The Love of God Discipleship Series

PART TWO

YOUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S LOVE[1]

The purpose of the Love of God Discipleship Series is to equip the believer with sound Biblical truths and practical guidance for spiritual living. In this second work[2], Your Response to God's Love, you will continue to learn sound doctrine with an emphasis on God's love and grace as the *motivation* for your response to Him. Unlike the traditional approach that teaches the "spiritual disciplines"[3] as a means to relationship, we begin with the belief that our outward expressions of dedication are a result of the relationship we already have with God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ His Son.

We have heard for decades that, "Christianity is not a religion. It's a relationship." However, we are very efficient at turning this blessed relationship back into religion. How does this happen? It is very easy. "Having begun in the Spirit", we then attempt to become perfect by our own efforts. We exchange the grace of God for spiritual traditions and chores. We turn the power and privilege of prayer with our Father, into methodology and formula. We make reading the Bible a goal, instead of a lifetime of wonder. We mandate giving to the point that no one could possibly give "as he purposes in his heart". Each and every blessing that God has given to us through the death and resurrection of Christ becomes a duty. Those who are good at it, have a sense of accomplishment, even to the point of becoming self-righteous. Those who are not good at these new laws experience a constant sense of guilt and inadequacy. This process of turning our relationship with God into a religion, is what Paul called "falling from grace".

My husband and I started out our Christian journey with all the joy and hope and faith Christians could have, but very systematically our joy was preached out of us. We were taught that part of pleasing God was submitting to our leaders, and that the leaders were not to be questioned. Since what we wanted most of all was to please God, we obeyed. With all of our hearts we did everything we were told to do. We got as involved as possible in ministries even becoming licensed ministers in our denomination. We were then ordained and served as pastors. Everything seemed wonderful at first, but little by little it all got turned upside down. Instead of doing what we did because we were so full of love for our Jesus, we began thinking that those things we were doing were making us holy, acceptable, and closer to God. In other words, we based our relationship with God on what we did and didn't do. We didn't know that by doing this we were separating ourselves from the work of the cross of Christ, and soon found ourselves miserably unhappy.

After we realized that we had taken a wrong turn, it took many years to get free from all of the religious knots that we and others had tied over our lives, but one by one, they were removed as God kept leading us back to His Word. As we tried to find a church that believed in the love and grace of God, we became increasingly aware that our fall from the grace of God was not at all unique, and that the Church of Jesus Christ, nearly as a whole, did not understand the grace of God beyond initial salvation. Out of this realization came a desire to "preach the Gospel to the saved" from the moment of salvation to maturity, and to assist those who had fallen from grace back into this glorious RELATIONSHIP with God. That is the goal of the Love of God Discipleship Series, to disciple believers in theology and relationship void of the traditions that are currently condemning believers to fall from grace.

The sad fact that many Christians today do not understand their continued salvation is a strong indication that they do not have a firm understanding of New Testament doctrine. They go to church on Sunday, read a few scriptures during the week, read a Christian book now and then, but never really take the time to study sound Bible teachings. Josh McDowell in his book, The Last Christian Generation, points out this problem and predicts that in one generation, Christians will know nearly nothing about the Bible. So, along with the desire to declare boldly the grace of God, there is the intention of giving a firm foundation for our

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[2] The first in the series is God's Love for You and views theology through God's eyes of love. The third is God's Love through You and instructs the believer how to be used by God to minister to others.

[3] The "spiritual disciplines" are commonly understood, as prayer, reading the Bible, witnessing, church attendance, tithing, fasting, and becoming involved in Christian ministry.

treasured Christian beliefs. Every effort has been made to state theology in digestible form and always from God's perspective of love for the people He has created. We hope that after reading this book, you will be set free from the "dooties and don'ties" of Christianity and that you will replace them will the freedom and joy God intended. May each aspect of your life as Christian be a response to His love for you.

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1

THE GIFT OF EVERLASTING LIFE

WE BELIEVE . . .

. . . that the name of Jesus in the only name by which we must be saved and that this salvation is by God's grace through faith in Jesus.

. . . that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man.

. . . that water baptism by immersion is required of all believers. The act of baptism itself does not save; rather it is an outward expression of an individual's faith in Jesus as the Lord.

. . . in the practice of Holy Communion also known as the Lord's Supper.

The Gift of Everlasting Life[4]

One of the saddest features of life here on earth is that it ends. A baby is born, loved by his[5] parents, grows up, meets someone he loves, gets married, has children, the children get married and then they have children. The parents get older and older knowing all along that eventually they will die. Somewhere along the line, they ask themselves, "Is this all there is? We born, then we work hard, then we die? There must be something more to life than this!"

Some just accept the "facts" and go with the flow. Others try to make their lives "count" by accomplishing as much as possible. Hoping to live as long as possible, many live the healthiest life imaginable, counting each bite and exercising each muscle. We set goals for ourselves so that when we meet them, we will have a sense of accomplishment. Some seek to be rich and enjoy life to the fullest. Others live committed to helping others, believing that if they only have one life, they might as well do something with it. Some seek to leave a legacy, so that at least they will be remembered in one line of history. Sadly, the longer history gets, the more likely their line will one day be dropped from the books. Then, there are those who sink into futile depression, never finding one good reason to exist, even seeking comfort in drugs or other dependencies.

