings. *It is life and it alone holds the secrets to life.*

Learn to listen during your prayer time.

At times you'll need to continue reading the Word *until* you hear from God. If the matter is urgent and pressing, inform Him that you're going to read His Word *until* you hear His voice, not arrogantly or in the context of a demand, but *to* hear. Faith is an action word. We hear by being still, listening actively, and waiting with expectancy.

Prayer is a two-way form of communication.

Prayer isn't a one-way method of communication with us doing all the talking. God already knows what's going on in our lives. He doesn't need to be brought up to date. Prayer is His method of communicating with us. So listening is actually more beneficial to us than rattling off a long list of all the things we want Him to change in our life.

When we become aware of the vastness of His power, listening becomes easier. We begin to sense what He knows, and we don't. Listening enables us to receive more. Constantly talking on the other hand, will drown out His voice and preoccupy our mind. God already knows our needs. Although He still wants us to express them, He's ultimately more interested in having us know Him, as He's the source of all answers and blessings. When we know Jesus personally, He supplies the answers we're searching for. When we don't know Him, we're continually and repeatedly asking for the same things, never learning what the key is to *receiving* from Him.

It's hard to get to know anyone when we're doing all the talking. Recognize your need of a wise mentor. Protégés learn most from quietly listening to the Master. Jesus is the **only** mentor you'll ever need, since He's the only **wise** mentor.

Our big-picture God.

God already knows the outcome of your life. Spend your time together more effectively by developing a deeper relationship with Him. That will lead you to a better understanding of what He has designed for you. Rather than complaining about your life to Him, you'll become excited about it as you see it through His eyes rather than your own.

Be careful to seek more than just what Jesus can give you.

Seek relationship with Jesus and you'll receive much more than answered prayer. *Has it occurred to you that this may be a reason He sometimes waits to answer your prayers?* Jesus wants to prepare our hearts to receive more from Him than just the basics of life. Many seek His hand,

but not His heart. Jesus has assured us that if we but seek Him first, He'll meet our daily needs.

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your Heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” (Matthew 6:25-34).

Still, Jesus wants us to experience more on the basis that He's so much more. He understands better than we do, that life isn't primarily about receiving daily provision from Him. He loves us too deeply to be satisfied with our settling for so little. He wants us to discover for ourselves what we've been missing.

God wants you to know you can dream BIG dreams with Him.

The caveat: He has to get you there first. He knows that many of us aren't aware that our dreams are puny and anemic, because we have puny imaginations. We have anemic knowledge about what He can do with a person of faith. God's Word says that *nothing* is impossible with Him, so dare to dream the impossible.

Great men and women of God have great prayer lives.

They love to spend time with God in prayer. This is, in fact, their secret to greatness. They understand that apart from God they would have no life, no ministry, and no impact. They would have no answers to their prayers or realization of their dreams, the dreams God implanted in their heart in the first place.

Daniel prayed three times daily. The psalmist David prayed seven times daily. Great men develop great habits. That's how they become great. You can achieve greatness simply by applying what you learn about Jesus to your life. Greatness starts with learning to pray rightly.

Make time with God the top priority of your day.

Don't let the enemy deceive you into thinking you don't have time to keep an appointment with God. You make appointments with your dentist, doctor, lawyer, pastor, spouse, children, and friends. *Are you going to tell Jesus that these commitments are more important than engaging with Him?* If that's what you're telling Him, indirectly by your habits and choices, it won't be long before your life reflects those skewed priorities.

Make a daily appointment with God.

God has remedies for our fears, tears, sicknesses, worries, and doubts. Go to Him first to seek the solutions He has for you. Ask Him to show you a way out of your situation. This starts with prayer.

Great men and women of God didn't become great because they scheduled time with everyone else in their lives. Great people know intuitively what's important long before the masses get a clue about what they're lacking. Start making and keeping appointments with God in

prayer. Enjoy His company! You may just discover that some of your other appointments aren't necessary after all.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

LET GOD MANAGE YOUR SCHEDULE

Do you typically find that you have more to do in a day than time allows? Have you become exhausted trying to fulfill your daily demands and from rushing from one activity onto the next? If so, then ask yourself: Who made your schedule? Many believe that everything on their to-do list is something that they must do.

We render ourselves powerless and eventually become resentful when we allow everyone else to dictate how we spend our days. Time is a gift from God and He expects us to make the most of it. If we don't value each and every day we'll settle for a mediocre life.

Today is a good day to take responsibility for the scheduling of your time and relinquish control of it. Delegate it to God and let Him manage your schedule according to His plan and timeline for you.

Many of us take on too much because we haven't figured out that we can say no, or we become confused about what things to say no to. Countless items on our agenda seem good to us, so we're clueless about what to eliminate. But has it ever occurred to you that not all of those *good things* are necessarily activities in which God wants you to be involved?

The absence of bad things on our schedule doesn't mean that everything on our list is from God. If we're exhausted, we need to go to God in prayer and ask Him to show us what's wrong. Most likely He'll remind us that we

made our own schedule and that we've overbooked ourselves. The vast majority never consider consulting God about their brimful calendar and therefore, fail to understand why they're depleted, underproductive, and often ineffective.

Learn to say no politely.

If this is your situation, ask God to reveal to you the items on your list that warrant a firm, if belated, no. He'll show you what you can purge and how to do so graciously. Some of this pruning will be difficult, but with time you'll come to understand that it was necessary and beneficial.

The Christian woman who seeks to please God does so by renewing her mind. When her mind is conformed to God's desires for her, it's just a matter of retraining. We form many of our habits on the basis of felt needs—needs we attempt to fill in our own way. We assume our solutions will fill up or replenish what's empty in us. But when we accept Christ, He comes in and fills those empty parts with Himself if we allow Him to. This eliminates the need for those earlier fixes.

Frequently, we continue doing what we've always done assuming that all of our activities are still appropriate. But a new life demands new priorities and actions, and these include leaving behind the old, worn-out activities that no longer fit. Guard your schedule carefully, as too many activities will keep you from having enough quality time to spend with God—who is the giver of both time and energy. When He gives you the go ahead about an activity, it'll then be productive, rather than depleting. Also, be aware of the people you're spending time with in your activities. Perhaps the Lord is telling you what to delete, so that the atmosphere around you is changed.

What is your self-made schedule bringing into your life?

Your schedule will either add or deplete you of peace. If you allow the Holy Spirit to *lead* you, you'll have peace. If you're obsessive about your schedule, you may need to touch base with God hourly as you try to trim back your excessive level of activity. If you're a workaholic who lacks the balance the Holy Spirit brings, your habits may cost you personal and professional relationships. Abandoned, withered marriages and emotionally orphaned children are often the result of overcommitted schedules, many of which were constructed in an attempt to build up self-worth.

Secure people have nothing to prove. They're confident and seek balance in all areas of their life, including their work life. A lack of balance can actually reveal to others what we're trying so desperately to hide—that we're insecure. Let people know that you value your down time and your family time. They'll secretly admire you for your balance and priorities.

Countless people cover up perceived inadequacies in their personal lives by overcompensating in their work life. Sadly, they may be successful in areas that don't really matter and a failure in those that do.

One of God's names is “Yahweh Jireh” the Ever-Living One, our Provider.

Satan loves to convince people that working harder is the reason they get ahead. But our Father tells us that He supplies *all* our needs—what we need for daily living as well as the resources we need to carry out His work. In the Old Testament God provided for His people, the Israelites, in part by sending clouds and fire to lead them.

“When the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not journey till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of the LORD was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys” (Exodus 40:36–38).

God didn’t stop there. He has provided us with a living blueprint to supplement His written Word. This is given to us in the person of Jesus Christ—the Logos or Living Word. These two forms of God’s “special” revelation—the written and the Living Word—agree with each other in every aspect. Jesus is our pattern, our model.

We are to become “conformed to the image of [God’s] Son” (Romans 8:29).

Take on God’s identity; it’s yours too.

When we let God build us up and tell us who we are in Him, the need and drive to push ourselves, to continually prove to ourselves that we’re worthy, dissipates. Our inner peace is a signal to others that we aren’t driven as they are. Remember that it’s Satan who *drives* us, but God who *leads* us.

God goes before us providing protection and shielding us from harm. Satan, on the other hand, pushes us out front, without protection, where we find ourselves vulnerable and exposed to the flaming darts coming at us from all directions.

Maintain your peace by asking God which phone calls and appointments He wants you to take, and which ones voice mail can just as easily handle. You can return some phone calls when it’s convenient. Many, you may discover, don’t need a response at all, especially if a time waster is waiting to commandeer your time.

Likewise, we need to refrain from making unnecessary calls, from wasting other people's time just to vent or gab. Don't pursue everything possible just because you can. The TV, phone, and Internet, all neutral in themselves, lurk along our path as potential time robbers. If you must include these in your agenda, limit your exposure, even if it means setting a timer. Don't deprive yourself of your greatest commodity—time.

Discern what God is bringing to you and what you need to stop chasing.

Success is a daily goal so include God in all your decision making and scheduling. Joy can also be a daily event, if we prioritize the Holy Spirit into our day. Habits become habits simply because they're repeated *daily*. It takes twenty-one days to form a habit, whether good or bad. Allow good habits to dominate your life by practicing them daily. A priority is anything God has commanded you to do. Obedience is key.

Do you desire more productivity from yourself?

Greater productivity requires developing new daily habits. Scrutinize what and who are wasting your time. Be honest with yourself. You can't retrieve time already lost, but you can become more productive in the future. Read a book on organization or motivation, or whatever you identify as your problem area. Don't let Satan rob you of your progress by injecting energy-depleting guilt into the equation. When God is directing your schedule and you're willingly obeying, there's simply no place for guilt. Guilt may actually be your first thought, as Satan introduces it into our thinking to keep us from being productive.

Follow Solomon's example of diligence.

Solomon spoke at length about both organization and motivation, concepts he lumped together under the category of *diligence*. The diligent pursue their goals without undue distractions. They reach their objectives because they keep their goals before them.

Refuse to allow others to distract you from your aspirations. Be willing to delegate anything in your schedule that others can accomplish. Eliminate the things that fail to align with your purpose, assignment, and vision. Only then will you, with the Holy Spirit's assistance, reach your goals.

Diligence may be defined as: *continuous and earnest effort to accomplish what we undertake, and persistent exertion of body or mind*. Diligence is needed to keep us continually focused and working toward our goals. It avails us of the resources and opportunities at our disposal. It takes vigilance to avoid errors and distractions. Our diligence provides a basis for others to trust us with tasks that may be tricky or complicated. It makes us the go-to person others can count on when important things *must* get done.

Diligence doesn't rely on talent alone, but on the commitment, industry, and perseverance to transform vision into reality.

"Do you see a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings" (Proverbs 22:29).

"Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth" (Proverbs 10:4).

"The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death" (Proverbs 13:14).

Although God promised Solomon riches and wealth, he didn't relax and take it for granted. Solomon knew the secret of success. He was a diligent hard worker. Solomon had this simple understanding: diligence is a

covenant requirement that works together with God to carry out His work. The key is to be sure you're doing what God has told **you** to do.

Psalm 1:3, gives us the key to prospering:

“He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.”

Disobedience and inaction will cause you to fail.

Inaction will cause you to miss the opportunities God has for you. Procrastination is the biggest reason many fail to see their dreams fulfilled. Disobedience will also keep you from achieving success in life. Take into account, delayed obedience is, in fact—*disobedience*.

“How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man” (Proverbs 6:9–11).

Make the most of your opportunities and then watch them multiply. Take control of your time, your spiritual growth, your relationships, your family, and work life. When you seek the Lord first about your schedule, you'll be more productive with less stress. This is being diligent with your time.

CHAPTER TWENTY

BECOME A PART OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

*The church is our spiritual family. For those whose family background was dysfunctional or ungodly in nature, the church becomes the new, healthier family they never experienced. It's our new *Christian* family.*

Christ's church is our fundamental and best family because it's the family of God. Within it are others who are like-minded with us. Just remember that other believers are trying to grow in Christ-likeness, just as you are. Imperfect people need a perfect Savior. We're all works in progress. What better place to be transformed than in the gathering place of believers? The church is our center for worshiping and praising the Lord in community.

What church teaches us.

It goes without saying that our most significant connection is with God. He not only desires this to be so, but has made it possible. As God connects us to Himself, He connects us to each other as well. Our Christianity involves more than a relationship with God. God's people are an intrinsic part of that connection. Sometimes we fail to grasp how deeply we need other people in our lives. God consistently works through other believers to inject His perspective into our spiritual lives.

Staying connected and growing in our relationships within God's family pose challenges, just as other family interactions do. But God has arranged the Christian life in such a way that it's within the family that we're to work out our salvation and maturity. God will use us to draw in others who

also need to be connected to Him. Taking people with you to church to hear the Word of God is the easiest and most loving way to show others that you care for them. What better manifestation of caring than to focus on their spiritual well-being?

“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34–35).

It’s important for us to develop a deep sense of gratitude to God for connecting us with others. Encouragement from fellow believers helps us stay faithful to God. We also share as human beings a common condition: We don’t always see ourselves clearly. God has a plan in place for helping us with that deficit.

“While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life. And Saul’s son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God” (1 Samuel 23:15–16).

Ask yourself:

1. *Who consistently encourages you and helps you find strength in God?*
2. *Whom do you regularly encourage in the Lord?*

Seek a Spirit-filled church.

A church that isn’t ashamed of inviting in the Holy Spirit to do His work is a church that will see greater works from Him. Many churches have squelched the Holy Spirit by failing to give Him permission to work in His own way. Churches that don’t want His presence won’t experience His power. Such churches must manufacture programs and community service projects to appear vital and relevant.

Set aside the programs, and then ask yourself whether the people in the church you are attending possess a faith that is active, felt, and life-changing, with regard to themselves and others? Are the people full of hope for tomorrow, and do they speak faith words about a God who performs miracles, in spite of what society and the economy are doing? Do the people seek more or are they content to sit back and receive a small weekly dose of religion? Are they expressive regarding their worship and love for their Savior?

If there is little joy or passion about Christ and what He offers, perhaps you need to seek another church. Before stepping out, though, ask God to reveal to you where He wants you to be. Be sure to ask whether He has a particular place and ministry in which He wants to use you.

Sometimes His assignment for us might be associated with the very problems we see in our current body. Keep in mind that God often gives us a problem to solve when He wants to use us. God uses each of us in one way or another to affect the world around us.

Place yourself under the teaching of someone who can feed and reveal spiritual truth to you.

Discern whether or not this person has a deeply personal and intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Is this individual speaking from knowledge gained solely at Bible College or seminary? Do they offer up for your edification and enlightenment additional insight the Holy Spirit has given them? Shepherds who actively seek the Lord's help to minister to others will be able to impart truth to you. This gift adds clarification to passages that have previously been difficult for you to understand.

Consider where God may be calling you to use your spiritual gifts and to give your tithe.

If you feel that this particular fellowship is the one Christ is calling you to, consider that this church is the body into which you'll invest your time, your influence (through the use of your spiritual gifts), and your finances. You'll form friendships that will hold you accountable and keep you from sliding away from God and the church. They'll share your burdens and joys, and you can reciprocate by participating in theirs. They'll pray for you and you for them. There's no other fellowship on earth quite like the local gathering of Christ's family, because Jesus ordained it so.

Godly relationships will build you up, while ungodly ones will tear you down. You need to be deliberate about spending enough time around God's people for positive faith building, spiritual nurture, and growth. Attend studies and classes the church offers to increase your Bible knowledge. It's a blessing to be encouraged by others' testimonies of what God has done for them. You can uplift others with your testimony too, even if it doesn't sound spectacular or extraordinary.

As a fringe benefit, speaking aloud what God has done for you, allows your own mind to process the reality that He's indeed answering your prayers and working on your behalf. This increases your own level of faith and trust in God.

Remember that success is a daily event.

Be sure to fill your life with the things that will build you up in your faith and not tear you down. To accomplish this, make reading and hearing the Word your first priority. Make time for prayer, being careful to wait to hear

God speak to you. Worshipping with and within the body of Christ, His church, are habits that will bring joy to your life.

Success is also about our relationships.

Seek out a godly woman to mentor you. Perhaps this woman would welcome the opportunity to join you, either occasionally or more regularly, for coffee after or before a service to give you some insight into growing as a Christian. She can recommend specific Scriptures or Christian books that have helped her grow in her faith. If the two of you are mutually willing, she may feel comfortable pointing out any areas in your life that need transformation with the Holy Spirit's help. It's easy for new Christians to overlook such issues for they're not far enough removed from their past. A wise mentor can point out potential trouble spots that might blindside us.

I recall visiting a pastor one time regarding a difficulty I was having with one of our children. He noted that I seemed angry—an important clue that had eluded me. Oftentimes we need to hear observations like this from someone who has discernment regarding the condition of the human heart. We can then turn over to God those rough edges in us that still need smoothing, inviting Him to mold us into conformity with His image.

Shed your inclination to become offended by correction.

We all need correction from time to time, and that includes those who have walked with God for a long time. King David, despite his God-proclaimed status as a man after God's own heart, was still prone to human failure. Correction can keep us from drifting too far in that direction. In David's case, God appointed the prophet Nathan to introduce insight into David's heart regarding his sinful encounter with Bathsheba. And David,

far from clinging to his royal prerogatives and allowing himself to become outraged at the prophet's boldness, acknowledged his sin and accepted the truth.

The church teaches us about the tithe.

It's in the church that we hear messages about the tithe and its importance in the life of a believer. God blesses us for our obedience in this area, as in all others, but with tithing He says we can test Him in this.

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it" (Malachi 3:10).

There's even a reward in this faithfulness to tithe: "I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the LORD Almighty" (Malachi 3:11).

Simply put the word tithe means "tenth." That tenth part of our resources belongs to God. Our hearts open up to giving when we understand how God blesses us in response to our tithing. Faithful giving is the surest indication that we've mastered our selfishness and restrained our natural desire to hold tightly to what we perceive as "ours." It's proof that we trust God with our money and believe what He says about our resources. It also verifies that we don't cherish in our hearts *a love of money*. A generous and giving heart blesses others and reveals that money has no power over us. When we reach this place of giving and experience the resultant joy, we're living in *freedom*. When we come to believe that God can replenish our resources enough to meet our ongoing needs, we have no need to hold our money close. In fact, we're eager to give it away.

The church teaches us how to be obedient to the Lord.

It's in church that we learn the reasons behind many of God's commands to us. Perhaps you were taught that God is a tyrant who doesn't want you to have more than you absolutely need to get by. Maybe you were taught that physical poverty is a sign of authentic spirituality. Know that this is false teaching. This comes from people who perceive God as a God of deficiency.

In contrast, God gives harvest from your giving; a reality you won't learn if you're in a church that spurns teaching about a God who gives freely and abundantly.

Never forget that we serve an incredibly rich God. A God who has prepared streets of gold on which we'll tread once we get to Heaven. He has prepared a place for us, a *mansion* in Heaven, according to the rendering of Jesus' words in some translations, including the long-cherished KJV.

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2).

Our God, the One who owns the "cattle on a thousand hills" is incredibly generous. He wants to share everything He has with us, His children. Why would financial resources be an exception to the many blessings He longs to lavish upon us?

"For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills" (Psalm 50:10).

If God knows that our heart is where it should be, that we lovingly adore and praise Him and have nothing but gratitude in our heart towards Him, doesn't it follow that He knows money won't hold our heart? When the

trappings of this world cease to captivate us, He can give us plenty, for He knows the generous heart longs to give it away for His purposes.

Boaz serves as a positive example of someone who kept on giving. He was generous with his compassion, with his crops, and later on with his commitment to Ruth in his capacity as her kinsman redeemer (Ruth 4:9–10). A generous spirit drove Boaz to give. He assumed that Ruth would be attracted to a younger man, yet still continued to give freely to her. You can be generous without loving, but you can't love without being generous. Boaz was both generous and loving to Ruth. In turn, his attitude toward his wealth earned her respect, paving the way for her to become his wife.

The apostles, to whom Jesus had passed along his spirit of liberality, provide another positive example for us.

Ananias and Sapphira are a negative example to us about what money can do to the heart of someone who hasn't developed a generous spirit or a right attitude in this regard (Acts 5:1–11).

God revealed to Peter (with a Word of Knowledge) their deception and the condition of their hearts and the apostle called them on it. After selling property, this couple conspired to tell the apostles that they had given the full proceeds to the church. Their sin wasn't *lack of generosity*, but *lack of honesty*. They wanted to be thought of as generous—without paying the price. They clung to their possessions instead of clinging to Jesus. They paid a hefty price for their deceit, which cost them their lives.

We can never out-give God. He'll always have more than we do. He doesn't need to withhold any of His blessings from us, including money, when He knows He has our heart.

God has no *need* of your money; but He does have need of your heart.

Is the Holy Spirit welcome in your church?

God's grace is free—and His grace makes us free too. If you're in a church that isn't teaching about the grace and goodness of God and how He wants to bless you by sharing all He has with you, then perhaps you're in a religious or stingy church. Such a church steals from you spiritually by teaching you *religion*, which emphasizes the laws of God without the grace that comes by faith in Jesus. Inquire of the Holy Spirit to see whether this is where you're to stay.

If you're already in a church that teaches these things, praise God for leading you there. Take the time to thank your pastor and others in the congregation for blessing you.

Become God-conscious, not self-conscious.

Make certain to attend a church that desires to glorify God. If the church is overly sin and rule conscious (legalistic), it will rob you of pleasure and joy. Your relationship with God will suffer as a result as you won't see God as loving or giving. Legalism focuses on rules and the law. There's little joy or grace when our focus is on trying to manage our unruly behavior.

God doesn't want you to focus solely on your sin. He knows that when you do, you'll become shame and guilt-conscious. Shame and guilt will keep you from enjoying or coming to Him freely. He doesn't want you to hold Him at arm's length. Keep your focus on Him and He'll take care of your sin problem!

God wants you to develop confidence in His ability to meet all your needs, and that includes your emotional needs and healing. When we become God-conscious, we become freedom-conscious. Nearly all problems in the Christian life begin with our being overly preoccupied with *self*. Determine today to free yourself by becoming God-conscious.

Go where people love to adore their Creator and openly express their adoration of Him in worship, practice, love, and attitude. Life is too short to spend your time with church people who don't want to abandon themselves to worshipping the "One True God." When you fall madly in love with Jesus and are filled to overflowing with gratitude for what He has done for you, there's no room in your heart for self-consciousness.

David knew better than most how to rejoice before the Lord: He danced in His presence. Non-gracious people will try to make you feel awkward or self-consciousness about extravagant worship. Church for them is also about them, not about their God. Go where people love, as David did, to worship God.

If you attend a loving church whose focus is solely on the pure delight of being satisfied in God, you'll learn to love your church family. Praise God for giving you these Christian brothers and sisters and for inviting you into living membership into the body of Christ.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

LISTEN AND LEARN FROM WISE MENTORS

The difference between failure and success is often determined by whether a person has had a mentor or not. A mentor is anyone who consistently teaches us what we want or need to know. A mentor will help us grow in personal development, knowledge, abilities, character and wisdom. Mentors are those who know what we don't yet know, and have gone where we still need to go. Mentors are therefore essential to our success.

The disciples experienced Jesus as their mentor-in-the-flesh. Joshua learned under Moses, Elisha learned under Elijah, and Timothy learned under Paul.

We have Jesus as our mentor. Observe Christians who've learned the secrets to success, and you'll discover that a high percentage of them were faithfully mentored by someone who was wise and knew the ways of the Lord. We enjoy the additional benefit of having the *written Word* to explain the *Living Word*—the completed Bible that enables Jesus to teach, minister, and disciple more people today than He could in those one-on-one early days. We're also able, through the perspective of history and the Holy Spirit within us, to understand much more than those disciples who walked the dusty roads in Jesus' company.

Mentors are in a unique position to see things from the perspective of an impartial third party. Unlike family members, friends, or even colleagues, a good mentor will tell it like it is, with your best interests at heart and without worrying about what you'll think of their opinions. The best mentors are those who will continuously challenge your ideas and push you to do the same.

A mentor teaches us to teach ourselves. They show us the importance of questioning our own beliefs before someone else does, so that we'll have the appropriate responses in place before we need them.

People have access to the best mentor in the world, yet multitudes continue to spend countless dollars in an unending quest for seminars, self-help books, and teachings by "experts and authorities." It's ironic that nearly everyone in the West has access to a Bible. Jesus' secrets are there in black-and-white for all to read, yet many fail to appreciate the treasure at their disposal. Having the right mentor, as opposed to just any mentor, is vitally important. It goes without saying that, if you have a fool as your mentor you'll pick up their misguided practices.

The Christian can find a way to be practically mentored by asking for wisdom and by reading Solomon's messages on wisdom in the book of Proverbs.

If you have a pastor whose insights you appreciate, make it a point to attend every service you possibly can. Arm yourself with a notebook and pen and take notes. Review those notes afterward to ensure that you can slowly absorb and digest the material. If your church offers tapes or CDs of these messages, purchase or borrow them and listen to them repeatedly. If

you enjoy listening and learning from Christian speakers on TV, obtain any books authored by these individuals and highlight them so that you can return repeatedly to refresh your learning or glean new insights.

Outline any ideas or facts of particular value that come to your attention. Keep a notebook of what you're learning, as well as of what you still want to learn or have questions about. Go to the Internet and glean any answers and insight. When you find someone who explains things well, keep going back for more information. Many popular ministries have excellent websites and teachings. Learn as much as you can from the people you respect and who can teach you well. Some websites offer free Bible study courses. Take advantage of every opportunity you can to gain godly wisdom and you'll have found a way to be mentored. Spend your time well and you'll grow exponentially in wisdom and knowledge.

Jesus mentored the 12 disciples.

He taught them about the Father and the Kingdom of God.

He taught them about Himself and His purpose for coming to earth in human form—to do the will of the Father.

He taught them how to heal the sick and disabled, and how to cast out demons.

He taught them how to share the good news, so that those entangled in oppression and captivity could break free into forgiveness and freedom.

He taught them how to *stand strong* in the face of hardships, obstacles, and persecution.

He taught them how to progress from having little faith to expecting miracles.

He taught them how to feed multitudes with one meager lunch and faith.

He taught and showed them that He would both return to the Father and leave them with another Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who indwells the heart of every believer.

He taught them how to trust in Him for their eternal destiny and destination—the place the Father and Son are together preparing for all who will choose to believe.

He taught them how to believe in that which they hadn't seen.

He taught Peter how to cast aside doubt—enough to walk on water!

He taught them that the words they spoke could move mountains and calm stormy seas.

Let books mentor you.

Develop a library of Christian authors from whom you can learn. Books allow you to go over the information repeatedly until it's understood and internalized. When you assimilate information, it becomes *your* knowledge. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand spiritual truth and to give you the needed insight to understand difficult concepts.

We're privileged to live in the information age. Even born, for such a time as this! God could have chosen for any of us to be born in another

century, but He selected the one during which He'll likely return so that He could include *us* in His great adventure.

God needs many faithful, obedient workers to bring in the coming harvest. Many will be born again during these last days. But if there's a shortage of workers to share the good news, who'll tell them about Jesus and the change He can bring into their lives?

The Bible is the greatest mentoring tool available to you. The words of wisdom contained in it will prepare you to effectively share this good news with others.

Let Solomon be your wise mentor.

The Holy Spirit gives wisdom to those who read the book of Proverbs and ask for it. Solomon also presents the flip side of wisdom, which he calls folly or foolishness. Foolishness has its own consequences. For those who choose the foolish things of this world, the outcome can be nothing but tragic—an outcome that includes immense regret; the potential loss of loved ones, friends, career, wealth, peace, health, rest, and a glorious eternity.

We can take a good look at Solomon's later life and glean a different kind of wisdom. He teaches us what to avoid, based on his decline and negative example.

If people in the developed world today remain ignorant, we can attribute this only to their own choosing. Wisdom doesn't require higher education. In fact, God delights in choosing simple people to confound the wise.

“But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him. It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord’” (1 Corinthians 1:27–31).

God purposefully chooses people with no outstanding skills or credentials; people who understand fully their need to depend on Him for any power and anointing they may have. God uses humble and trusting people in powerful ways.

Seek wisdom and she will mentor you.

We’re to seek wisdom, for as Solomon advised, it’s the principal thing. Recognize your need and ask for it by name. Like him, you’ll be certain to receive. There’s no need to make it hard. The promise isn’t conditional. God wants us to seek *His* wisdom, for He longs to bless and increase us when we operate within its parameters. Listen to His simple invitation from James 1:5:

“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.”

You’ll become wise indeed if you read and reflect upon a chapter of Proverbs each day (there are 31). The Holy Spirit, the written Word, and the book of Proverbs contain the mentoring you need.

In the words of Solomon in Proverbs 1:5, “Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

WELCOME CORRECTION

Fools are foolish precisely because they choose not to receive or benefit from correction. King Solomon's advice was to avoid being in their company lest their habits and attitudes rub off on us. In other words, we're to pick our friends carefully!

"For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them; but whoever listens to [wisdom] will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster" (Proverbs 1:32–33).

"The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death" (Proverbs 13:14).

Already in the first chapter of Proverbs we learn about the foolish person. We're told that the fool despises wisdom and instruction. Additionally, we're given some insight into being a simpleton. Verse 4 indicates that the simple need prudence and will be killed by their insistence on turning away from it. Webster's Dictionary describes *prudence* as: "the ability to govern and discipline oneself by the use of reason." As Proverbs 13:14 reminds us: The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life that keeps him from death. And the consequences for being a fool or a simpleton lead to death.

Avoid foolish people.

Successful businesses take great care to avoid hiring foolish people. It comes as no surprise that they're always on the hunt for the brightest and

most creative people. They understand that those blessed with ingenuity and problem-solving abilities will bring profit to their organization. The same is true in the arena of sports. Recruiters go after the very best, never the mediocre. They want winners, because winners make them a winner. Winners add value to any team they join.

Ask yourself:

Do I bring value to my employer? Am I a problem-solver or a problem-creator? Would the company be at a loss without my contribution? If you operate with more wisdom than anyone else in the company and are a gifted and positive contributor, the answer to these questions will, if your organization is also wise, be yes. A Holy Spirit led person will possess a wisdom that other good people do not. Additionally, godly, solid character goes beyond giftedness. Today's gifted people (by worldly standards) usually don't possess the character, honesty, and integrity to keep them in their positions of influence for long. It takes more than giftedness to remain on top. Sound character will take you beyond your giftedness.

On a personal level you should be asking: *Do I bring value to my spouse, to my children, to my extended family and friends, to my church family, and to my neighbors?*

Successful people understand that they can progress only as far as they're willing to learn and accept correction. They understand that when they're no longer teachable, they stop adding value. When we cease learning, we cease growing. In fact, we shrivel!

This isn't based on aptitude, but on attitude. Attitude has everything to do with adding value to others. Know-it-alls believe they already have the

answers. They believe they're the experts who should be enlightening others based on their knowledge. Those who are wise understand that no one can ever know it all. There's no end to our potential to learn and grow.

Proverbs 9:7–12 reveals the value of correction in our lives:

Verse 7: "If you correct conceited people, you will only be insulted."

Verse 8: "Never correct conceited people; they will hate you for it. However, if you correct the wise, they will respect you."

Verse 9: "Anything you say to the wise will make them wiser. Whatever you tell the righteous will add to their knowledge."

Verse 10: "To be wise you must first have reverence for the LORD. If you know the Holy One, you have understanding."

Verse 11: "Wisdom will add years to your life."

Verse 12: "You are the one who will profit if you have wisdom, and if you reject it, you are the one who will suffer."

The wise continually look for opportunities to improve themselves through instruction and learning. In fact, people who are persistently learning often become acutely aware of what they *don't know*.

Wisdom begins with correction.

Wisdom begins with correction. Errors in thinking must be exposed. Mistakes must be admitted if we're to avoid them in the future. Think back over your life. *Who has influenced you the most? Taught you the most?* Most likely, it was the one who *corrected* you the most.

There will always be people who know more than you do. Listen to them and accept their instruction and correction—it will be invaluable to you.

Learning to listen well, as opposed to talking incessantly when you're around people who are more knowledgeable than you is a wisdom principle to which successful people hold fast.

Regard correction.

Hell is for those who couldn't, or wouldn't be corrected. Heaven, on the other hand, is full of people who humbly accepted correction and direction from their Creator.

God isn't present in hell. The absence of His presence and goodness is what makes it *hell*. Prisons are full of men and women who refused to tolerate correction in their lives. They're reaping what their foolishness sowed for them. Wise people not only heed correction, but actively seek it.

Invest in yourself by listening and learning.

Solomon taught that successful living means investing in ourselves. Carefully studying the book of Proverbs to change your life is one way of doing just that. By studying its wise teachings, you are in effect front-loading your life, insuring yourself against unexpected losses in the future.

Solomon understood that making wise choices while we're still young, will impact the rest of our life and prevent a host of problems later on. It's always easier to make changes and to change course if needed, by receiving correction in the first place.

"Due diligence" is a term often used in business or real estate transactions. There are just some things we need to know *before* we're fully

engaged and our capital (money, time, energy, etc.) is already spent. Learn to love correction and you'll save yourself from personal and financial loss.

A defensive attitude toward discipline is both foolish and immature. We've all been chastened and learned valuable lessons as a result. In fact, we all need continual course corrections to stay on track. Athletes understand both correction and persistent practice. What are they concerned about correcting? Imperfect actions and methods. They're reaching for perfection and that requires discipline, obsession, and mastery, until doing it right becomes *automatic*.

Most of us learn as much, or more, from our mistakes as we do from our successes. Correction teaches us what to leave behind so we can be more productive and effective in the future.

Biblical advice regarding correction.

“My son, do not despise the LORD’s *discipline* and do not resent His rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those He loves, as a father the son He delights in” (Proverbs 3:11–12).