Thank God, this is NOT all there is! We are not created only for this life. There is hope of life after death. God's plan from before the foundations of the earth was to send His Son to redeem man from death.

Read again this familiar verse in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." *Everlasting* life. This is what we desire—to live forever. This is what God wants to give us. This is what He has provided. By giving His only Son, Jesus, to die to

[4] For a more detailed explanation of the salvation of man, read Lesson 8 of God's Love for You which is the first book in The Love of God Discipleship Series

[5] The author finds it tedious to both write and read works with he/she, him/her, and himself/herself. In this work "him" refers to a man or woman, etc., unless the context reflects otherwise. I apologize if you find this offensive. If it makes you feel better, say "her" every time you read "him", unless the contexts forbids it.

remove our sins and to taste death for us, He has provided a way for all to have everlasting life.

God has provided this for all by His grace, but it is not automatically ours. A response is required. Look again at the verse. What does God require? It says, "that whoever believes on Him," Could it be so easy, just "believe"? Are there other verses that say this same thing? Yes. Here are just a few:

- ***John 3:36***
  He who believes in the Son has everlasting life.
- ***John 5:24***
  Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.
- ***John 6:40***
  And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.
- ***John 6:47***
  Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.

If *believing* on Jesus is how we have eternal life, then understanding the word *believe* is very important. The word for *believe* in these verses is the Greek word pisteuō. According to Smith's Bible Dictionary, pisteuō means "to believe, to have faith, to put one's trust in". In Holman's Treasury of Key Bible Words it says that pisteuō means to "place one's trust in another" and adds that ***believe* is expressed in the word *receive***. Strong Concordance adds to the above, "to be committed unto". So *believe* is more than just mental assent. It's more than *knowing* something is true, but has to do with *embracing* what we believe. When we say that someone *believes* in Jesus, in the true Biblical sense, we mean than he fully commits his faith and trust in Jesus.

John adds to this understanding of what it means to be born again, that is, to become children of God when he writes in John 1:12, "But as many as *received* Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who *believe* in His name: *13* who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The word *receive* here means "to take hold of". This goes well with the meaning above of the word *believe*.

How to Receive Eternal Life

If we dig a little deeper into our response to God's offer of salvation, also referred to as the new birth, we see that our confession has to do with receiving Him. So it is, that we believe, putting our faith completely in Him, and we confess Him as the Lord God. No other verse more completely explains this process than the following.

- ***Romans 10:9-10***
  That if you confess your mouth the Lord Jesus Christ, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Believing in our hearts as defined above (completely putting our trust in) is what results in us being made righteous. Confessing Him as the Lord results in salvation. Believing, receiving, and confessing are so closely intertwined, that the three actions happening simultaneously can appear to be one.

You cannot learn or earn this salvation. It is a free gift given to you. You need only believe it and receive it. This is our response to God's love.

- ***Ephesians 2:4-9***
  But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, [5] even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), [6] and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7] that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. [8] For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, [9] not of works, lest anyone should boast.

It is important to notice the manner in which people became believers in the book of Acts because it greatly contradicts what is represented today. One example is that of what we call "the sinner's prayer". Whatever version you look at, when you compare it with how people were born again in the beginning years of the church, it will stand in contrast. The other common mistake that is the idea that to be saved, one must "make Jesus the Lord of your life". Romans 10:9 says that we must, "confess with our mouths the Lord Jesus," and this gets twisted to read, "confess that Jesus is the Lord of our lives". You will find no record of anyone doing this in the book of Acts.

We are saved by grace through faith. That's it. If someone needs to confess all of their sins and dedicate every part of their lives IN ORDER to be saved, we have lost entirely the point of Christ's death. ***He*** PAID for our sins. He IS the Lord. He did it. We simply receive His grace by faith.

This does not mean that if someone recited the "sinner's prayer" or "made Jesus the Lord of their lives" they aren't really saved. Very likely, faith was at the core of such prayers, and that is what God sees. Yet, it is important to understand that we are saved by grace through faith, not by confessing sins[6] and promising to make Jesus the Lord of our lives. When the jailer asked Paul what he had to do to be saved, Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved and your house." When the Ethiopian eunuch asked Phillip, what kept him from being baptized, Phillip said, "If you believe with all of your heart, you may." In neither case was there a formula or requirement for salvation. If someone believe in Jesus, he will be saved.

No Other Way

[6] The exception to this is found in 1 John. There were those among them that didn't believe sin was an issue and even disputed that Jesus came in bodily form. John testifies to this as he had walked with Jesus, and tells that that if we (address these non-believers) say we have no sin, we lie. These people did not think they needed salvation and certainly not from Jesus. In this particular case (known as gnosticism), these people needed to acknowledge their need for forgiveness "confess their sins"; and thus, their need for a Savior—Jesus. However, the only sin mentioned in Acts that required repentance was that of not believing in or outright rejecting Jesus as the Lord (Messiah). When we believe in Jesus, we receive forgiveness. For many people, repentance of individual sins happens after they have been saved as their minds are renewed.