“A fool spurns his father’s *discipline*, but whoever heeds *correction* shows prudence” (Proverbs 15:5).

“And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: ‘My son, *do not make light of* the Lord’s *discipline*, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord *disciplines* those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son.’ Endure hardship as *discipline*; *God is treating you as sons*. For what son is not *disciplined* by his father? If you are not *disciplined* (and everyone undergoes *discipline*), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons” (Hebrews 12:5–8).

“Moreover, we have all had human fathers who *disciplined* us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers *disciplined* us for a little while as they thought best; but God *disciplines* us for our good, that we may *share in his holiness*. No *discipline* seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on,

however, it produces a *harvest of righteousness* and *peace* for those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:9–11).

“Blessed is the man *whom God corrects*; so do not despise the *discipline* of the Almighty. For He wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal” (Job 5:17–18).

“But when God does judge us, He *disciplines* us as His own sons, that we may not be involved in the general condemnation of the world” (1 Corinthians 11:32).

In the words of Jesus, “Those whom I love I rebuke and *discipline*. So be earnest, and repent” (Revelation 3:19).

Wisdom from Proverbs.

Proverbs 9:9-12:

Verse 9: “Anything you say to the wise will make them wiser. Whatever you tell the righteous will add to their knowledge.”

Verse 10: “To be wise you must first have reverence for the LORD. If you know the Holy one, you have understanding.”

Verse 11: “Wisdom will add years to your life.”

Verse 12: “You are the one who will profit if you have wisdom, and if you reject it you are the one who will suffer.”

Proverbs 10:8–27:

Verse 8: “Sensible people accept good advice. People who talk foolishly will come to ruin.”

Verse 14: “The wise get all the knowledge they can, but when fools speak, trouble is not far off.”

Verse 17: “People who listen when they are corrected will live, but those who will not admit that they are wrong are in danger.”

Verse 22: “It is the LORD’s blessing that makes you wealthy. Hard work can make you no richer.”

Verse 27: “Obey the LORD and you will live longer.”

Proverbs 13:9–20:

Verse 9: “The light of the righteous shines brightly, but the lamp of the wicked is snuffed out.”

Verse 13: “He who scorns instruction will pay for it, but he who respects a command is rewarded.”

Verse 14: “The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, turning a man from the snares of death.”

Verse 15: “Good understanding wins favor, but the way of the unfaithful is hard.”

Proverbs 13:16, 20:

Verse 16: “Every prudent man acts out of knowledge, but a fool exposes his folly.”

Verse 20: “He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.”

Discipline as a mark of love.

A marriage is blessed when both parties are humble before the Lord and have in their possession wisdom. Humility requires a teachable spirit. Someone who’s not teachable, but rather defensive, doesn’t possess wisdom. Wisdom knows how to make peace and how to love another.

Many of us lack all the qualities we would like to possess. Being open to God’s correction can add the very character traits we desire. When God disciplines us: we’ll receive more, be capable of more, influence more, and accomplish more. His aim is to bring us back into the fold when we stray. He’s keeping us on target so we don’t abandon what He has stored up for us.

He desires to give us a dream, *His* dream on our behalf, but we can't realize it unless we're disciplined enough to receive it and carry it out with care. He won't give dreams to those who squander their opportunities or to those who remain foolish and obstinate.

God reveals to us through His discipline, that He loves us and wants us to become all that we can be—through Him. He'll make every attempt to channel our energy and attention in the right direction. As parents, we do the same, as we use all available means of discipline to turn our children's unacceptable behavior around. When one method doesn't work, we try another.

A legacy of blessing.

Discipline and correction aren't *punishment*. Punishment comes only after repeated attempts at correction have been snubbed. It's the last resort, when all else has failed.

At any given time our attitude toward discipline can decide our future. By willingly accepting it, we reap a rich, rewarding life characterized by greater success, increased opportunities, superior blessings, and the favor of God.

These benefits are also our legacy to our children, as they will reap rewards from our disciplined life. You bring blessings instead of curses to the generations to follow by your attitude toward God's chastening today. Rebelliousness is transferable from one generation to another, just as humility and a love for God are. God is good to those whose fathers have accepted discipline and honored Him with their lives.

CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

DETERMINE TO BE AN OVERCOMER IN THIS LIFE

Learning to overcome this world will be the hardest thing you'll accomplish in your lifetime. If you want to attain any lifelong goals and rewards, it's essential to learn and then master its basic skills. There's an old, favorite hymn with the title, "When We All Get to Heaven" by Eliza E. Hewitt, pub.1898, with a refrain that says it well.

Sing the wondrous love of Jesus, Sing His mercy and His grace;

In the mansions bright and blessed He'll prepare for us a place.

Refrain:

***When we all get to Heaven,
What a day of rejoicing that will be!
When we all see Jesus,
We'll sing and shout the victory!***

While we walk the pilgrim pathway, Clouds will overspread the sky;

But when trav'ling days are over, Not a shadow, not a sigh.

Let us then be true and faithful, Trusting, serving every day;

Just one glimpse of Him in glory Will the toils of life repay.

*Onward to the prize before us! Soon His beauty we'll behold;
Soon the pearly gates will open; We shall tread the streets of gold.*

It **will** be worth it **ALL** when we see Jesus! As the day draws nearer for Christ's return, it will be increasingly difficult to live for Him. But believers aren't to lose heart. While many Christians in the past have faced hardships, ridicule, and persecution for the sake of Christ, the future will be another story.

As the future becomes less certain for those who don't know Christ or operate within the parameters of His wisdom—fear will be their ever-present companion. We see signs of this happening already. As people become more apprehensive about what lies ahead, they also open their hearts more and more to solutions. As believers, we need to demonstrate to those around us that life can still be lived with joy and peace, even in the midst of anxious times.

In the words of Jesus, as recorded in John 16:33,

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

As *overcomers* in our own right, we stand out in a nervous and frightened world. Others are taking note that despite the troubled times we're at peace and enjoying blessings.

"You will keep in perfect peace Him whose mind is steadfast, because He trusts in you" (Isaiah 26:3).

What does it mean to overcome, and how will this set us apart?

Let's consider the word **overcomer** in its biblical context:

“To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations,” says Jesus in Revelation 2:26.

Strong's Concordance defines *overcoming* as: conquering, prevailing, or gaining the victory. Webster's Dictionary describes the term as: conquering, vanquishing, subduing, overcoming in battle, surmounting, or getting the better of. An overcomer is a believer who maintains faith in Jesus to the end. The person who resists the evil one overcomes the world, the flesh, and gains victory over sin.

What needs to be conquered to overcome and win in this world?

Plainly and simply put **sin**. As Christians, we're to settle for nothing less than victory. The blood of Jesus makes continuous provision and offers unrelenting power for overcoming sin in the believer's life. If demons are making it more difficult for us to overcome sin, the Bible instructs us to take authority over the enemy. Jesus gave us everything we need to overcome sin. When we lose a battle, it's because we were under prepared, under informed, or unwilling to learn. The manual is there for our use, but we *must* do our part in the process. We've been given the task of overcoming.

Genesis 4:7 puts it like this: “If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.”

And Paul enjoins Christians in Galatians 5:16–17, “So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.”

And again in Ephesians 4:22–24, “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

You’ve been inducted into God’s army.

Think of a young man or woman recently inducted into the military. First step in the process of change: basic training. The mindset of the individual has to be changed first. The person must be transformed from a civilian to a soldier. An in-depth process is required to transform a civilian into a disciplined, highly-trained military professional who is committed and ready to face war. This process is essential. No military mission can be accomplished unless the soldiers have been thoroughly trained and are conformed to the standards of their mission. Throughout the process, numerous tests are used as markers along the path to completion of that conforming process. In the end there’s also a final exam.

If an inductee can’t pass the tests administered, that recruit is considered unsuitable for the military. If, on the other hand, he or she is accepted, those same standards must be continually met, as monitored by regular physical and technical testing. If a soldier desires a long career in the military, he or she will have to expect and participate in continuing education (testing of a different sort) throughout their career, ensuring that advancements in rank and position are met. Rank is earned based upon an individual’s perceived potential. Then training that follows is intended to equip, so that performance standards may be met or exceeded.

Our Christian lives are much the same. We’re inducted into the army of God upon receiving salvation. Our minds must become conformed to this

new life of being a Christ-follower. As part of this process our old patterns of thinking and living must be stripped away.

The more relaxed civilian lifestyle doesn't fit the rigorous demands for fitness and excellence in the military. To excel in the Armed Forces, one must learn to deny self, become comrade-aware, and unquestioningly follow the orders of a superior. Basic training is about eradicating the undisciplined lifestyle of the recruits, to transform them into fit and obedient soldiers. The system is orderly and purposeful. The purpose for us here in the United States is preparation for war to defend the freedom of America.

The training presupposes victory. Failure is never an option; therefore all training is serious business. There's no room for mediocrity in the military—only for excellence as lives are at stake. Honor, integrity, fitness, excellence, and exceptional training and preparedness are endlessly pursued and must be achieved. The objective of a soldier is to function as a *warrior*.

If new Christians were trained in a similar manner, they would stand a greater chance of achieving victory in their daily Christian walk. The truth is, though, that most of the time our training is dependent on ourselves. If we don't take seriously the need for training and for transformation of our minds into the likeness of our superior, Jesus Christ, we won't be prepared to win the battle.

It's only after we've been fully transformed and prepared for every enemy tactic, that we're qualified to march into victory. Victory is sweet—and defeat is both humbling and devastating. Tolerate no defeat in your life.

You're God's soldier, and He's provided the best training on earth to ensure your success.

Prepare to recognize your enemy, Satan.

Christians frequently fail in their Christ-transformation, because they're underprepared and undertrained for identifying the enemy and his tactics. They're often totally unaware that their daily lives are being lived out in the midst of a battle zone. The enemy's self-assigned goal is to completely deceive the *whole world*. Yet we as Christians too often go carelessly about our day without the least hint of awareness that a sniper is lurking around the corner to take us out. We haven't been fully prepared for victory, so defeat comes easily and naturally to us. We not only don't know enough to win, we don't even realize we're under attack. We neither see, nor hear the enemy.

It requires *Spirit training* for us to become alert to what others miss—the presence of our adversary. The responsibility for our training is our own. So seek out the Holy Spirit. He's the One who can equip you with the tools you'll need to identify and defeat your ardent foe.

God wants to promote you to your next rank.

God has an assignment for you and wants you prepared for it ahead of time. He wants to advance you in rank, but it's up to you to show Him you have the potential. It's up to you to reach for fitness and excellence, honor and integrity, or you'll delay further promotions and assignments. Those who seek excellence are the ones God entrusts with positions of leadership. We lead by example. *Overcoming* is the example for the Christian.

Conforming to the world once we profess to belong to Christ reveals that we didn't make it through boot camp. If this is your story, ask God to allow you to retake the test. He's more than willing to extend that grace. He'll teach you to be an effective warrior if you'll show Him you're willing and teachable.

In the Old Testament we have the example of the Israelites. As often as not they failed to overcome, sinning grievously against the Lord with no timely repentance. God's patience was exceptional, but it wasn't endless:

"The LORD replied to Moses, 'Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book'" (Exodus 32:33).

But because God *commands* us to overcome, He also provides us with the equipment and ability to do so.

"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things *revealed* belong to us and to our sons forever" (Deuteronomy 29:29).

We must learn to overcome our old sin nature.

It's time for self-evaluation. It's time to take inventory of your past life stipulating what needs to be left behind. You can only embrace a new life as a *warrior* for God. It's time to accept your status as a new recruit—able and willing to start and complete basic training.

Our goal: *transformation*. We do this by overcoming *self*. Self-deception, self-righteousness, self-will, selfishness, self-indulgence, self-aggrandizement, and self-pity. In other words, it's time that we begin to overcome evil with good; to be peacemakers, instead of peace breakers; distinctive, rather than vindictive; dispensers of grace, as opposed to moral judges.

Jesus is our example.

Jesus gave us the example on the cross by overcoming death and asking the Father to forgive His oppressors, who, in His gracious words, didn't know what they were doing. Jesus showed us in the wilderness how to overcome Satan's temptations, by answering Satan in each instance with words straight from the mouth of God. Our Lord was able to overcome in this effective way because, as the Living Word, He knew and understood the Father's Word.

Quoting Scripture to Satan puts him to flight.

We're also called to triumph over temptation by knowing and using the Word as our shield. Satan won't stick around someone who quotes the Word back to him, or uses the name of Jesus. He hates that Word, as he does everything God and His Kingdom stand for. Scripture is the best weapon in our arsenal to defeating Satan.

There are some realities about the enemy and about spiritual warfare that we must know. If we know nothing other than how Jesus fought off Satan, we have everything we need to overcome and win in this life. Satan can't bring himself to hang around when we quote the Word back to Him in response to his temptations. We have nothing to fear from him. He is defeated, but still a resentful foe, doing all he can to overcome us in combat during the limited time he has left.

Know the Word and you've armed yourself against Him. Learning how to defeat the foe is equivalent to being promoted in rank; you gained a new skill level and learned the main tactic of war—***defeat your foe!***

For us to overcome our enemy we must surmount every obstacle that threatens to stand in our way. God and His Word are infinitely more powerful than Satan. Both God and Satan are well aware of Satan's outcome and destiny—the lake of fire. Don't be tricked into believing he has any power beyond the limited power God has permitted him. God can snuff out Satan at any time, but the fact is that the devil, however unwittingly, is serving God's purposes.

What's God's purpose for using Satan?

That He would even use evil for His sovereign purposes.

“The Lord has made all for Himself, Yes, even the wicked for the day of doom” (Proverbs 16:4).

To bring about His eternal justice in His time.

“The Lord of hosts has purposed it, to bring to dishonor the pride of all [human] glory, to bring into contempt all the honorable of the earth” (Isaiah 23:9).

That the Creator of the Universe purposed before the foundation of the world that Jesus Christ be preeminent.

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in Heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things [Christ] may have the preeminence” (Colossians 1:15-18).

That we would acknowledge our natural depravity and trust Him as our only hope.

“...we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in

mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ..." (Ephesians 2:3-4).

"Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy, to deliver their soul from death....our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help and our shield" (Psalm 33:14-19).

To destroy the works of the devil.

"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

That people would repent and turn from their darkness to the Light, which is Jesus.

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, **every** one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." (Acts 2:38-39).

That we witness to His absolute, irrevocable sovereignty. "Then His yoke shall be removed from them....This is the purpose that is purposed against the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?" (Isaiah 14:24-27).

God, not Satan, is in control—so trust in God and tune out Satan. *You* have greater weapons than Satan because you wield *unlimited* power through Christ who strengthens you. You possess everything Jesus does. We lose when we're not aware of what we possess through Jesus. Jesus has given us weaponry to win every battle, but we must educate ourselves regarding His methods.

"...for waging war you need guidance, and for victory many advisers" (Proverbs 24:6).

"Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" (Ephesians 6:11).

Stand firm.

How do we go about standing firm? How do we finish well? The answer is simple, but it isn't easy. We stand firm by making a choice every day to live for God and not ourselves. We stand firm when we spend time each day immersed in God's Word, rather than the trivia others engage in. We stand firm by praying, by fellowshiping regularly with other believers, and by being ever-watchful so as not to fall into temptation.

As Jesus put it, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak" (Mark 14:38).

"He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8).

Satan's reasons for doing what he does.

To discredit God.

To deceive the whole world.

To blind as many as possible to the truth.

To cast slanderous remarks and lies on the Word of God.

To adulterate God's salvation plan by suggesting that Jesus' sacrifice accounts for only *a part of* our salvation—in other words, by *adding* good works to the equation.

We must not allow the enemy to pull us away from our devotion to God or from reaching our intended purpose in Christ. More will fall away during these end times than ever before simply by neglecting to stay alert

and watch for Christ's sure return. Jesus Himself warns us that in the last days,

“Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12).

Paul's rhetorical questions in Romans 8:35 and 37 thrill us with hope, provided we're willing to stand firm:

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”

Following Jesus' example we need to overcome evil with good and we do that by being an overcomer. We show others how to overcome by our example to them. Overcoming evil with good is the only strategy that works. The only power that can transform evil is the transforming power of Jesus' redemptive love.

Jesus' example of overcoming—“It is finished!”

When Jesus uttered from the cross those three simple words “It is finished,” He was signifying that He had accomplished the task the Father had assigned Him—to overcome death and evil in this world. Through His obedience to the Father, and His resistance to Satan and the religious evildoers, He beat them at their own game.

God made man for Himself, and they (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) want nothing more than for us to make our home with them now, and for all eternity. God's will calls for the redemption of people, back to Himself.

Our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ allows us to partake in His righteousness, bridging the chasm of our sin that had for so long separated

us from God. In accomplishing this for us on the cross, Jesus revealed His true nature and intent for humanity; to love us unconditionally.

Jesus confronted the epitome of evil; in triumphing over death and sin, He successfully “finished” His assignment. Since our Savior has already defeated the forces of evil, why should we tolerate ourselves to feel threatened by them?

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21).

This call constitutes the highest level to which we as Christians are to ascend.

We do this when we overcome...

The flesh: When you’re tempted with the lust of the flesh, remember the word *flight*. It’s interesting that God doesn’t tell us to *fight* this kind of temptation. Instead, He tells us to turn tail and run for all we’re worth! (1 Corinthians 6:18; 10:14; 1 Timothy 6:9–11; and 2 Timothy 2:22).

Joseph did just that when Potiphar’s wife approached him in lust. David, on the other hand, lingered too long watching Bathsheba bathe on the rooftop, with the result that his temptation got the better of him. The result went far beyond adultery with another man’s wife. It led to the murder of her husband and negatively affected the course of David’s family life from that point on. One sin leads to another, and then to another, especially when we stumble all over ourselves in complicated and deceptive cover-ups.

Temptation invariably leads us down a path of destruction. It’s Satan’s bait, after all, and he isn’t about to waste it. When we overcome, we recognize his tactics, seeing the bait for what it is and refusing to bite.

“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, ‘The two will become one flesh.’ But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with Him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:15–20).

“Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?” (Proverbs 6:27).

The world: *How do you and I overcome the world?* The operative word here is faith in our God, since we belong to Him.

“For whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4).

“I do not trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory; but you give us victory over our enemies, you put our adversaries to shame. In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name forever” (Psalm 44:6–8).

“Pray that you will not fall into temptation” (Luke 22:40).

Notice that we aren’t told to fight the world, but to *put our faith in God*. Faith makes God real to us. It enhances our understanding of the power He has to protect us from the evil that is so rampant in our world. Loving God, instead of the world, is our ultimate protection from the world.

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

“But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

“For the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory” (Deuteronomy 20:4).

The devil: Unlike the situation with the “flesh” (sexual temptation), the key word in overcoming the devil is *fight*.

James 4:7 calls on us to, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Notice what James doesn’t say “Flee from the devil, and he will leave you alone.” First, we *submit* to God, and then we *resist* the devil—not in our own strength but in God’s. We need to concede that the devil isn’t going to leave us alone until we *resist him* in the Lord Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:11).

The devil cares nothing for you, your resolutions, or your good intentions. Nor does he fear you. What he does mortally fear is the blood of Jesus. So when he comes calling for you, show him Jesus. Get on the offensive. Tell Satan that “Scripture says _____” (repeat back to him a pertinent quote from God’s Word) and inform him that, “By the blood of Jesus, I am victorious over you. You have no hold on me, so *BE GONE*, in the name of Jesus.”

We fight the devil by refusing to entertain him and by refusing to give him our time and attention. Treat him as the pest he is. Since our weapon is the Word of God, we have no need to speak to him at all, other than simply to send him packing by saying: “Get behind me Satan, in the name of Jesus.”

When we plead the blood and name of Jesus we defeat Satan on the spot. Use it continually if need be, until he gets the message and flees from you.

Don't ever give him an inroad to speak to you. Rebuke him immediately!

"I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you" (Luke 10:19).

"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might" (Ephesians 6:10).

Avoid seeking self-sufficiency.

Don't get caught up in the desire to become self-sufficient to the point that you think you don't need God to supply your needs. Regardless of our health, wealth, or abilities, or lack thereof, God wants us as His people to be ever looking to Him to supply our needs. That includes our relationships, finances, health, and the ability to prosper in everything that we do.

God frowns on our desire to be self-sufficient as it keeps us from receiving from Him. Many Christians are continually worried as the world is, because they fail to understand this foundational wisdom principle.

"But *remember* the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms His covenant, which He swore to your forefathers, as it is today" (Deuteronomy 8:18).

At no other time in history have Christians lived in such an exciting time as we do as we see prophecy unfold before our very eyes and at an ever-increasing pace. God is busy setting up His end-times transition. But many must still be brought into the kingdom of God before it comes to its final, glorious fulfillment.

We must escalate our efforts to tell all nations the good news. Overcomers will have a part in bringing sinners into the kingdom of God as

other believers will have fallen for deception and be useless for the harvest. Overcomers have determined to fight evil until the end and they will reap their just reward. Keeping others from experiencing eternal damnation by bringing them to a saving knowledge of Christ is a glorious reward indeed.

Improve your preparedness.

God will need many workers to bring in the end-time harvest. Only those who have become knowledgeable about Satan's ways, have learned to escape them, and have overcome in spite of them, are in a position to be used for the Kingdom. Those caught off guard, wallowing in their own sin, addiction, and waste, will be caught by surprise. They won't be ready to enter with the bridegroom (Jesus) when He returns for His own.

Getting ready requires thinking ahead and recognizing what we'll need. Create a list or system for yourself that will help you recognize any habits or practices that might be tripping you up. Leave them behind; be determined and deliberate in your preparedness so that God can use you immediately when He needs to. Learn from your past mistakes. Begin now to learn everything you can about God and *His* ways. Know His Word. You'll be a great help to others as you've spent the time readying yourself for what lies ahead.

Those who've prepared will know the excitement and satisfaction of having been born for such a time as this. Many feel assured that these present generations constitute God's chosen generation to participate and witness in these last days.

We're expected to live longer than any previous generation in our modern age, for a purpose. Modern technology is in place to advance the

kingdom. This, we can surmise, is also a part of God's master plan. It's vital that we grasp the bigger picture of what God is doing to avoid squandering our lives. When we get on board with God's plan, we can be assured He'll get on board with ours.

Never give in or give up.

Unless we purpose in our heart to be an overcomer, we may be tempted midway through life, when the going gets really tough, to throw in the towel. Life has a way of taking sudden turns, sometimes for the worse. We need to be prepared to prevent being blindsided.

We have everything to gain by refusing to give up. Perseverance is rare, because it requires great diligence and strength to keep on, keeping on. Take heart, recognizing that you don't need to accomplish this on your own. Jesus gives us the strength we need to endure. Your responsibility is to pursue Jesus with all your love and devotion. If you take care of your devotion to Him, He promises to care for you.

When you catch yourself becoming discouraged, go back over the Scriptures that speak of God's promises to you and the future you will inherit. For those who stand firm and remain faithful to the end, great reward will come.

Be encouraged. Our light and momentary trials will seem like nothing when we get to join Jesus in the air and enter the final phase of eternity with Him, the Lover of our souls.

"Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Corinthians 4:16–17).

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

DON'T LET PRIDE KEEP YOU FROM ACCEPTING HELP

Did you know that on average ten people drown in the U.S. every day? If you've ever witnessed a drowning rescue captured for the news, you've observed some of the various methods used to get people a life preserver. Sometimes it comes by helicopter and at other times someone close by throws the preserver toward the struggling person. The individual being rescued can either put on the ring or simply cling to it to stay afloat until pulled to safety.

Nearly all people recognize a life preserver as a tool for preventing a person from drowning. Only a fool would refuse this tool in a crisis situation in the water. A sensible person, recognizing the life preserver as a tool for their "salvation," will grab on and cling to it as though their life depended on it—which it does.

Most people notice when a person is drowning. But not as many sense when a person is going under in life. What's more, too few identify when they themselves are sinking until it's too late. The key to saving a person from drowning is to see early enough that they're in trouble and get to them before it's too late. When someone is struggling to breathe, they're usually unable to yell for help. It's great to have people around us who are informed, alert, and able to help, but what if we feel as though *we're* the one drowning and there's no one around to hear *our* feeble cry.

First of all, accept that you're in danger of drowning and scream for help. You do this by freely admitting your condition. Second, recognize that there are life preservers all around you. Be willing to grope for one, and then grab on for dear life. God supplies us with capable people who can offer assistance.

If you need help, set aside your pride enough to accept whatever help is available and offered. Even when friends and family are throwing life preservers in your direction, if you yourself fail to acknowledge that you're in need of one, you may decline to grab on. You may even resent those who are trying to help.

Face the fact that you may need some help.

Many people are in denial about their need of rescue. Countless families have tried intervention programs, but if the person in need of help doesn't accept his or her condition, or doesn't wish to get better, there's little anyone else can do. A life preserver in and of itself can't save you unless you grab hold.

We live in a fallen world and we have limited abilities and insight into how we can overcome the disastrous forces that come against us. Without Christ, we're left to our own interpretation of how to live. Very often we get it wrong. We can help our self only by knowing Christ personally. He's the life preserver who saves us. Once saved, He teaches us how to live.

The following Scripture paraphrases summarize for us what we have in Christ, who is our life preserver:

"I have been made complete in Christ" (Colossians 2:10).

“I have been buried, raised, and made alive with Christ” (Colossians 2:12, 13).

“I died and have been raised up with Christ. My life is now hidden with Christ in God. Christ is now my life” (Colossians 3:1–4).

“I have been given a spirit of power and self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5).

“I have been saved and set apart; this is God’s doing” (2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5).

“Because I am sanctified and am one with the Sanctifier, He isn’t ashamed to call me His brother [or sister]” (Hebrews 2:11).

“I have the right to come boldly before the throne of God, where I’ll find mercy and grace to help me in my time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

“I have been given exceedingly great and precious promises by God, by which I am a partaker of God’s divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

“I have been made alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:5).

“I have been raised up and seated with Christ in Heaven” (Ephesians 2:6).

“I have direct access to God through the Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 2:18).

“I may approach God with boldness, freedom, and confidence” (Ephesians 3:12).

“Christ Himself is in *me*” (Colossians 1:27).

“I am firmly rooted in Christ and am now being built up in Him” (Colossians 2:7).

God expects us to ask Him for help. Before we can do so, we need to believe that He exists and understand why He desires to be a part of our life.

God allows us to descend to the depths of despair, but only so that we’ll look beyond ourselves and our perceived ability to provide for our own needs. When we finally acknowledge that we don’t have all the answers to life, do we see Jesus there in our path waiting for us to call upon Him.

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5).

“I have been spiritually circumcised. My old, unregenerate nature has been removed” (Colossians 2:11).

“I have been rescued from the domain of Satan’s rule and transferred into the Kingdom of Christ” (Colossians 1:13).

“I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins. The debt against me has been cancelled” (Colossians 1:14; 1 John 1:9).

Isolation from others can be a trap that leads to failure.

Even brilliant people can possess very limited practical knowledge and they may lack the necessary social skills and common sense for successful daily living. *So are they really brilliant?* Perhaps in their area of expertise, humanly speaking they are. But, God isn’t looking for people of exceptional intellect, for far too often they’re caught up in their own sense of ability and importance.

If you’re going to overcome the crushing disappointments of life you must admit that you won’t be able to do it alone. All successful leaders know that they didn’t reach the top solely by their own efforts. Good leaders identify when they’re in over their heads. They conquer their pride and seek the expertise of others who know more about a particular area than they do.

Going solo will leave you without critical information you need to prevail. What you don’t know, in other words, will cause your downfall. You may have excellent information, but it’s what you *don’t know* that will cause you problems. You already know what you know. What you don’t know is—well...what you don’t know yet, or need to know. Ignorance is

deadly. What we don't know about the enemy and the darkness he brings is fatal.

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8).

Reach out and honor those who have come along side you to show you what you don't yet know.

The ultimate go-to person.

God expects us to run to Him when we need help and don't know what to do. In reality, He wants us to run to Him even when we don't need help but simply desire His companionship. He always has more information, more knowledge, more wisdom, and more expertise than we do. He loves nothing better than to share it with us. The requirement: Only those who *recognize* what He possesses, *want* it for themselves, and *ask* for it will receive.

It makes sense that God, the Creator of all things, understands how *everything* works. When we go to God to find the answers we're in need of, He sheds light on situations that have previously perplexed us. We begin to *see* what we couldn't perceive before. We come up with answers we didn't *possess* before. We know how to *proceed* wisely in a given situation. Getting the answers to life's problems is just one benefit of asking and receiving of Him.

God loves to honor those who reach for Him.

God rewards “reachers.” Reachers receive refuge when they don't know where to turn. He provides wisdom when it's asked for. He gives

supernatural knowledge when the need arises to be informed about a coming event. He helps us determine when to step forward in faith and when to back up and wait for further instructions.

He knows *everything*, so we're foolish to go about our lives, with all the uncertainty in this world, without His guidance. Learn to trust the Holy Spirit's leading. Your instincts will tell you when to seek the interpretation He provides.

When you need a life preserver: Yell, *Lord Help Me!* There's never any need to hold back in pride. God expects us to come to Him to avoid confusion. He alone provides us with the spiritual direction we need.

As humans we're at the same time physical, emotional, and spiritual. If we concentrate on only two aspects of our being, the physical and the emotional, we'll be unbalanced. A three-legged stool can't stand on two legs. It's time to focus on your spiritual direction.

Get rid of any self-sufficiency you may have embraced in the past and call on God to help you. Self-sufficiency is making a god of yourself, (*I can do it*) and it can lead to a stronghold of pride in our life. God never reneges on his offer to help those who ask for help from Him. He alone provides hope to the hopeless. We need only *remember* to ask Him.

Proverbs 3:5-6. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."

Psalm 55:22, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and He will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be moved."

1 Peter 5:7, "Casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you."

Hebrews 13:6, “So we can confidently say, “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?”

Reach out for God’s protection—His life preserver to you.

If you sense you’re drowning and feel hopeless about the future, don’t let Satan steal from you by telling you God doesn’t want to hear from a sinner like you. God loves sinners. We’re ALL sinners, every one of us. Those that choose to swallow their pride and ask Jesus to throw them a life preserver are just saved sinners. Jesus died for sinners, so ask Him to save you and to give you a fresh new life. Don’t make a foolish mistake by not taking the preserver He has to offer you. The sooner you sense your need of saving, the sooner you can be saved and live a life free from peril.

2 Timothy 4:16-18, “At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the LORD stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The LORD will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his Heavenly Kingdom. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Claim His words for yourself. Hold tightly to His promises, for His words preserve your life.

CHAPTER TWENTY FIVE

FIND YOUR PURPOSE IN LIFE

When God sets someone aside for greatness, He often gives them a problem; a problem that needs solving. David encountered the problem of the giant. He didn't back down, and through God's power, pursued the solution.

From the moment we accept Jesus as our Savior, the Holy Spirit endows us with spiritual gifts according to His discretion. Every believer receives at least one spiritual gift. Some get many, as the nature of their calling within the body of Christ requires many abilities. Your gift equates to your God-given ability to solve a problem within the body of Christ.

My spiritual gifts are pastor/shepherd, prophecy, exhortation, teaching, wisdom, and discerning of spirits. Teaching with wisdom and clarity allows others to identify for themselves the solution to their problems. The gift of exhortation *shows* people how to move beyond their problems to their solutions—by pointing them to the *Who* for the solution. Exhortation is teaching that encourages and is practical for everyday living.

I encourage others to move from being *problem*-focused to being *solution*-focused. Problem-focused people waste their time and energy whining about their situations, as opposed to coming to terms with what has taken place, and moving beyond the circumstances into the solution. Being solution-focused is equivalent to slaying the giant.

Complaining to others about our problems only dumps our negative viewpoint onto them. Now they get to have their problems *and* ours running around in their heads. Be a blessing to others by *not* talking about your problem and share with them the solution God has revealed to you. Tell people what you're going **to**, not **through**. In this way you not only bless them with words of encouragement, but you show them by example how to brainstorm possibilities for resolving their own issues.

Have you considered that the Lord is blessed when we report to someone His ability and eagerness to meet our needs? We are in effect showing others through the example of our life that they too can trust the Lord to meet their needs.

David was a problem solver.

Others in David's community talked continually about the problem the giant was causing in their lives. Yet only David solved the problem by getting rid of the giant. Mere talk isn't equivalent to action. Even complete knowledge of what we *need* to do doesn't solve the problem. We need to *act* on the knowledge we've received.

Many who've developed a pattern of whining and complaining to others simply *like to talk* about their problems, but seldom seek or even necessarily want solutions.

Christians, like David, must become problem-solvers, not problem-creators, or problem-sharers.

Decide today to become a problem-solver.

If you've been the kind of person who creates or shares problems, determine today with the Lord's assistance, to become a problem-solver instead.

Your uniqueness will determine which particular problems God will call on you to solve. Your spiritual gifts will equip you to do what He calls you to do. Increasing your wisdom quotient will keep you ever mindful of who is doing the equipping and giving you the power to carry it out.

You'll find your greatest fulfillment once you discover which problems you were created to solve. The nature of your ministry will depend on this gifting. Many people are never happier than when they're helping others. We become through the process more others-centered and less focused on our own problems.

Say good-bye to depression and self-esteem issues forever.

Depression can result from either of two seemingly opposite conditions: being self-absorbed and/or having low self-esteem. God created us with a need to love others; when we love ourselves more than others, we're tampering with God's original design for us.

Low or negative self-esteem indicates that a person doesn't understand in *whose* image they were created. It's being inward focused. God created us to be other, or outward focused. When we understand our identity in Christ, our self-esteem becomes a non-issue.

Make the decision to view yourself in the way Christ sees you. It's infinitely more important to be Christ-esteemed than self-esteemed.