There are many religions today which acknowledge Jesus in their belief system. They might view him as an important prophet or a great teacher. Even if they deny that Jesus was God and that He rose from the dead, they might still adopt many of his teachings as being good advice for living. However, what they ignore is that Jesus did not acknowledge any other but Himself. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, but by me," (John 14:6). He went even further to say, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. **8** All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. **9** I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture" John 10:7-9. Not only did Jesus not acknowledge any other way to the Father, but referred to those who claim to be an alternate way to God as thieves and robbers.

I remember the first day I understood this in 1974. I had embraced the popular religious thinking of that day that any way of believing was ok as long as the person believing was not a hypocrite. In my mind whatever someone chose to believe was the truth for them, and it was no one else's business to say otherwise. So, when I heard it taught that Jesus was the ONLY way to God, I was offended because my former way of thinking challenged the Word of God. I began to wonder if I could be a Christian if it meant believing this. Almost as I began to doubt, I began to believe. I knew Jesus had completely changed me. If He said He was the only way, the only truth, and the only life, then I would believe Him.

We don't get to pick and choose what we will believe from the Word of God. It is *all* true and we must wholeheartedly embrace it. In John 8:31-32 we read, "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. **32** And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Even though the truth will not always make us popular, it will *always* set us free.

Why People Will Perish

Because of Adam's transgression we are all born spiritually dead and in sin[7], lost and in need of a Savior. Even if someone were to live a perfect life, this would not be enough to save him. Some might say that this isn't "fair".

In some ways, we might agree that a person should be held responsible only for his own sins, not Adam's. If that were true, the outcome would be the same because all have sinned. So, whether you believe it is by birth or by actions, we still all stand equally lost before God before we come to Jesus.

What we need to understand is that when Adam sinned, he passed death to all men. God is not to blame for this situation in which man put himself. However, He did not leave us helpless.

- ***Romans 5:18***
  Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.

When God sent His Son to redeem man from the kingdom of darkness and put him in the kingdom of light, He provided a way out for all men. We did not deserve this salvation.

[7] See Lesson Six in God's Love for You entitled "The Fall of Man".

Men have throughout time been rebellious and hateful to God. Yet, He loved us so much, He made a way. Since this way is available to all, all can be saved. However, all won't.

So, why is it that some will perish when it is not God's will?[8] It is because God has given man a choice, to choose life or to choose death. Happily, many choose life through the Son. Sadly, many more choose death. Following are some Scriptures that clearly state why men will be condemned.

- ***John 3:17-19***
  For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. [18] He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. [19] And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

We can see in the verses above that God didn't send Jesus to condemn, but to save us. We also see the reason people choose to not believe is that they love darkness rather than light. They love their evil deeds.

- ***John 3:36***
  He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."
- ***John 8:24***
  Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."
- ***John 16:8-9***
  And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: [9] of sin, because they do not believe in Me.

The sin for which men will be judged and condemned is refusing to believe in Jesus whom God has sent.

OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S LOVE

Receiving God's Free Gift of Salvation

Our first response to God's gracious offer of salvation, as we have stated above, is to believe in Jesus. In doing so, we bring pleasure to our Father who went to great lengths to demonstrate His love for us. It's as if God is saying, "I love you," and we, by receiving Jesus say, "I love you, too."

Water Baptism

[8] 2 Peter 3:9

The next response to God's love for us is water baptism. After Jesus' death and resurrection, He gave his disciples a directive which is known as The Great Commission. We read about it in Matthew 28:18-20.

> *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

Here, Jesus gives instruction to His disciples on what to do after He ascended into heaven. One of the things was to baptize the believers in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. So, after we are born again, the next response is to be baptized.

A good question to ask is whether or not baptism is required to be saved. The answer is "No and Yes". The act of being baptized alone does not save anyone. The person must first believe in and receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior. However, if someone were to be born again, and then for some reason, die the next minute without having been baptized (as the thief on the cross next to Jesus, or someone who receives Christ right before dying), he would still be saved. Baptism is an outward expression and public declaration of what has already happened in the heart. When we are baptized, we identify with the death and burial of Christ, and when we come out of the water, we identify with His resurrection.

However, even though it is possible to be saved without water baptism, it is the normal next step for those who believe. Jesus commanded that the disciples baptize believers, so it is expected that believers will be baptized.

We can observe in the book of Acts that water baptism was the norm for new believers. Below are the instances of new believers being baptized in water. As you can see in the following examples baptism took place almost immediately after conversion.

ACTS

2:41	*3,000 who were saved on the day of Pentecost were baptized the same day.*
8:12	*In Samaria after Phillip preached, Simon the sorcerer and others who believed were baptized.*
8:38	*The Ethiopian eunuch who had believed on Jesus said, "Here's water, what hinders me from being baptized?"*
9:18	*The apostle Paul was baptized only a few days after his conversion.*
10:47-49	*The Gentile believers upon whom the Holy Spirit fell while Peter was preaching were immediately baptized.*
16:14-16	*Lydia (seller of purple from Thyatira) and her household were baptized when they believed.*
16:33-34	*The Philippian jailor and his household were baptized right*

	away.
18:8	*Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth, all his household, and many Corinthians were all baptized.*
19:2-5	*Ephesian disciples (who prior to conversion knew only the baptism of John), were baptized after they believed in Jesus.*

So, what should a baptism look like? Do we sprinkle, pour, or immerse? First of all, the word baptize in the Greek means "to fully wet". Most Christian denominations take this to mean total immersion. The easiest way to be totally immersed in water is to go under water. So, most often, a minister will assist the person being baptized to go backward under water and then help them come back up. However, if the idea is to be fully immersed, it seems reasonable that someone could simply kneel in the water and go under, or even have water poured over someone's head until he is completely wet. It is my personal belief that whether one goes backward, forward, kneels down or is completely immersed from above; the important thing is to be completely covered in water as if to completely identify with Jesus.