Christ's high regard for us can be the single factor that prevents self-esteem issues.

There are few issues for those who ask God to show them their purpose. With God-directed purpose, our self recedes into the background. When we pour our heart and time into others, we take care of our self in the process.

This may sound like a given, but our purpose in life *gives* us purpose. Having purpose gives us something to look forward to—a reason to get up day after day. Having a job to do in the Kingdom gives us joy, which infects those around us. Receiving the joy of the Lord brings joy to the Father.

Helping others with their problems, by pointing them to the only answer—their Heavenly Father, brings us an abundance of joy, more than we'll ever need. God's desire is for each of us to find our joy and delight in His Son, Jesus.

Once you've given your problems to God, resist the urge to reel them back in.

Identity issues are the enemy's tactic for deflecting our focus from God, our sole problem-solver. Keeping our eyes only on our problems, and for that matter, on ourselves, only creates more problems in the end. They keep us in a state of continual anxiety and complaining. It invites worry, frustration, angst, and unbelief into our lives. Continuous complaining leaves us with a thankless heart. When we whine, we're in effect telling God that He either can't, or won't, help us with our problems. This is unbelief!

We often fail to recognize our part in taking back our problems.

There are indeed times when God “can’t” help us with our problems—in the sense that we either lack the faith to cooperate with Him, or refuse to ask for and accept His assistance. Too often we simply don’t *give* Him our problems. Some people do hand over their problems, but then decide after the fact to take them back, or to leave a copy with God on the off-chance He can do something. They want God to answer a dilemma on their timetable and in their preferred manner. They, in effect, put God on trial, determining at the outset that if the answer doesn’t come on their terms and time table, they’ll reel the burden back in and go it alone.

The irony is that we blame God for not answering, when in truth, we haven’t permitted Him to work. *But what happens when one day we encounter a problem that’s so difficult and complex we would never be able to fix it ourselves? What do we do when failing health or broken relationships are so arduous and challenging, there’s no human answer?*

How much better to learn now, before experiencing such a crisis, how to let go and let Him? Then, when, and if a truly big problem comes our way, we’ll know whom to turn to. It will be more natural and automatic. By learning to give God our burdens while they’re still small, we develop the confidence to trust Him when a problem begins to snowball and is completely out of our control.

Letting Him take over will allow us to live stress-free.

Stress-free living will result only when we learn to give God *all* our problems and allow Him to *keep* them.

“Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:15–16).

Learn to let go. Allow God to work *in His time* and *in His way*. When we do, we’re free and unencumbered. God is capable of our load and once we delegate our problems to Him, we can devote our energies to other endeavors. We never have to micro-manage God.

It’s important not only that we learn to ask God for help, but that we make our requests specific. Opening our eyes to what He has already given us, inspires gratitude, which in turn, changes our perspective and helps us get our eyes off what others have. We simply can’t be grateful and jealous at the same time, as these emotions cancel each other out. Never lose sight of the fact that you already have so much more than countless millions around the world.

We easily lose the essence of this truth, because we set our sights on those who have more than we do. This is precisely what the enemy wants from us. If we want our lives transformed, we must break that pattern. When we choose an attitude of continuous gratitude for *everything* God has given us, we become content in all things.

The Bible tells us that we offer our thankfulness as a spiritual sacrifice. We do so in the form of prayer and praise. Prayer, praise, and thanksgiving are nearly inseparable, and most of the time they’re offered together. Thankfulness is a peace offering that serves at the same time to produce more peace (Leviticus 7:11–13, 1 Timothy 2:1–2).

To what does God respond?

God doesn't respond to our whining or our tears. He does respond to our faith in Him to solve our problems and provide for our needs. We invite Him into our situation when we have the faith to believe He can make all things right. We invite Him to work on our behalf when we show Him that we have implicit faith in His ability. We give Him thanks not only after we receive resolution, but *ahead of time*, (this reveals faith in the unseen) exulting Him for His mercy, love, and power. Our obedience reveals our devotion and thankfulness to Him. We need to go beyond saying it, to *showing* it. What a powerful testimony to others when they see that as Christians we also have problems, but that we know who to turn to, to find resolution for those problems.

Begin to dream, and then believe you can achieve your dream.

Our dreams need feeding to keep them alive. Faith must come into play if our dreams are to be realized. The woman with the 12-year hemorrhage trusted Jesus for her healing (Luke 8). She had a dream that one day she would find healing and she sought it by exercising her faith in Jesus. No one else kept her dream alive for her. She had gone to doctor after doctor, all to no avail. She was responsible for her healing (by keeping her faith in the One who heals) since Jesus didn't even know until she touched His garment and He felt power go out from Him that she was a part of that milling crowd.

Despite all the setbacks she never gave up on her dream of healing. Nor was she ultimately disappointed (Luke 8:43).

Focus on your dream.

It's tempting to allow ourselves to become so preoccupied with other things that we forget all about our dreams? We can't afford to let the distractions of life interfere with our dreams. It's up to us to keep them alive, even if we have to wait for years. Whatever the dream God has given you, don't forget that He also gave you the ingenuity to do your part in bringing it to fruition. Harness your creativity, remembering that it too, is God's gift.

Don't allow a series of trivial goals or people deflect your focus from the one worthwhile dream. Give it your undivided and prayerful attention. God expects you to go after the dream He's given you.

Watch your associations.

If we're going to see our dream come to pass it's important that we pursue right friendships. Faithless and foolish people will crush our aspirations.

"He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm" (Proverbs 13:20).

It's important to disregard words meant for our harm, words from our critics that disrespect our person or our dream. Derogatory remarks and toxic people aren't a part of our dream, so why should we honor them with our time or energy? Instead, reach out in friendship to those who are great thinkers and leaders. Invest in books by such people. Listen to teaching CDs of individuals you admire and respect. Absorb the spirit of godly people and learn from them the attitudes and practices that propelled their success and achievement.

In your prayer time reaffirm your firm belief that the dream God has planted in your heart will come to fruition. Let Him know that you're confident it will happen *in due time* (meaning *His* time). Don't let your enthusiasm wane, as time will pass before your dream comes to realization. God uses time to test our patience and trust in Him. Many give up too soon, not willing to wait upon the Lord.

During your waiting period, ask God to reveal to you anything you could be doing, or shouldn't be doing, that could delay its fulfillment. Let Him know you desire to be teachable and surrendered. Then determine to enjoy the journey and all that He has to show and teach you along the way.

Fix your eyes on Jesus, not just on the dream. If you focus on your delightful relationship with Him, you'll be able to wait patiently and joyfully, so contentedly that when the dream does come, it will catch you by surprise.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

PURSUE YOUR PASSION TO FIND YOUR PURPOSE

Ages before your birth God had a purpose in mind for your life. When He created you, He implanted within you your personality, abilities, gifts, talents, strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes. Because He designed you to live with purpose and passion, He programmed you with the abilities, gifts, and talents that would enable you to succeed according to His plan. This can be called your assignment in life—your purpose for existing.

Your assignment requires passion. God changes our secular passions and implants new passions in us for what He calls us to. If you have passion for your work, others will be attracted to you because of that passion. If you're zealous about your life's purpose, others will take notice.

What do you most enjoy learning and talking to others about? What excites you? What do you love most? What occupies your thoughts in those idle moments?

These are clues as to what you've been hardwired to do. Many become discouraged simply because they don't know what they're supposed to do with the life they've been handed. Scores of people waste years trying all sorts of endeavors never taking notice of their strengths. Or they've pursued a vocation because a parent, guidance counselor, financial advisor, or other well-meaning individual steered them into that particular field.

Looking to others for guidance on what we should do with our lives works only if they're willing to take an objective look at our God-given giftedness. If we pursue a vocation based solely on money or advancement opportunity, it won't be long before we become dissatisfied.

God doesn't work that way in our lives. He knows us before we're born and He affirms His plan for us.

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5).

When God calls us to our assignment and reveals to us our purpose, it's because He designed it especially for us. Yet, He doesn't expect that we'll already possess everything we need for success in that assignment. He calls us based on what He can do *through* us when we let Him lead, direct, and equip us for the task ahead.

When God reveals your purpose to you, be sure to obey.

Don't be fearful or inclined to ignore or resist the assignment God calls you to. God equips those He calls. Remember that He knows you better than you know yourself, and He alone knows your potential. God will give you the inner desire to carry out your assignment, birthing a passion deep within you for that particular work. God rewards those who obey by giving them this dedication to task and an enthusiasm that brings fulfillment. He won't call you to anything you could do on your own apart from Him. Unless you try to accomplish the task unassisted, you have nothing to fear. With His assistance and guidance, you simply can't fail.

Jonah's assignment.

Jonah was given a twofold instruction by God that would lead him to his assignment: (Jonah 2:9–3:3).

He was to leave the place where he was, and...

He was to go to Nineveh instead.

Jonah started out in obedience (he got up and went), but he didn't finish in obedience. God had to deal with his refusal to complete his assignment. God doesn't discipline us because He has nothing better to do. He disciplines us *because* He loves us and He wants us to conclude our assignment, both for His satisfaction and our own.

Remaining in His presence gives us the endurance we need to accomplish our task. Loving what we do fills us with persistence and equips us with the necessary tenacity we need to endure. God longs for the opportunity to congratulate us with a hearty, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Jeremiah's assignment.

Jeremiah was also given an assignment (Jeremiah 1:1–19). The Lord commanded him in Jeremiah 1:17:

"Now, get ready. Stand up and tell them everything that I command you. Do not be intimidated by them or I will cause you to cower before them."

And in verse 18 God goes on, "Today, I am the one who has made you a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the population. They will fight against you but never prevail over you, since I am with you to rescue you. [This is] the Lord's declaration."

Just do it!

Having clarified the assignment for Jeremiah, God now gives a command to get on with it. We need to stop evaluating God's assignment and simply do it. The Great Commission isn't confusing.

One company uses the advertising slogan "Just do it!" and that sums up God's command to Jeremiah. God confirms the promises to strengthen His prophet. Like Jeremiah, we need to discover and accept God's assignment—and then get busy doing it.

Matthew relates Jesus' giving of the Great Commission to all of His disciples in every age:

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

Ask yourself what you would do with your life if money weren't a factor.

If you have a dream in your heart and believe lack of financing is keeping you from going for it, remember that God is the originator and dispenser of money. He can appropriate the funds if your desire is to follow Him in obedience. Don't let natural, carnal knowledge of what you may lack today overshadow the possibility of God making your dream happen tomorrow. If you learn to expand your faith even a little, then Jesus has words of assurance for you in Matthew 17:20:

"I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

God doesn't need you to believe in yourself first, to make it happen. He's asking you to trust *Him* to make a way, when there seems to be no way in the natural.

Are you willing to trust someone besides yourself?

God doesn't give unbelievers an assignment or purpose. But He does bless those, who in faith, trust that He has a greater plan for their lives.

God gave His Son Jesus as a gift to the whole world so that all who will believe in Him might receive the free gift of salvation and forgiveness for their sins (Romans 5:15, 18, Ephesians 2:8). Those who don't comprehend their need of being saved and forgiven for their sinful, rebellious condition won't conclude that Jesus is that gift from God to us.

When we stop trusting in our own abilities and look to God, we discover what He has for us. Jesus brought the whole world *physical* healing through His physical death upon the cross. He brought the world *emotional* healing with His emotional tears of love and caring. He brought His love and gave His life, so that we may have *spiritual* healing and *eternal life* with Him.

Trust comes into play when we accept Jesus. Purpose appears when we trust Him with our life's direction. That's what faith is: Trusting in the One who can make it happen for us. A great quantity or even a great quality of faith isn't needed. Just pure, uncontaminated faith not mixed with unbelief, will make it happen for you. If God wants you to do something and has instilled within you the passion for it, He doesn't care whether a mountain stands in the way. He has His ways of moving mountains.

Let God give you the dream He has for you instead of coming up with one of your own. When we try in our own power to make a dream come to pass, it's usually done in the flesh. Mind you, what you start in the flesh will have to be finished in the flesh, for God won't bless what we conceive on our own. But if you wait on God and allow Him to get it done through you, on His timetable and with His resources, the job will get done, and you won't be exhausted by it. It will also have the necessary anointing, as it will have God's blessing on it.

Your obligation is to *remain in faith* and not give up. Keep your eyes on *Jesus* and not on what lies ahead. He'll help you start, continue, and finish the job if you'll remain confident in His ability to steer you past each and every obstacle.

Don't mix your belief with unbelief.

The difficulty in persevering comes when we encounter our first tough obstacle and become convinced that God didn't really mean what He has promised us. When we let our minds travel where they shouldn't (listening to Satan's messages of doubt and unbelief to us), we are then tempted to mix in a measure of unbelief with our faith. Doubting will create fear if you don't speak forth God's Word to alleviate it. The way to counter doubt is to pronounce "It is written," going on to repeat aloud what God has said in His Word. That way our ear is hearing God's spoken Word, not our expressed doubts. If you find it helpful and feel comfortable, go around the house shouting it out. Say it until it reaches your spirit and you trust in Him again. You don't need to feel confident in yourself; you just need to lay hold of *His* confidence, the confidence He offers for you to make use of.

God isn't dependent on our faith or on our ability to make anything happen. Everything transpires because we choose to trust that what He has said will happen, indeed happens, regardless of what things look like on the surface or how long the process takes.

Don't become impatient and try to make it happen on your own.

Sarah and Abraham had to wait 25 long years for Isaac. As human beings, they didn't understand time the way the Lord does. After many years of waiting they began to doubt God's promise, so they took things into their own hands and conceived a child for themselves through Sarah's hand-maiden, Hagar.

This act of "running before God" revealed that as the years passed and they saw themselves age, they began to doubt God's promise to them. Since fulfillment of the promise was taking more time than they had anticipated and because of their advancing age, they couldn't envision the birth ever taking place. What they didn't know was that God was purposely taking His time so that there would be no doubt in their minds when the blessed event did take place that God had delivered on His promise. If the two had been able to conceive a child "on their own," they might not have thought of their son as a special gift from God. By waiting for their bodies to become too old to reproduce, God demonstrated unequivocally that Isaac had come to them through His miracle-working power. God demonstrated that He works in the supernatural, not in the natural as we do.

It's important for us to identify that this is often God's method of operating. When an event happens that is against nature and impossible to explain away as anything less than a miracle, we know beyond doubt that

we can produce nothing on our own. We have no ability apart from His power working in and through us. God often waits until we have exhausted our resources and abilities before He brings our dreams to completion.

God restores our strength when we wait upon Him.

Abraham and Sarah thought their idea was a solution to their problem of barrenness. But their doubt in God created a tragic series of events that could have been avoided by waiting patiently for the Lord to work in His own time. God's way averts problems for us. Our impatience and meddling can ironically create delays and bring us heartache and regret.

“Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isaiah 40:30-31).

Moses loved people and when he saw an Egyptian beating a fellow Israelite, he moved quickly to defend him by killing the Egyptian. He was so passionate about justice that his impulsiveness delayed his assignment to be a deliverer for his people. Because of his love and compassion for people, Moses was eventually able to lead God's people well. And they followed him. Yes, they grumbled and complained, but they, and God, found in Moses an able leader.

God must delay our assignment too, if He doesn't see in us the character needed to carry it out successfully.

When we wait upon the Lord we'll see promises realized.

Has God spoken specific promises to you about your future? Has He given you a dream of what He wants to bring about in your life?

It's wise to recognize, and then work to change, the flaws we find in ourselves. It's also wise to ask God to confirm our calling and purpose. Permit yourself to become a stronger, better servant by placing your hope in Him and in His ability to answer the promises He gave you. We have so much to inherit if we will learn to wait patiently.

“Those who hope [*wait*] in the Lord will inherit the land” (Psalm 37:9).

“Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; He rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all those who wait for Him!” (Isaiah 30:18).

“Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him” (Isaiah 64:4)

The word for “hope” is the same word used for “wait” in Isaiah 40:31. When we wait on God, we put our hope in Him.

A word of caution while you wait upon the Lord: Don't lose the essence of who you are by focusing solely on your calling. God made you unique aside from your calling and He wants to enjoy that uniqueness too. Your gift to Him is to give Him what He wants from you: your time, attention, and devotion. He wants you to find your enjoyment in Him, not just in your assignment.

Learn to discern your spiritual gifting.

Whatever your gifts are, your strengths will align with God's ministry calling for you. Don't spend time building up a ministry based on your weaker areas. Whatever God has gifted you to do is what you should be doing. Let God mold and discipline you, sculpting you to become humble, then efficient, and diligent. These traits will produce success in your ministry, but it takes time and perseverance to make them second nature.

God works in us so that we can serve capably and effectively. He wants us to succeed and to influence others in positive ways. Only a God-*designed* character will last. Only a God-*constructed* character can successfully lead others, and only a God-*developed* character will receive the crown of life when we face the Lord at the end of our life.

What you love most is a clue to the gifting and marvelous uniqueness God has instilled in you. Appreciate it, develop it, and treasure it. Use it to His glory, giving Him the praise and honor that are His alone.