Partaking of Holy Communion

Another ordinance that Christians observe is that of Holy Communion. This practice was initiated by Jesus on the night he was betrayed by Judas Iscariot. Jesus gathered with his disciples to celebrate the Passover. This is commonly called The Last Supper because it would be the last time Jesus would eat or drink before he was crucified. Following is a combined account of this event from Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

> *When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it and gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." Then He said to them, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Likewise, He also took the cup after supper, and when he had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Take this and divide it among yourselves. Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many—for you for the remission of sins. But assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom (in the kingdom of God)," And they all drank from it. And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

It is important to notice not only what they did and what Jesus said, but also what they didn't do and what He didn't say. Please note that upon careful examination of these passages or in all of Scripture that the bread did not turn into Jesus' flesh when they ate it, and that the wine did not turn into His blood. Nor did Jesus say, "When you do this in remembrance of me, the bread will become my flesh and the wine will become my blood. It is obvious that the bread and the wine only *represent* His flesh and blood. It is an ordinance of remembrance, a time set apart to recall the suffering He endured to demonstrate His love for us. Paul describes this remembrance in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

> *For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; [24] and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." [25] In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." [26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.*

Paul did not say how often to remember Christ's death with the bread and the cup. He left that to the individual. He said, "As often as you eat this bread". In other words, each time you drink the wine and eat the bread, you proclaim the Lord's death until He returns whether that is daily, weekly, monthly or whatever amount of time you want. Usually a church will have a certain custom as to how often and when, but the early Christians celebrated communion in their homes, and so may we.

Another aspect of communion which is not often stressed is that it represents our unity as a body of believers. Paul pointed this out in 1 Corinthians 10:16 where he writes,

> *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? [17] For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.*

So, we see that partaking together of the symbolic body of Christ represents the church. Each of us makes up a part of it and those parts make up one body. When we come together, we need to be aware of each other and be considerate of each other, and thankful. To be high minded, to see ourselves better than someone else or to think of ourselves as less than others is not what God wants. We are all valuable to Him, and He loves without partiality.

The next time you receive communion, think on these things:

1. While you eat the bread, be thankful for the body of Christ. His body was beaten beyond recognition so that we could be healed. "Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you <u>were</u> healed." Communion is the perfect time to remember that healing was purchased for us 2,000 years ago. It is already ours for the taking.
2. When you take the wine, be aware of the effects of the blood of Jesus. Here are just a few:
   - *We have been justified by His blood. Romans 5:9*
   - *We have eternal redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. Ephesians 1:7, Colossians 1:14, Hebrews 9:12; 1 Peter 1:18-19; Revelations 5:9; Revelations 1:5*
   - *We who once were far off have been brought near by His blood. Ephesians 2:13*
   - *We are reconciled to God and at peace with Him through the blood. Colossians 1:20*
   - *The power of Satan in our lives is destroyed by His blood. We do not fear death. Hebrews 2:14*
   - *Our consciences have been cleansed from dead works through His blood. Hebrews 9:14*
   - *We have the confidence to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus. Hebrews 10:19*

- *Jesus sanctified us with His blood. Hebrews 13:12;*
- *His blood establishes with us an everlasting covenant. Hebrews 13:20*
- *The blood continually cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:7*
- *We overcome the enemy by the blood of the Lamb. Revelations 12:11*

3. While taking communion, consider doing this as well. Look around at those who are receiving it with you. Consider that you are all part of the same body. Be thankful for each other. If you are at odds with someone, forgive him. If someone doesn't like you, forgive them. As far as it is possible with you, be at peace with everyone. If you know of someone who is in need, do what you can to help them. Consider also that across the world, you have brothers and sisters everywhere. Say a prayer for those who are in prison for their faith or those who live in danger due to their faith. We are all part of the same body.

Correcting a Common Misconception

It is important to understand a misconception that is commonly taught. Paul warned the Corinthians not to partake of the Lord's table in an "unworthy manner". There are those who teach that this refers to not taking communion if there is sin in one's life. However, when we read the context in 1 Corinthians 11, we realize that this is not what Paul meant. He was clearly referring to factions among the believers. People would come together to celebrate the Lord's Table and some would eat and others would go hungry. Some were even getting drunk. To partake of the Lord's table in an unworthy manner has to do with not discerning the Body of Christ.

Living with Jesus as Savior

Jesus did not die only to save us from our past, but our redemption is eternal. Eternal means "having infinite duration, everlasting, continued without intermission, perpetual, endless, valid or existing at all times[9]" What peace there is in knowing that this salvation is for yesterday, today, and forever. He will never leave us or forsake us. The enemy will lie to us and tell us we did something that will keep us out of heaven, but he is a liar. As long as we believe in Jesus, we are secure in that redemption. "Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ," (Phil. 1:6).

Walking by Grace through Faith

My grandfather once gave me some advice which has served me well over the years. He said, "Get in the habit of saying, 'Yes' to Jesus." I remember thinking that was very brief advice, but it really is that simple. When we receive Jesus as Lord, He will begin teach us by His grace. He will likely lovingly point out aspects of our lives that are harming us or others. He will work in our hearts to change our minds about many things. He will also lead us by His Spirit. When He speaks, we follow. It's really that simple.

[9] Merriam-Webster Dictionary

So, what does Jesus want us to do? This is also quite easy to explain. In 1 John 3:23 it says, "And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment." Believe in Jesus. Love one another. He even gives us the ability to love. "We love because He first loved us."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REVIEW

1. Why is living this life without the hope of ***eternal*** life so undesirable?
2. According to Scripture, what does God require for someone to be born again?

3. After reading this lesson, what is your understanding of the word "believe"?

4. What are the three responses to God's offer of salvation mentioned in this chapter?

5. What information about communion stands out to you in this lesson?

6. If you have not yet been baptized in water, plan to do so as soon as possible. Let your pastor know that you are ready to make this public declaration.

7. How might the advice the author's grandfather be a blessing in your life? Has anyone whom you respect spiritually given you advice that has helped you over the years? Please share.

2
FREEDOM

WE BELIEVE . . .

. . . that Jesus set us free so that we can live freely.

Jesus said, "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed," (John 8:36). As born again believers, we are truly free, as we read in Galatians 5:1, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.[10]" God's purpose in sending His Son to die for us was to give us freedom, but how can we stand fast in it if we don't know what freedoms we have been given? This lesson is meant to be an overview of the freedom given freely to those who believe in the name of Jesus Christ.

Freedom from Wrath

Many Christians today have an unhealthy fear of God. They expect Him to swat them like a bug if they make one false move. They picture Him angry holding Himself back from bringing down punishment against them. However, God's wrath was satisfied when Jesus became our sacrifice for sin. As Christians, we never again need to fear the wrath of God. We are now at peace with Him.

1 Thessalonians 5:9
For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.
John 5:24
"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.
Romans 5:1
Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
Romans 5:9
Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.
1 Thessalonians 1:10
And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

[10] NASB

Freedom from Being an Enemy of God

Before we came to Jesus, we were enemies of God, but we are no longer God's enemies. We are His friends. Even more than friends, we are His children. He loved us while we were His enemies, how much more does He love us now that we believe in the name of His Son?

Colossians 1:21
And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled.
Romans 5:10
For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.
John 15:13
Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. ***14*** *You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.* ***15*** *No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.*
Romans 8:15
For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

Freedom from Being Far from God

Those who do not know God have a sensation of God being "out there somewhere". They call Him the "man upstairs". We, who know God, could not be closer to Him than we already are because He dwells in our hearts. He will never leave us.

Ephesians 2:12-13
That at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ***13*** *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*
John 14:23
Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."
John 14:16-18
And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— 17 *the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.* 18 *I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.*
Colossians 1:27
To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.
Hebrews 13:5
Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."
1 Corinthians 6:17
But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.

Freedom from The Past

While God does not wipe away our memories, He does completely remove our sins from us. Furthermore, God does not bring to His or our remembrance the evil we committed in the past. Of course, because He is omniscient, He knows all and knows what you did in the past, but He will not bring it up again, He will not take it into account. It doesn't come up in His mind when He thinks of you. God is not mindful of our past. He is not keeping it in his thoughts.

When we share our personal testimonies it is not required that we recall to others all the sins we committed. First of all, it is no one else's business what we did before we came to Jesus. Secondly, if God does not bring to remembrance the sins you committed, why should you? We are no longer who we were. Thank God!

When we first come to Christ, with our memories only weeks prior, it can be nearly haunting when we think of what we did before. Some beg God in prayer, "Please, God, take ways these horrible memories!" His answer to us is, "I cannot take away your memories, but I will take away the pain they cause." Over time, He will do just that.

However, the enemy will find it sporting to bring up our past, to accuse us, to condemn us, to try and steal our joy, and to challenge the work that Jesus has done in us. He will tell us we haven't really changed. So be prepared to lambast him with the following Scriptures and others in this lesson.

Psalm 103:11-12
11 For as the heavens are high above the earth,
So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;
12 As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.
Hebrews 10:16-18
*"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," **17** then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."*

Freedom to Forgive

Before we come to Christ, we can be some of the most resentful, bitter, and unforgiving people on earth. We've been hurt, and to get revenge, we are bitter and hateful. Or someone hurts someone we love and we see it as some sort of loyalty to hold a grudge against the offender. Children are offended by their parents and hold grudges for years, even for life. Parents are hurt by their children and live wounded on a daily basis. Even worse offenses such as physical abuse and sexual violation produce profound wounds and resentment that can affect each aspect of one's life.

As believers in Christ, we are set free to forgive even the worst offenses. This is because we have been forgiven by God for our own wrong doing. Amazingly, we also have the power to forgive those who are not sorry for what they've done, and who may never be sorry. When we do, we can experience healing. Even though the pain someone caused may still be hurting us, we can let go and forgive because we are forgiven.