God has a ready ear to hear those who wait upon Him.

God promises a listening ear to those who wait upon Him. He reveals His purposes to those who wait for Him to lead.

“I waited patiently for the LORD; He turned to me and *heard* my cry” (Psalm 40:1).

The word *heard* in the original language means: to give undivided listening attention, an understanding heart, to be heard and answered, and to grant request. It’s the same word used when the angel came in response to Daniel’s fasting and prayer to tell Daniel that his prayer had been heard and the answer sent.

“Then he continued, ‘Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them’” (Daniel 10:12).

God does have a purpose for all of us, and He wants us to be passionate about it. Disobedience may delay it, but obedience will bring it about in God’s *perfect* timing.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

RELENTLESSLY CHASE YOUR PURPOSE AND SEE IT TO COMPLETION

It has been said that the way to defeat a person with a dream is to give him another one. Once you've asked the Lord to reveal the assignment He has for you, you'll need to give it your undivided attention. Aggressive focus is the only way to finish well.

What begins for many as simple diversion, soon leads to derailment. Say "no" to things and people you know are going to distract you from your purpose and undermine what God has given you to do.

Anything that has the natural ability to rivet your attention and produces passion within you will become effortless. You'll be a blessing to others as they observe your obedience, joy, and dogged determination to let nothing knock you off-course. Completing God's assignment brings fulfillment, rather than regret at the end of your life too.

Broken focus leads to lack of completion of our assignment.

We won't finish our assignment if we tolerate diversions. We lose our direction when we fill our lives with meaningless activities, busywork, and needless obligation. We become distracted and lose our passion for God's assignment when we permit ourselves to passively or actively engage in godless t.v. programming, movies, books, magazines, and the Internet that Satan has set up and influenced. When we *tolerate* these dark, immoral

messages to enter our lives by our own choices, we succumb to the world's distractions which are set up to divert us from our calling.

Many of us become idolaters by *passively* allowing the world to infiltrate our thinking. Our thinking affects our heart, our character, and eventually our behavior. Rather, we must “watch and pray” by aggressively fighting this natural tendency within ourselves. Remember, Satan wants you to abort your purpose and its fulfillment. He does this through the world's operating systems.

Jesus had “one” job to do.

That job was to accomplish *the will of the Father*. Jesus didn't do anything *contrary* to the Father's will. Obsessed with His mission, Jesus refused to allow anyone to redirect his concentration. This came naturally to Him since He was interested in pleasing the Father, not other people.

“‘My food,’ said Jesus, ‘is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work’” (John 4:34).

The apostle Paul was obsessed with completing the assignment he had received from the resurrected Jesus. His undeterred interest in this task gave him unbelievable success in the face of his enemies and even of his friends who misunderstood him. As Paul reflected in his letters to the Philippians,

“Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me Heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13–14).

You too can stay the course and remain faithful to your calling by making it your obsession. Following are suggestions for ways to develop your assignment into your obsession:

1. Refuse to become distracted by sin and wrong people (Hebrews 12:1).
2. Be willing to distance yourself from people or to decline projects that aren't connected to God's assignment for you (2 Timothy 2:4).
3. Continually examine your assignment and learn everything you can about it. Become an expert at it by investing the necessary time for reading and research (2 Timothy 2:15).
4. Avoid unnecessary, trivial, or silly talk. Foolish talk attracts those who are foolish and lapses into foolishness have no place in the lives of the wise. If you seek wise friends, you yourself will need to exhibit wisdom (2 Timothy 2:16, 23).
5. Remove yourself from those who are unwilling to encourage or support you in your God-given passion. Those who can't see what you see, or know what you know in your heart, can't share with you the most precious thing in your life. Negative people will discourage you and implant unbelief to your mind and heart (2 Thessalonians 3:14).
6. Allow wrong relationships to die a natural death; they have no place in the fulfillment of your purpose. When God wants someone to go another way, He rotates them and points them in a

new direction. In Bible times He often changed their names and gave them their walking papers to a new location. This was God's way of getting them ready for their *new* assignment. By removing them from their past life, He made it necessary for them to trust in His ability to fully care for them in their new life. He removed *everything* that they previously depended and trusted upon. This new assignment required their surrendered obedience. They had to leave behind their previous, comfortable places, and say goodbye to their status quo way of life. When it comes to purpose, the old simply doesn't mix with the new. God instructed Abraham to come out of his tent and to gaze *upward* at the stars. He also had him move to a new place. This was God's way of getting him to refocus for the new things He had for him. Abraham also eventually allowed his nephew Lot to go his own way, even though he understood how misguided Lot's choice was. We must be willing to let go of those who aren't willing, or able, to get on board with our *new* assignment. (Ephesians 6:7)

7. Understand that you will offend those that don't understand your calling is from God. This is all a part of the process and progression of being chosen by God. God calls many to Himself but few choose to respond. It will be your decision to end up as the "many" or the "few." "Then Peter spoke up, "We have left everything to follow you!" (Mark 10:28).
8. Fight to keep your focus on your assignment and resist developing another passion apart from the one God gave you. (Proverbs 1:5)

Fulfilled, fruitful ministry based on God's assignment for you will be the delight of your life. Don't ever compromise it and don't let it slip away due to broken focus. Keeping it close to your heart will keep it secure. Nothing is more satisfying than having a passion for the work you were called and created to do and seeing it to completion. A work *designed* by God *especially* for you!

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

DETERMINE TO BE OBEDIENT TO GOD AND TO LOVE HIM WITH ALL YOUR HEART

The account of Hosea and Gomer is one of the strangest love stories in the Bible. Imagine God directing a prophet, a committed servant, to marry a prostitute! God instilled within Hosea a deep love for a woman who would break his heart repeatedly. She didn't share his commitment to God, nor was she faithful to him, or even a good mother. It's quite possible, in fact, that he wasn't even the father of one or two of the children she bore. Far from loving Hosea back, Gomer was bitter, angry, and self-seeking.

Even after the life she was living had led her into slavery, Hosea sought her out and paid good money to redeem her—to buy her back. Yet she still didn't return his love. Imagine how Hosea, a prophet who spoke for God and tried to turn God's people back to Him, must have felt. How deeply it must have saddened him to know that his own wife was among the worst of the lot.

So, why did God place such a demand on Hosea? Hosea was living out his message to God's people. Day after day he preached about God's unconditional love for them. It was one thing for Hosea to speak the words, but quite another for him to live with someone who was herself so faithless.

God loves us in spite of our unfaithfulness and unwillingness to love Him in return.

Even though the Jews were unfaithful to God by committing spiritual adultery with their false gods, He still loved them. They took advantage of Him, used Him, hurt Him, and deserted Him. *What did He do in return?* In love He pursued them, paying the price to redeem and restore them to the place that was rightfully theirs, on the basis of His covenant promises.

God longs for us to experience this same love. In spite of our spiritual adultery, we have a God who loves us when we don't seek to return that love. God loves those who are not easy to love.

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5).

“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, NKJV).

Loving those we like or for whom we feel a natural affinity, those who are endearing and faithful, is easy. But loving those we don't particularly like, those who stab us in the back or play games with us, those who hurt and take advantage of us, now that's a different story. In the natural we don't want to love them. We'd much prefer to treat them in the same way they're treating us. Yet, in spite of their difficult conduct or personalities, when we *choose* to love them as Jesus loves us, we show the world what unconditional love looks like.

The world knows little of God's love; consequently, people need to see it acted out. It's relatively easy to say the words, but God wants us above all

to live out our love, starting in our own homes 24/7. It's in this deliberate act of obedience that we learn to die to self.

God understands that living out His message is the hard part. He knows that when we try on our own accord, it's practically impossible. Forgiveness is one of the attributes that best personifies God. We're never more like Him than when we learn and choose to forgive.

Oftentimes God will permit a difficult person to remain in our lives to help teach us lessons we still need to learn. Then, once we've been tested and approved, we're ready for God's use. God wants us to speak His love and forgiveness with the passion that can only come from the struggle of living out these qualities in our own lives. Many people preach God's Word with little passion, little anointing, and little fruit to accompany the message. Their words are delivered from a knowledge-base as opposed to a passion-base. Those with discernment can perceive it.

God is looking for people who will preach His Word with passion and conviction; who will persevere in obedience to His calling and His ways. He isn't in any great need of people who can offer only head knowledge. There can be little fiery passion or conviction in the most principled message that isn't being lived out by the speaker. When we're willing to practice what we promote, people will take notice and respond, producing an abundant harvest for God. People respond, after all, to the power of the God behind the message, not to our ability, words, or delivery.

As expressed in 1 John 4:7-12, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed His love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.”

John continues in verse 16, “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.”

Verses 19–21, “We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

How do we determine to be obedient to the Lord?

We can’t be obedient unless we spend time learning His ways, which are in His Word to us. If we don’t know Him, or know only a little *about* Him, it will be impossible to be obedient to Him. Obedience comes through submission. It’s a conscious decision to submit to another. It takes humility and surrender to please God.

What is humility?

Humility is, according to Webster’s definition: *freedom from pride and arrogance, humbleness of mind, a modest estimate of one’s own worth, or lowliness of mind*. Functionally, humility represents recognizing and accepting our true place in the larger picture of things. Primarily that includes our place before God.

“The creation, or a created being, has no right to question its Creator” (Romans 9:20–21).

“We’re sinful and therefore unworthy to be partakers of His righteousness” (Romans 3:10–23).

“We’re the objects or recipients of God’s mercy, compassion, and grace” (Romans 9:22–23, Ephesians 2:8–9, Titus 3:4–8).

The call for humility is a call for simple realism. An inferiority complex is just that: a complex, a false assessment of ourselves. A guilt complex, on the other hand, is a *neurotic and narcissistic reading of events, an erroneous focusing of the blame on ourselves*. When an Albert Speer at Nuremberg confesses his guilt, he has no guilt complex; he *is* guilty.

The sinner humbled before God isn't sick in sin, but is coming into health.

Paul exhorts believers to humble themselves, for humility is an honest reflection of our real relationship to God. The fact is we *are* dependent. All that we have comes from God: our breath, our lives, our salvation, our hope, our Christ. God has given all and yet still owns all; *nothing* is our own. God gives, God will take away, and God will give again.

To be humble isn't an act of self-effacement best cultivated by spending years in a monastery. It's a simple, objective recognition of the reality of God. Humility isn't even a virtue, any more than it's a virtue to recognize that the sky is blue. If God is God, then we're God's creatures. To be humble toward God is to acknowledge what is both the most obvious of facts and yet the most difficult of admissions: ***We aren't God!***

"The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Here we read Solomon's conclusion to his philosophy of life.

Although in this life we have our struggles and our endless work cycles, we'll find real meaning in everything we do when we make God part of our work, our lives, and our play. When we do this, even dull and boring tasks take on new meaning.

As Martin Luther expressed it, “The Christian cannot have his God without being willing to work in His service. Even Adam was not allowed to be idle in the Garden but was given something by God to do.”

What has God given you to do?

No matter what job or activity you’re involved in, do it as unto the Lord. Give it your best effort and allow the Holy Spirit to guide you in your work. You may discover that the work that once seemed boring and pointless, suddenly takes on new importance. You’ll begin seeing things through Heavenly eyes, instead of being blinded by the harsh glare of life lived “under the sun.”

“For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

“But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matthew 6:3-4).

“Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life” (1 Timothy 6:18-19).

This is why we can take joy in all that we do: We know that God rewards good. God sees our *every* deed, whether we do it openly or in secret. As long as we’re faithful to God’s commands, it doesn’t matter what anyone else does or thinks. God will work it all out in the end.

We know that someday God will judge us on the basis of our deeds.

Equipped with this new perspective, we can see beyond a hurting person causing hurt to others. With compassion we see that they haven’t yet been

transformed by knowing Jesus. We can pray for their salvation because we know they'll be different when they meet the Savior. We can experience compassion instead of anger toward those who hurt us personally, because God allows us to see beyond the surface into their empty heart.

Are there any areas in which your walk isn't matching your words? Confess them and ask God to help you be faithful in those corners of your life. God has a higher standard and greater expectation for those who commit their lives to serving Him. Are you willing to be more than a mouthpiece for Him? Willing to be an example no matter what the cost?

God has told us to love one another as He first loved us.

One of our greatest needs is to be loved. We need to know that we're important to someone, and that someone truly cares about us, wants us, and accepts us unconditionally. When we doubt that we're loved, we may develop unacceptable behavior patterns to compensate for it.

The good news from God is: He loves you unconditionally! To know God is to find release from the crippling effects of being unloved. Twice the Apostle John categorically stated that God is love.

“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them” (1 John 4:8, 16).

Love is one of the warmest words in the English language, and that God is love is one of the most reassuring truths known to man. Love is God's nature, not merely an attitude He projects. It's the very essence of His being. He's always going to act toward us in love, since He can't do otherwise. Love is the way He is!

Love involves *action*. It's expressed in the giving of oneself for the good of another, so it always demands an object. Whenever we talk about love, we're suggesting that there's more than one person involved. There must be at least two; the one who loves and the one who is loved. When we love the unlovable, we're being obedient to God's command to us to love others as ourselves.

To whom, right now, are you having trouble showing unconditional love? Ask God to fill you with His own love, so that you can see them through His eyes. He does this for us—we can do it for others *through* Him.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

LET GOD EXPOSE TO YOU YOUR CHARACTER WEAKNESSES

What separates leaders who achieve victory from those who suffer defeat? Victorious leaders simply won't accept losing. Since defeat is unacceptable to them, they make no provision for it. They devote their energy instead to thinking through all of the possibilities and opportunities at their disposal for making a win happen. They have no plan B, since failure isn't part of the equation.

Winning is an inside job. The one who overcomes in life is the one who faces down her demons. Such people take careful inventory of their flaws and ask God to do a work in them, allowing those weaknesses to be subdued and/or eliminated. This is the key to running a successful race and taking first prize.

The law of victory requires a teachable spirit.

A teachable spirit will be your greatest asset. It will permit you to live in personal victory—*over yourself*. Without first acknowledging your weak areas, you might be tempted to overlook or downplay them. But if you do, they'll only trip you up later on, catching you unaware. Even brilliant people, if they fail to admit their fatal flaws, can be brought down by something surprisingly small. By ignoring your dominant weakness, you could be setting yourself up for failure.

Your weakness, when fed, will grow until it becomes like another person within you. If you don't acknowledge, deal with, and starve it, it will eventually overtake you. Greed, lust, deceit, laziness, dishonor, arrogance, and apathy toward the things of God—any or all of these faults will overrun your dream and your reputation. They'll destroy every worthwhile relationship you have. Just one weakness, unrecognized or ignored, can bring you down.

Everyone has weaknesses.

Most of us followed the god-of-this-world before we became Christians because we knew no other way to live, think, or behave. Oftentimes believers carry over some behaviors from their past life into their new life. Each of us is a work in progress and it takes time for God to transform our mind, body, and soul—and time is a commodity God has plenty of. If we don't submit and allow Him to mature and perfect us, those lingering weaknesses can threaten our future.

As a sixteen-year-old Israelite king, Josiah demonstrated that he was open and teachable. Instead of trying to convince the populace that he knew it all, he humbled himself. He departed from the ways of his arrogant father and sought after God. Idol worship, a problem since the days of Solomon, was a major hurdle that needed to be overcome. By seeking God, Josiah was able to successfully clear the country of idols, repair the temple, and reinstate the Passover. Josiah was also generous; out of his own wealth he donated thousands of lambs, goats, and cattle to be sacrificed (2 Chronicles 35:7, 18).

Every leader must find the path to victory

For Josiah that path was *repentance*. He repented not only of his own sins, but for those of his people, encouraging his countrymen and women to follow his example. *How was Josiah so successful?* He first faced down and overcame his internal battles. He was able to lead others to success by understanding this fundamental law: Good leaders lead by example. A clean, repentant life is the best example any of us can give to others.

Know that your weaknesses are the entry point for evil spirits to find admission and try to destroy you. Judas was one of the 12 disciples, yet Scripture tells us that “Satan entered him.”

“Jesus answered, ‘It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.’ Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him” (John 13:26–27).

Judas heard Jesus’ messages. He watched Him minister and perform miracles. He listened to His parables. He witnessed firsthand the blind receiving sight and the lame the ability to walk, yet he accepted Satan’s influence to dominate him. Jesus’ words were life-giving. His messages of hope, love, and everlasting life changed the individuals who not only heard His words, but *received* them personally (Luke 22:3-6).

We must examine carefully our own weaknesses so we’re not deceived into accepting the counterfeit. If one of Jesus’ chosen inner circle succumbed to deception, how much more vulnerable might we be?

Weaknesses, like sin, always grow.

James 1:15 points out the *progression of sin*:

“Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”

Let God expose your weaknesses to you, so that early on, before they take a stranglehold on your life, you can master them. Time permits some of the smallest things to grow alarmingly large. And when sin expands within us, we become a slave to it. In the words of Jesus to Peter,

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat” (Luke 22:31).