Ephesians 4:31-32
Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. [32] And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Freedom from the Power of Sin & Freedom to Be Righteous

"I'm just a sinner saved by grace," is one of our least favorite traditional Christian sayings. The Apostle Paul, when referring to his past lifestyle in which he persecuted the church, called himself the chief of sinners, but he was not referring to his current way of living nor how he viewed himself as a born again believer. Paul did not live as a sinner.

Before Christ, we were just like everyone else, sinners involved in sinning. However, we are no longer sinners. **We are not bound by sin and we are free to not sin.** I prefer to say, "I was a sinner, but I was saved by grace. Now, I am a saint." Many Christians respond to that statement by saying, "Well, *I'm* no saint and neither are *you*." Really? Well, then you are calling God a liar, because He calls us saints[11].

The next question normally is, "Then why do we sin if we are free from sin?" The answer is simple. Choice. Jesus Christ has set you completely free from sin. He has given you power over sin. However, He did not turn you into a robot. You still have a free will. He has made it 100% possible for you to NEVER sin again, but if you choose to sin, He provides continual forgiveness for sin. God's provision and plan is for us to walk in daily victory over sin in the power He has provided. Knowing that we have free will and that we might not always make right choices, He, at the cross, provided for those sins as well. So, all sin, past, present and future is covered by His blood, and we are therefore completely free from the power of sin.

1 Corinthians 1:1-2
Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,2 to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are ***sanctified*** *in Christ Jesus, called to be* ***saints****, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.*
Romans 6:5-14
For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, [6] knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. [7] For he who has died has been freed from sin. [8] Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, [9] knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. [10] For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. [11] Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. [12] Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. [13] And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. [14] For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

[11] All born again believers are saints. If you are interested in this topic, go to www.biblegateway.com, and do a Keyword Search for the word "saint". May God open your eyes and show you who He has made you.

1 John 1:7
But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

Not only are we free from sin, we are free to be righteous. In fact by His cross, we have been made holy, blameless, and are beyond reproach. We are justified, sanctified, and have newness of life. We cannot make ourselves any of these things. They are all done by Jesus.

Galatians 2:21
I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.
Colossians 1:21
And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—
Romans 5:9
Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.
2 Corinthians 5:21
He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
Hebrews 9:14
How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?
1 Corinthians 1:30
But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—
Titus 2:14
Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.
2 Corinthians 5:17
Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Freedom from the Flesh

The New International Version of the Bible inaccurately translates the word "flesh" as "sinful nature" which can be very confusing when we try to understand who we are now that we have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. If you have an NIV Bible and you read the term "sinful nature", check the Greek to see if the original word is *flesh*.

The word "flesh" in the New Testament is "sarx" and means flesh. Our flesh is just that, flesh, our body, our senses, what we can see, hear, touch, taste, or smell. Our flesh will lust after things that are not God's best in order to be satisfied.

Before we came to Christ we were IN the flesh. However, now we are IN the Spirit not IN the flesh. Romans 8:8-9 says, "So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. [9] But you are **not** in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His." By this verse we see that all those who have been born again, those in whom the Spirit of God dwells, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit. This is positional. Christians are always IN the Spirit.

Even though we are IN the Spirit, we can still **choose** to live ACCORDING to the flesh. When we say someone is living "according to the flesh" we mean that they are allowing their senses to guide them, and not the Holy Spirit. We can also choose to live ACCORDING to the Spirit. When someone is living according to the Spirit, he is allowing the Spirit to guide him and not his fleshly desires. Romans 8:5 says, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit."

However, the unbeliever is different. The unbeliever can only be IN the flesh (positional), and cannot be IN the Spirit because he is not born again. Therefore, the unbeliever can only live *according* to the flesh. Yes, unbelievers can be nice people, but they cannot live according to the Spirit because they are not born again. Romans 8:7-8 says, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, **nor indeed can be**. 8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God." In other words it is not possible for a non-believer to please God because he is an enemy of God and can only live according to the flesh.

So, let us who are in the Spirit live in the freedom given to us to live according to the Spirit and not the flesh. We have a new nature given to us by God. We no longer have a sinful nature. We are new creations and thus we are free from sin.

> ***2 Corinthians 5:16***
> *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**; old things have passed away; behold, **all** things have become **new**.*
> ***Galatians 5:24***
> *And those who are Christ's have **crucified** the flesh with its passions and desires.*
> *For the flesh wars against the spirit.*
> ***Ephesians 2:1-4***
> *And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, **2** in which you once walk**ed** according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, **3** among whom also we all once conduct**ed** 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.*
> ***2 Peter 1:3-4***
> *As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, **4** by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the **divine** nature, having **escaped** the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

Freedom from the Old Man

The "Old Man" is not your father. It is who you were before you came to Christ. You are free from him because he has been crucified.

> ***Romans 6:5-7***
> *For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, **6** knowing this, that **our old man was crucified with Him**, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. **7** For he who has died has been freed from sin.*
> ***Ephesians 4:20-24***

*But you have not so learned Christ, **21** if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: **22** that you **put off**, concerning your **former** conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, **23** and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, **24** and that you **put on the new man** which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*

Colossians 3:9-10

*Do not lie to one another, since you **have put off the old man** with his deeds, **10** and **have put on the new man** who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.*

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Freedom to Have Our Minds Renewed

Before we knew Christ, we formulated our beliefs based on what was available to us in the world. Some of us were more methodical than others picking up degrees and certifications. Others took a more relaxed outlook on life. Whatever our approach, our minds picked up a lot of garbage along the way. We formulated opinions on just about everything. When we come to Christ we bring all of that baggage with us, our concepts of right and wrong, our opinions, our attitudes, our likes and dislikes, and sadly, some very bad experiences. Usually unaware of it, we were also heavily influenced by the devil. Almost all of what we believed before coming to Christ was opposed to God.

The wonderful news is that we can be transformed by the renewing of our minds. As we read the word of God and fellowship with our Father, we begin to take on His perspective. Our manner of thinking, evaluating, and making decisions will gradually, day by day conform itself to God's word.

This requires some effort on our part because God will not take over our minds and think for us. He will *renew* our minds as we *permit* Him. Sometimes we will read something in the Word of God that goes contrary to some truth we previously held dear. We will have a choice at that time, to accept all of God's word or ignore the parts that don't fit into our previous way of thinking. However, in accepting the Lordship of Jesus Christ, we embrace His wisdom. Over time, we begin to realize that His way of thinking sets us free.

Many of the scriptures below show that we cooperate in the process of having our minds renewed.

Ephesians 2:1-7

*And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, **2** in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, **3** among whom also 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. **4** But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, **5** even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).*

Hebrews 8:10

*For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their **mind** and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.*

Colossians 1:21-22

*And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled **22** in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.*

Ephesians 4:17-19

*This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the **futility of their mind**, **18** having their **understanding** darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the **ignorance** that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; **19** who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. 20 But you have not so learned Christ, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: 22 that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and **be renewed in the spirit of your mind**, 24 and that you*

put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

Romans 12:2

*And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed by the renewing of your mind**, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

1 Corinthians 2:11-16

*Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. **13** These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. **14** But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. **15** But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. **16** For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" **But we have the mind of Christ**.*

Romans 8:6-7

*For to be carnally **mind**ed is death, but to be spiritually **mind**ed is life and peace. Because the carnal **mind** is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.*

2 Corinthians 8:12

*For if there is first a willing **mind**, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.*

Colossians 3:2

*Set your **mind** on things above, not on things on the earth.*

Freedom from the Law of Sin and Death

Most Christians who are alive today were never were under the Law of Moses though they might have grown up memorizing the Ten Commandments. Being "under the law" means that one is submitted to the requirements of the Law of Moses and is be blessed for obeying it and cursed for not obeying it. When Jesus established the New Covenant, He did away with the Old Covenant. So, when a Jewish believer came to Christ, he was set free from the Old Covenant, which was the law, and came under a New Covenant of grace.

Hebrews 8:10-13

*For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. **11** None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. **12** For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." **13** In that He says, "A new covenant, " He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.*

When Gentiles came to Christianity, they partook of the New Covenant without ever having been under the Old. However, when certain Jews saw that the Gentiles were becoming Christians the same as they were, they insisted that these believers be circumcised according the Law of Moses and follow the other laws as well. In other words, they viewed Christianity as an extension of Judaism and believed the Gentiles should add Judaism to their faith in Christ. However, all believers, both Jew and Gentile are free from the Law of Moses.

John 1:17
For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
Romans 8:2
For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.
Romans 3:28
Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.
2 Corinthians 3:7-9
*But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, **8** how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? **9** For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory.*
Romans 10:4
For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Freedom from the Curse of the Law

If we are free from the Law of Moses and its requirements, then of course we are free from its curse. If you are interested in knowing in detail what curses from which you are free, read about them in Deuteronomy 28:15-68. That's 58 verses of curses from which we are free!

Galatians 3:10-13
*For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." **11** But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith." **12** Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them." **13** Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"),*
Colossians 2:13-14

*And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, **14** having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.*

Freedom from Guilt & Condemnation

Not only are we free from the Law of Moses and the curse of that law, but we are free from condemnation. According to Merriam-Webster condemnation means, "1: to declare to be reprehensible, wrong, or evil usually after weighing evidence and without reservation, 2 a: to pronounce guilty: convict, sentence, doom."

We read in John 3:17 that Jesus did not come into this world to condemn it, but so that the world might be saved. Through Jesus, instead of receiving condemnation, we received justification. In John 3:18 we read that the only condemnation of man will be for not believing in the name of God's Son. We who believe are free from condemnation.

Romans 5:16
*And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in **justification**.*
Romans 5:18
*Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in **justification of life**.*
Romans 8:1
There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

Freedom from Sickness

We will be studying this topic in more depth in Lesson 11. However, we must mention here that one of the things from which we have been set free is sickness. As you study the life of Christ, you will discover that He never once denied healing to anyone who came to him in faith, and by His wounds we are healed.

Hebrews 13:8
Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.
3 John 1:2
Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.
1 Peter 2:24
Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.

Freedom from the Enemy and Freedom from Fear

Given all the false Hollywood portrayals of Satan and demons, no wonder some Christians today are afraid of them. However, no Christian needs to fear either. We have

been set free from the power of the enemy and the fear of death. Because Jesus has power over him, and Jesus lives in us, the enemy cannot hurt us as long as we put our faith in Jesus.