God isn’t surprised by our weaknesses. Remember that *He came to set us free from our weaknesses*. Understand that those chinks in your armor can’t be filled by your own efforts or willpower. If we could overcome our own weaknesses, Jesus wouldn’t have needed to give His life for us. If we were able to deliver ourselves, we would have no need for a deliverer. The shed blood of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit at work in our heart is the power source behind true deliverance. Confess your weaknesses to God; you don’t need to tell everyone you know. In doing so, you give Him permission to work in your life and change you from the inside—the only place from which *lasting* and *permanent* change occurs.

Learn what deflects Satan.

Satan reacts violently to the Word of God, which is precisely why Jesus quoted it when he tempted Him in the desert. Jesus had just fasted for forty days and nights and was hungry and thirsty as a result. Satan’s timing was impeccable, approaching Jesus as he did at the point of His greatest weakness. But, Jesus, unlike us, was ready for the tempter. By countering Satan with “It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God,” He defeated him on the spot. So resoundingly that Satan found it necessary to depart. Satan recognized at that point that Jesus, the Living Word, couldn’t be tempted into sin (Matthew 4:2–4).

“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18).

“For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin” (Romans 7:19–25).

Believe what God says about you, not what you say about yourself.

Apart from the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we have little discernment on how to turn from wrongdoing. What we think determines who we are, and who we are determines our actions. If we think in our heart that there’s no good in us, we’ll act out and prove to those around us that we are in fact good for nothing. If, on the other hand, we believe that we are kind, caring, and compassionate, we’ll reveal this thinking by treating others accordingly. When we think well of ourselves, we think well of others. When we don’t love ourselves, we find it difficult or impossible to love others.

Know that God understands our human imperfections and uncertainty about which way to go and how to live rightly. He understands that unless we have an encounter with Him we won’t begin to live up to our full potential. Only He can accept us in the raw, broken and flawed, and make something extraordinarily beautiful of our lives.

God loves flawed individuals.

The fact is that God looks for the flawed. He works out His promises to us through our very imperfections. He works with flawed individuals so we eventually come to see that what we achieve doesn't come through our own efforts. Blemished people who face themselves honestly are able to identify God at work in and through them.

Self-proclaimed "perfect" people believe that they can achieve virtually anything in their own power because the world tells them so. Well-meaning parents tell their children every day that the sky's the limit for them. Only later on in life, do some of us recognize that many accomplishments are possible only with the help of Almighty God.

Yes, we're gifted people and we can achieve a great deal. But God's work can be accomplished only when we acknowledge Him as the source behind our ability and success. When we do so, He receives all the glory. That's what He's looking for. "Perfect" people can't share the glory for their successes, as they're wired only to seek it for themselves.

Through partnership with God you can achieve all things. In humble obedience and submission, coupled with His power, wisdom, and ability, you truly can accomplish anything He asks you to do. God goes so far, as to give you dreams you would never have thought to dream on your own. He'll equip you beyond what you possess in the natural. This is the power of partnering with God.

In fact, the writing of this book came about as the result of God revealing my assignment to me after I had asked Him in earnest one day what I should be doing with my free time and the rest of my life. Our children are grown, and I have no financial need to work outside the home. What I did

need was fulfillment. I knew God had blessed me with spiritual gifts to benefit the body of Christ. It was at this juncture that He told me to start writing. I don't consider myself a natural writer; actually, the task would be quite impossible based solely on my own ability. But He revealed to me that *He* could make it happen. I just needed to be willing and obedient.

Gratitude comes naturally to those who've been restored.

Broken individuals are often the most appreciative to God for His gifts of grace and mercy toward them. They understand, perhaps for the first time in their lives, that they were selfish and had little use for Him earlier on. Gratitude fills the heart of a person who recognizes that God is always waiting for them—waiting for them to turn from themselves to Him. He delivers us from our despair and hopelessness. In addition, we're encouraged when He wants to use us in spite of our imperfections. God is long-suffering. He waits for us and gives us every opportunity to reach for the deliverance He holds out to us.

God uses those who are imperfect.

The Bible holds numerous accounts of imperfect people being used by God, for God only has imperfect people to work with. These accounts should encourage us—that despite our flaws we can still be of use to our Creator. God's bigger plan will be carried out through imperfect servants, but not through rebellious people. God is looking for willing and obedient vessels, not perfect ones. We can never be perfect in our own right, so God makes us perfect by His righteousness.

God isn't looking for our goodness to catch up with our desire before He will use us. He seeks out those who are willing to submit to His authority

and be used as He wills. Those who seek His agenda, qualify for His use. When we submit ourselves to His service, He'll take care of the details, the equipping, and the means.

Many of God's Old & New Testament people had appalling character flaws and weaknesses.

1. Abraham lied twice about Sarah being his wife, not because lying was his pattern, but because of fear.
2. Jacob lied in order to attain the birthright from his twin brother Esau. Later in life, Jacob's own sons chose the same deceptive pattern of behavior when they left their younger brother Joseph in a dried-out well to die. They later returned to their father with the lie that Joseph had met his end in an encounter with a wild animal.
3. Moses committed murder. His anger got the better of him when we observed an Egyptian beating a Hebrew worker. Rather than confessing, he ran away in fear, becoming a fugitive in the desert. This kept him alienated from the very people he was chosen by God to deliver. Many years later God prohibited Moses from entering the Promised Land as this same character flaw resurfaced when he struck the rock in anger instead of speaking to it, as God had clearly instructed.
4. Samson gave himself over to lust, engaging harlots and revealing his fatal weakness in the presence of charming, magnetic women. Seduced by the deception of Delilah he gave away the secret to his God-derived strength. Samson, who had been set apart from birth for God, allowed himself to be defeated by his vulnerability to lust.

5. Peter was impetuous and had a habit of speaking before his brain was fully engaged. Difficult as it is to believe, he blurted out denials of the very Lord he adored three times during the course of one dreadful night. Under pressure, he protected himself, going so far as to swear and curse in conjunction with his emphatic “I don’t know the man!” Even when Jesus revealed ahead of time that this would happen, Peter failed to take to heart the warning about his weakness. As the result of finally seeing himself as he truly was, Peter broke down and wept bitterly.

Each one of these servants was restored and used again by God.

1. Abraham became the friend of God and is remembered as the father of the faithful throughout all the generations to follow.
2. Jacob, the lifelong deceiver, wrestled with an angel, pursuing God with such intensity that God changed his name to commemorate this pivotal moment. Jacob had long needed to come to terms with his lifelong character flaws. Already in the womb he had grasped his twin brother’s heel. As a man he struggled with his brother Esau, his father-in-law Laban, and with God. God wanted Jacob to know that yielding was the only way he would be able to fulfill his God-given purpose. Later on, through Jacob’s son Joseph, God’s chosen people were spared from starvation.
3. Moses, the most humble man in the Bible, had the satisfaction before the end of his life of accomplishing the great task God had given him to do—to deliver His people.

4. Samson's hair, the source of his tremendous strength, began to grow back. In spite of his horrific failings, he turned his heart to the Lord and was humbled. Samson prayed to God; a first, at least in terms of the detail provided in Judges, and God saw fit to answer. Through his sacrificial and heroic death Samson destroyed more of the enemy than he had previously killed throughout the course of his life.
5. Peter was humbled and learned from his failings. From his failure on, the Lord used him mightily. Still, Peter had to be restored first. God used Peter to preach at Pentecost and 3,000 were saved. God additionally used Peter to take the gospel to the gentiles and he was the author of two New Testament letters.

Has the Spirit of God brought past failures to your mind? Then seek forgiveness in Jesus and allow Him to restore you (1 John 1:8,).

God-change is lasting change.

God is more than able to bring about good in the lives of men and women who comprehend their character flaws by letting God change their heart.

Humility is the key to transformation. When we as flawed individuals learn to put our trust in God alone, we're able to walk away from those hindrances that would otherwise have left us trapped in failure. God changed His Old and New Testament people and He can change us too.

Let God have His way with you.

Have you been held back by your character flaws? Have you failed God in some way? Have you failed your family or others who love you? Have you hurt the body of Christ through a lack of self-control? Don't despair! As you become familiar with God's methodology for restoring and equipping those He loves and uses, you'll be encouraged. He stands ready to exchange your weakness for His strength. All you have to do is ask.

Ask Him to come into your life and reveal to you what areas need work. Let Him have His way with you. Surrender completely to Him. You can be restored and made a new creation by your willingness to humble yourself.

Don't despair over your past failures and experiences, for they leave you better equipped to help others who suffer from similar kinds of weakness.

God isn't finished with you yet. Hold on to your hope and look to Him to make you perfect and useful for His service.

CHAPTER THIRTY

SPEAK FAITH WORDS INTO YOUR LIFE

Words have tremendous power and energy as they're a force for creating. It was God's spoken Word that held the power that created. His very words brought the physical world and universe into existence. When God spoke something into being—it appeared.

Everything you say produces an effect in this world. Words are spoken thoughts. In the natural world they bring about either pain or healing. In the spiritual world they are receptacles of power that can change your life and direct your future. Words carry God's power to literally heal your body, bring blessing to your circumstances, and to bring God's promises into your life.

To believe what the Word says, you first have to know it.

The Word of God has power within itself to cause what it discloses to come to pass. If we believe God's Word and use it as God intended, it will go to work in our lives. It's essential that we *act* on the Word, as faith requires action. The best way to act on the Word is to “*speak it.*”

Speaking the Word is called confession.

It has been said that “confession brings possession.” (This is not the type of confession some think of when confessing their sins to a priest). For God to cause something He has promised, we need to speak, or confess His Word. By doing so, we demonstrate that we *agree with Him*. We put our

trust in Him and appreciate that He works in the supernatural, not the natural as we do. Our faith and trust in His promises, bears witness in us, as we hope in Him. In other words, we believe He'll do, what He has said He will do.

This means that what we desire and confess moves from the spiritual realm into the physical or natural realm. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in both spirit and truth (John 4:24). The spiritual realm is higher than the natural realm.

Over and over again the Bible makes it clear that once you believe, you must confess, or speak, the thing you believe. Even in conversion we follow the process of believing in our heart and confessing with our mouth.

“But what does it say? The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Romans 10:8–10).

The Greek word for “salvation” in this verse encompasses more than deliverance from sin. The word used here means, “*saved, healed, and made whole in spirit, soul, and body.*” The concept is wholeness or complete restoration. This biblical principle of confessing God’s Word, to bring that which is true in the spiritual realm into manifestation in the natural realm, is crucial to a complete understanding and correct usage of Scripture. Speaking the Word brings God’s power and authority to bear on a physical problem.

Jesus “spoke” the world into existence.

The Word is near you. Right there in your heart, and in your mouth. This follows the method God Himself used in His creative work: Jesus spoke and it came to pass. Likewise, when we speak His Word, it comes to pass.

The centurion at whose faith Jesus marveled understood this principle.

“The centurion replied, ‘LORD, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed’” (Matthew 8:8).

Notice Jesus’ response in verse 10: “When Jesus heard this, He was astonished and said to those following Him, “I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.”

Not even the Israelites of that day, despite the fact that they *were* operating under a covenant with God, approached the level of faith of this Roman Army commander. *Why not?* The centurion alone seemed to *understand* the principle of *speaking the Word of God in faith*. He alone seemed to *recognize* the authority in God’s Word. Even beyond that inherent authority, God’s Word has the power within itself to cause its own words to come to pass.

When the angel delivered the announcement of Jesus’ coming birth to Mary, she asked in effect, “How shall I conceive a child, since I am a virgin?” The angel responded, “For with God nothing shall be impossible” (literal Greek translation of Luke 1:37). Unfortunately, the King James rendering of this verse doesn’t fully capture its meaning. The angel was explaining to Mary the “how” of the situation, which was precisely what she had asked. The implication of the angelic response was just this: that God’s Word contains within itself the power to cause what it says to come to pass. God’s words became material reality when the angel spoke them. Jesus Himself explained the importance of words.

“You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that men will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:34–37).

Jesus addressed these words to the scribes and Pharisees who were supposed to be experts in the Word of God. Yet He called them evil. How could they indeed, being evil, speak good things? Notice the Lord’s choice of words “out of the treasure of one’s heart.” The word *treasure*, as used here, means “deposit.” What you have deposited in your heart, or spirit, you will speak from your mouth.

Notice Jesus’ inclusion of the word *every*. Jesus was literally saying that we’ll be judged for every idle, inoperative, non-productive word we utter. We should use words carefully, to put it mildly, much as we would a power tool. None of us would misuse or take for granted the power of a chain saw; neither should we treat lightly the power of our words.

What then should we do?

Based on the above, whatever we want to have come out of our mouth we should deposit in our heart. Hide God’s Word in your heart. Store it up there.

Psalm 119:11, “I have hidden your Word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

Joshua 1:8, “Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. *Then* you will be prosperous and successful.”

If we want to prosper we must meditate on God's Word. When we do, whatever we've stored up in our heart will emerge from our mouth. That word, God's Word, has the power within itself to bring it to pass. * (www.speakfaith.com).

Faith requires speaking “words of faith” over oneself.

Based on this principle, consider what would happen if you were to speak life over your relationships, over your spouse, and over yourself. Such words are like springs of living water. Emotions would change, attitudes would be transformed, and joy and love would increase. Why speak death and defeat over others and ourselves when we can speak words of faith, hope, and love, which are life?

Clean out your house. Get rid of the things that invite death and remove those death words from your speech. You don't want your love to be compromised in any way.

James 3:10–11, “Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?”

You can't speak curses and expect blessings. Too many Christians fail to develop the discipline to listen to their own communication. Be careful what you dump on people. Be careful, even, what you say to yourself. Check yourself before you open your mouth and let your emotions spew out. Speak with and from your mind—not your emotions.

Psalms and Proverbs on the believer's speech:

“The mouth of the righteous man utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks what is just” (Psalm 37:30).

“I said, ‘I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth as long as the wicked are in my presence’” (Psalm 39:1).

“I do not hide your righteousness in my heart; I speak of your faithfulness and salvation. I do not conceal your love and your truth from the great assembly” (Psalm 40:10).

“Hide me from the conspiracy of the wicked, from that noisy crowd of evildoers. They sharpen their tongues like swords and aim their words like deadly arrows” (Psalm 64:2–3).

“May my tongue sing of your Word, for all your commands are righteous” (Psalm 119:172).

“Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD” (Psalm 139:4).

“To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech” (Proverbs 8:13).

“He who conceals his hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool. When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise. The tongue of **the righteous is choice** silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value” (Proverbs 10:18–20).

“The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but a perverse tongue will be cut out. The lips of the righteous know what is fitting, but the mouth of the wicked only what is perverse” (Proverbs 10:31–32).

“A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his tongue. A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret” (Proverbs 11:12–13).

“The LORD detests lying lips, but He delights in men who are truthful” (Proverbs 12:22).

“A truthful witness gives honest testimony, but a false witness tells lies. Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment” (Proverbs 12:17–19).

“An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up” (Proverbs 12:25).

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly” (Proverbs 15:1–2).

Remember to build your faith daily.

Never speak words that encourage the enemy.

Avoid the temptation to create a backup plan when you have to wait on God.

You can't plan your success and failure at the same time; determine which of the two you really want.

Energize and strengthen the vision of your future with those who will be *in faith* with you.

Always speak words of faith—not of death.

*Remember to **speak faith!***

***Confess** with your mouth!*

***Receive** it by faith and believe!*

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

BECOME A WINNER BY ENDURING TO THE END

What does the Bible mean when it tells us we must endure to the end? What exactly is the end? Most Christians have some understanding about the “end times” of which the Bible speaks. What’s interesting, though, is that many non-Christians also seem to comprehend that we’re living in a unique time of history. The History and Discovery channels, for example, both telecast programming addressing the end-time mysteries and what the Bible has to say about them. Even newscasters seem to understand that the times are peculiar, and they’re asking whether this is it, whether the end is near.

Many Bible scholars believe that the generations currently living are the last ones and that we’ll soon see the return of Jesus. Never before have so many profound and alarming world events lined up in accordance with what the Bible reveals to us about the last days. Significant events are occurring weekly, even daily. We observe the earth groaning as cataclysmic natural disasters like tsunamis, floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, and tornadoes follow one after another. In the first quarter of 2010 alone, we witnessed major disasters taking place around the globe.

Jesus warns us in Matthew 24:12–19 that, “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, **but he who stands firm to the end will be saved**. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those

who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days” (emphasis added).

We have definitely seen a proliferation of wickedness in our country and around the world during the past several decades. Year by year this evil is, in fact, increasing exponentially. The Bible tells us that in the last days events will occur in a manner similar to birth pains—like the contractions of a woman in end-stage labor, they’ll get worse and worse and come faster and faster...until the end.

We’re warned that before the culmination of human history, the evil that surrounds us will cause many to fall away. Their love will wax cold. The warning has gone out to the church. God has said, in effect, “Get ready! Prepare for the worst.” All indications are that we’re on the threshold of the greatest period of testing and trial ever to come upon man, and we’ll need something to sustain us if we’re to endure it.

“For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise” (Hebrews 10:36).

Endurance is the ability to keep pressing on without growing weary. It is *stamina, forbearance, courage, fortitude, durability, and the ability to stand strong without becoming faint*. The word *endure* is derived from the Greek *hupomone*, which means more than persistence. It denotes cheerful endurance or hopeful waiting.

Biblical endurance, then, speaks to the attitude with which we wait as much as it does to the act of waiting. Beyond just making it across the finish line, we need to maintain good form and a positive, hopeful outlook while we run.

Joel 2:13, “Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and He relents from sending calamity.”

Trust God with the changing of seasons.

We live out our lives here on earth through changing seasons. We welcome some passages and dread others, for they bring disappointment, pain, suffering, loneliness, or just plain hard work. *What is it that gives a person the capacity to endure trying times and to keep pressing on?* Only the firm conviction that God is in charge busily orchestrating all of the background details, keeps us pressing on in the midst of difficult change.

As the Teacher reminds us in Ecclesiastes 3:11, God makes everything “beautiful in its time.”

No matter what may come our way, we can rest on God’s promises. Knowing that He’ll take care of us eliminates the need to live in dread of the future. If we allow ourselves to be overcome with fear, we are in effect informing God that we discount His promises to us. Consider the following verses and be confident in the comfort they afford:

“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).

“For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject His people, because the LORD was pleased to make you His own” (1 Samuel 12:22).

“All that the Father gives me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never drive away.... And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I shall lose none of all that He has given me, but raise them up at the last day” (John 6:37, 39).

“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of My Father’s hand” (John 10:28–29).

Seek out truth and believe it.

Only those who seek out truth and believe it can benefit from drawing upon it when difficulties arise. God is the author and orchestrator of the turn-around. He alone brings beauty out of ashes, turns poverty into resources, turns away death and offers life. He alone equips us to endure and to wait expectantly for His sure return. He alone ignites within us childlike faith and trust, a sense of incredulous wonder at the reality of His Fatherhood to us.

Traditionally it's a father who provides security and provision for his family. Remember, that it's God who teaches earthly fathers and mothers how to take care of their families. How, then, can we justify anxiety about our Father's ability to care for us?

God in His eternal wisdom knows how the end times will unfold and when they'll take place. He goes about His work as we learn to live in obedience and contentment, trusting Him to carry us through seasons of sorrow and pain into our promised reward. As His Word assures us...

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30:5).

We can count on this. But what are we to do while the night season remains?

That the "trying and testing of our faith produces endurance" (James 1:3).

Our job is hold on tightly to God and *never* let go.

How are we to endure?

The question isn't whether or not it's possible for us to do it, but in what frame of mind we will do it. Cheerful endurance is a powerful attitude that

makes an equally powerful statement: God not only can change my circumstances, **He will!** It's a mindset driven by a compelling confidence, expectation, optimism, and assurance in Christ.

Hopeful waiting and cheerful endurance simply won't allow us to give up our dreams or turn loose of our hope; instead, they call us to a deeper level of faith. It's crucial that we know and understand God's Word. Otherwise, how can we hold it fast?

If you feel as though you've been bearing the weight of the world on your strained shoulders, know that you can hand it over to God through faith that's built by prayer, praise, worship, and gratitude to God. Be aware that endurance is a marathon and not a sprint. Work at producing faith instead of fear, and you'll receive joy rather than sorrow. We can find tremendous satisfaction in succeeding in God's endurance training regimen.

Fathers and mothers who love their children, parent in ways that enable them to succeed in *all* areas of their lives—by **not** doing everything for them. God builds up our ability to endure in the same way. He doesn't do for us, or give us everything we want, because in our immaturity we don't know what's good for us. We don't know how to ask wisely.

God wants us to receive our Heavenly prize. He knows how to build the endurance we're in need of. Learn to view any hurdles you encounter as your Father's invitation to become strong, disciplined, and able to endure to the end. What does endurance and maturity produce? A Christian who reflects Christ and bears *good fruit* to the end.

Remaining strong in the midst of troubles honors God and brings Him glory.

We're neither to accept nor tolerate the weight of fear, perceived failure, bitterness, or lack of forgiveness Satan tries to pile on us. Instead, we need to distinguish these attitudes for what they are—death. We're called to press on against these tendencies to reap the life that endurance brings to those who refuse to waver, fall away, or allow their love for God to grow cold.

Fear, worry, and anxiety are all indicators that our love for God is cooling. When we entertain these attitudes, we're permitting Satan thoughts to infiltrate our minds. Before we discern it, we start to believe him instead of trusting in God's promises to care for us.

Is God calling you to joyful endurance?

Is He calling you to a new level of faith? Do you need a fresh, dynamic expectation of God? Have you lost your hope that anything beautiful can emerge from your life, your circumstances, or your relationships? Then get to work at working out your salvation—work at understanding what God wants you to know about Him. Throw off the old weights of sin and unbelief and run with endurance. Turn around and seek God instead of continually begging Him to turn your situation around. Seek the physical, emotional, and spiritual benefits of endurance in lieu of constantly seeking instant, but temporary relief.

Let God work out in you what needs to take place for you to reach maturity. Don't thwart your spiritual growth. Ask Him to show you areas in your life that need changing; then permit Him to do His part through your circumstances to transform you and build up your endurance.

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2–4).

Why is it that some people live out their lives without understanding the Bible’s clear warnings?

Here’s the reason: God has deliberately hidden the truth Jesus was preaching about God’s way of life. Yes, you’ve read that correctly. The wise and powerful of this world have been set aside for the time being. The truth has been made off limits to them. The “wise of this world” (those who deliberately choose to follow earthly, rather than godly, wisdom) are being prevented by God from perceiving or discerning spiritual truths.

The Gospel writer Matthew records Jesus’ words:

“I thank You, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in your sight” (Matthew 11:25–26).

It’s God who opens the door of understanding in the hearts and minds of people who seek out enlightenment and truth.

“For whoever has, to him more will be given...and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him” (Matthew 13:12).

The purpose of the parables.

“Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: ‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them’” (Matthew 13:13–15).

This should encourage us as believers. Prophecy reveals that the end of all earthly things is drawing near. The signs of the times are an indication to us to be prepared, to get our lives in order. We're to be ready to join Jesus when He returns for us.

For those who refuse to hear or see.

Those who can't or won't see the signs won't be prepared and will need to suffer whatever comes afterward. We in the church are not without warning. God expects us to use that warning to be both comforted and prepared. According to the Bible, the hardness of heart that God most despises has to do with *the hearing and rejecting of His Word*.

“A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy” (Proverbs 29:1).

God gives us every opportunity to respond, positioning many things and people directly in our line of vision so we can't fail to see. Sadly, a hardened heart can neither see nor respond properly. It takes more difficult lessons to penetrate such a heart. It's up to each of us to decide just how hard our lives will have to become before we choose to see and listen. But there are always those who, no matter how tough things get, refuse to soften their heart toward the things of God. They're destined, like strong-willed children, to suffer what the tenderhearted don't have to. The children of Israel loved to hear the powerful preaching of Ezekiel—but they never obeyed it.

Warning against unbelief.

“My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts

are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice” (Ezekiel 33:31-32).

The book of Hebrews gives us a authoritative and prevailing warning: “So, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert” (Hebrews 3:7-8).

“Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt?...” (Verse 16).

These passages clearly show that hardness is not connected to atheism, communism, or any other “ism,” but, rather, *to hearing and not doing God’s Word.*

God’s people are called to a different standard.

We’re always to be on the alert, watching and waiting. We’re to *stay* prepared. The parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1–13 addresses this issue:

“At that time the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming and they became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet Him!’ Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ ‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with Him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the others also came. ‘Sir! Sir!’ they said. ‘Open the door for us!’ But he replied, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’ Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

The foolish ones were unprepared to enter with the bridegroom (Jesus) when he showed up.

We're told that these shortsighted virgins "took no oil with them." That such lamps could still be lit was no strange phenomenon: One can ignite an oil lamp without a single drop of oil by lighting its dry wick. But without oil the wick would very quickly burn up, the fire would go out, and the lamp would fail to serve its intended function of producing light.

Christians need oil (the Holy Spirit) to illuminate the way for them.

Oil is needed for a lamp to produce light, and light is needed to find our way in the dark. In this parable it was night, and consequently dark, the condition in which light is needed. It appears that here, just as in other Bible passages oil was used as a symbol for the Holy Spirit. The five wise virgins of the parable symbolize the saints who have received the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us light to see the truth; He illuminates the way before us. He sheds light on our path so we won't stumble and fall in the dark.

All of the virgins were invited to the feast, but the five foolish ones didn't *recognize* that they might have to wait quite a while before the bridegroom made his appearance. They weren't prepared for a delay. Many people, including many Christians, are living with the same mindset, failing to understand that to endure means to be prepared and equipped for the long haul.

Many people take in a glimmer of this truth, but fail to respond before that glimmer fizzles out. Many *do* in fact receive the Word, but because they fail to persevere, to make the effort to understand and appreciate what

it is they've received, it's quickly snatched away by Satan. Satan is in continuous opposition to the Word of God, and he's always there, on the alert, when that Word is preached or heard, to snatch it away from us.

Just how does the enemy go about trying to snatch the Word from those who hear?

When Jesus interpreted the parable of the soils in Mark 4:14–20, He referred to Satan only once, in verse 15:

“These are the ones along the path, where the Word is sown; when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the Word which is sown in them.”

Jesus prayed to His Father in John 17:17, “Sanctify them by the truth; your Word is truth.”

The Word of God, the revelation of His truth, is the means used by the Holy Spirit to sanctify God's people—to make them fruitful and loving. A persistently fruitless hearer of the Word can't be a disciple of Jesus. As Jesus Himself said in Luke 6:43,

“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its fruit.”

Good fruit in and of itself doesn't make a tree good. It doesn't give life. It's true, though, that good fruit comes only from a good tree. Fruit is a sign or indicator of life. Good and bad trees are known, respectively, by the quality of their fruit.

Fruitfulness is essential to being a true disciple of Jesus.

Abiding in the Word is the key to fruitfulness and discipleship. Scripture tells us that in the last days, evil will run rampant and that many will fall away. Satan is continually at work to snatch away the Word so that those

who have received it become useless, and fail to inherit the Kingdom of God.

Endurance is critical if we're to avoid being among those who hear the Word and then lose this treasure to Satan's deceit. When we respond to the truth that is given to us by the Holy Spirit, when we take hold of it and continue to work out our salvation (work out the maturing process of growing in Christ-likeness), we endure.

We learn to endure by refusing to cave in every time hard times come our way. We learn to endure *by refusing to tolerate unbelief* when things don't appear to be going our way.

Endure so that you may receive your just reward.

God sometimes permits difficulties to come our way to teach us how to become strong. They're for our good. He's teaching us through them, how to endure. Eventually it dawns on us that we are strong and that we can endure. It's empowering to know that we're prepared, able and ready to stand strong. Only strong believers will stand in the end times, as the Bible tells us many will fall away due to their lack of endurance.

How do people fall away?

When life comes too easily and with too much easy prosperity, it makes us soft. We become whiners, not winners. Endurance teaches us problem-solving techniques. In the faith realm, we learn to put our trust in Jesus, and we're able to gaze ahead into the future looking beyond our current hardship.

Growing up in and knowing only affluence gives people an entitlement mentality. When everything comes easily for us, we come to expect that this is life's norm. A *lack* of hardship prevents people from becoming mature or interested in others. They have little impetus to save for a rainy day and little motivation to meet the needs of others less fortunate than themselves.

The generation that lived through the Great Depression understood these lessons well. These hardy people withstood and consequently understood poverty, hunger, and war. From those experiences they learned to persevere until their lives prospered once again.

A soft, undisciplined, entitlement-mentality generation, being ill-prepared to endure, will quickly fall away. We may not always make the connection in our minds, but falling away from godly living sets people up to be conquered by the enemy.

Be warned!

The Bible warns us of these coming events. In addition, more and more preachers are starting to speak up, alerting us to the signs pointing to the end times. These events are taking place now, before our eyes, but how many really see or understand, or want to see or understand, what's taking place?

We'll be prepared and perceptive, when we spend our time getting to know God and how His kingdom operates.

Jesus' Second-Coming.

The prospect of being alive for Christ's return should fill us with great excitement and expectancy. He's returning, after all, for us. He's coming to liberate us. This revelation, if we allow it to sink into our consciousness, can both affect us intensely and keep us from falling away. We'll be prepared, expectant, regularly topping off the oil in our lamps so we'll be ready in an instant when the trumpet sounds.

Those who have been Spirit-filled will already have what they need when the time comes; the Spirit will reveal to them that it's time to get ready. This gives true believers the great advantage of assurance that they'll accompany the bridegroom to the banquet.

Satan, too, is acutely aware of the times. He's throwing much at our generation. All kinds of evil, pornography, human trafficking, addictions, materialism, unbelief, and crippling fear are at an all-time high. Increased workloads and pressure from financial strain keep people preoccupied with worries about the future. Ironically, even too much of the good life, including leisure time, leads people astray as they seek out more and more pleasure. Such people will be caught off guard when the end comes, just as people were before the flood in the days of Noah. Once the deluge had begun and God had shut the door of the ark, they pleaded to be let in, but it was too late.

How many unprepared people will cry out for access into the kingdom of God in the same way when they see the unfolding calamity all around them?

Like the virgins who had lacked the forethought to supply oil for their lamps, these people who didn't seek after God, who didn't seek out wisdom

or welcome the Holy Spirit, won't go in with the bridegroom when He returns.

The time to understand this is NOW!

Those who look to the world for their pleasure, protection, and provision will be sorely disappointed when they realize that Mother Earth has nothing to give them—that they've been looking in the wrong place, for the wrong thing, and from the wrong person (themselves). In designating themselves as their god they've made a foolish choice, one with eternally devastating consequences.

Make your decision today. Do not delay.

We who have welcomed God and His wisdom into our life and heart must rise up in faith as the apostle Paul admonishes us:

“Let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us” (Romans 12:1).

Some things are our responsibility. It's clear from Scripture that **WE** must throw off whatever it is that's encumbering us; whatever is slowing us down, as these things are counterproductive to our endurance and inheritance as believers. God will certainly do His part, providing every opportunity for us, but unless we choose to turn from our past and ask for His help, we may not have the endurance to persevere when the fiery testing comes.

Decide today with faithful endurance to follow Jesus. Be assured that He'll turn any sorrow you may have into joy. Hand Him your fear and let

Him exchange it for His peace. He's the only One who can give you a rich and rewarding life now and the opportunity to live with Him for all eternity.

There's no better promise in the entire world than Jesus' pledge to return for us.

Make sure that you belong to Jesus and that you're prepared and ready to join Him. Don't be as the hard-hearted of this world. The Bible had this to say about Israel's fathers:

"But they, our forefathers, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and did not obey your commands. They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate; slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them" (Nehemiah 9:16-17).

God always knows what's in a person's heart and He knows when someone will listen but not obey, choosing instead to go his own way. Determine today not to be one of the stiff-necked or cold-hearted.

Instead by choosing rightly, you can celebrate the inclusion of your name in the Lamb's book of life. Let God's wisdom turn your life around for good, and rejoice in the fact that He's coming again for *you!*

GOD’S LOVE PROVIDES A PLAN OF SALVATION FOR YOU

Choosing to receive Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior is the most important decision you will ever make!

God’s Word promises: “That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (Romans 10:9-10).

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

God, by His grace and mercy, has already provided everything you need to receive forgiveness and salvation. Your part is to simply believe and receive what He paid the price to give you.

Receive salvation by praying:

“Lord Jesus, I confess to you that I am a sinner and in need of a Savior. I believe in my heart that God raised you from the dead to be **my** Lord and Savior and I accept you as such. By faith I receive you. Please come into my life and make me a new creation. Take out of me what should not be there, and put into me your spirit so that I have the power to be transformed. Thank you for saving me.”

The moment you commit your life to Christ the truth of His Word instantly comes into your spirit. You are now one in spirit with Him. You are now born-again and have a new identity—a child of the Most High. You have a new inheritance too, as you will spend all of eternity with Him.

Receive the Holy Spirit by praying:

“Father, I recognize my need for your power to live a transformed life. Please fill me with your Holy Spirit. By faith, I receive Him right now and thank you for baptizing me in the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit I willingly submit to you and welcome you into my life. Change me, mold me, and above all else, *transform* me into your likeness.”

It doesn't matter if you felt anything or not when you prayed to receive the Lord and His Holy Spirit. If you believed in your heart that you received, then God's Word promises you did.

“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (Mark 11:24).

WELCOME INTO THE FAMILY OF GOD and
THE BEGINNING OF YOUR NEW, WISDOM-FILLED LIFE!

Before we part, I'd like to thank you for purchasing my book. If you found practical help and wisdom by reading it, please consider leaving a review on Amazon. This not only helps me, but helps spread the Word of God to a dying and confused world.

Thanks in advance. Lilliet.

Remember, the world is dying for some good news...

And the gospel is the “Good News” that saves us.

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