In Part 3 of the Love of God Series we will study spiritual warfare. In that lesson we discuss who Satan is and what our proper perspective should be concerning him. However, there are three important points to keep in mind. First of all, the power of God in your life is infinitely more powerful than the power of Satan. If we represented God's power by all the particles in the universe and contrasted that with the period at the end of this sentence representing Satan's power, we would still not have it right.

Before we came to Jesus, we were without God and in the kingdom of darkness and without hope. Now, we are in the kingdom of light where we are safe in Him. We don't have to fear him or demons. Jesus Christ has disarmed Satan.

Finally, Satan is a fallen angel. He is not a god does not have the attributes of deity. He is not everywhere present; he does not know everything (like your thoughts); and he is not all powerful. He has no power over you unless you give it to him. All he can do is lie to you, challenge the power of God's word, and thus accuse God of being a liar. We, on the other hand, have power over him in the name of Jesus.

Luke 10:19
19 *Behold,* ***I give you*** *the* ***authority*** *to trample on serpents and scorpions, and* ***over all the power of the enemy****, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.*
Matthew 10:28
"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.
Acts 26:17-19
I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, **18** *to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from* ***the power of Satan to God****, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'*
Hebrews 2:14-16
Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might ***destroy him*** *who had the power of death, that is, the devil,* ***15*** *and* ***release those*** *who through* ***fear*** *of death were all their lifetime subject to* ***bondage****.*
Colossians 2:15
Having ***disarmed*** *principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them,* ***triumphing*** *over them in it.*
Revelation 1:18
I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And ***I have the keys of Hades and of Death****.*
John 10:10
The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have ***life****, and that they may have it* ***more abundantly****.*
James 4:7
Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will ***flee*** *from you.*
Romans 8:15
For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to ***fear****, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."*

2 Timothy 1:7
*For God has not given us a spirit of **fear**, but of **power** and of **love** and of a **sound mind**.*
Hebrews 13:5-7
*Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." **6** So we may boldly say:*
"The LORD is my helper;
***I will not fear**.*
What can man do to me?"

Freedom from Worry, Freedom to Rest, Freedom to Trust, and Freedom to Live in Peace

One of the most comforting verses in the New Testament in Matthew 11:28-30.

- ***Come to me**: Jesus invites each person to come to Him personally.*
- ***all**: He is calling all people to Him*
- ***you who are weary**: Are you weary? He is calling you.*
- ***and burdened**: Is life overloading you? He is calling you.*
- ***and I**: He Himself, not a religion or certain way of life.*
- ***will give**: You cannot purchase, earn, or work for what He wants to give you freely*
- ***you**: You personally*

- ***rest***[12]*: Rest. Yes, rest. Think about this for a minute. Wouldn't some rest be nice?*
- ***Take**: By an act of your will, receive what He wants to give you.*
- ***my yoke**: Not <u>your</u> yoke, not the yoke of a <u>church</u>, not the yoke <u>someone</u> else wants you to take…take <u>His</u> yoke. (A yoke is what is put on an ox to pull a cart.)*
- ***upon you**: Upon you.*
- ***and learn from me**: Jesus Himself wants to teach you many things.*
- ***for I am gentle**: This is not always the image people have of Jesus. He <u>is</u> not angry or pushy. He is gentle*
- ***and humble in heart**: He is not out to get you. He wants to minister to (serve) you.*
- ***and you will find rest**: Ah, rest again.*
- ***for your souls**: Rest for your soul…deep down inside rest and peace.*
- ***For my yoke**: His yoke, not your yoke, not the yoke or religious tradition, but His yoke.*
- ***is easy**: Easy? Yes, <u>easy</u>. Easy is the opposite of difficult.*
- ***and my burden**: Again His burden, not someone else's. Notice there is a burden to bear,*
- ***is light**: but Jesus says that this burden is light. We can carry it easily if we will come to Him, learn from Him, and find rest for our souls in Him.*

It is the norm in the church today to teach the complete opposite of this verse. We are told that following Jesus is "hard", but Jesus said it would be "easy". Jesus said we would find "rest", yet many live in constant striving, and many in the church today are exhausted. If you would describe the Christian life as difficult (even "miserable"), perhaps you need to take another look. Jesus wants us to enter His *rest*. Now, rest has to do with believing in Him. Believing in Him means to place your trust in Him.

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[12] **Definition of Rest:** Cessation of work, exertion, or activity. Peace, ease, or refreshment resulting from sleep or the cessation of an activity. Sleep or quiet relaxation. Relief or freedom from disquiet or disturbance. Mental or emotional tranquility. (American Heritage Dictionary)

> ***Hebrews 4**:9-16*
> *There remains therefore a **rest** for the people of God. **10** For he who has entered His **rest** has himself also **ceased from his works** as God did from His. **11** Let us therefore **be diligent to enter that rest**, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience. **12** For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. **13** And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. **14** Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. **15** For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. **16** Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

In the above verses we not only see there is a rest for us, but we are told to be *diligent* to enter that rest. It will take our effort to not fall back to trusting in our own works but fully rest in His.

Another aspect that brings rest to our souls is His word. We are told that his word is living and powerful and it can discern our thoughts and intentions. This might worry some, but it should give us rest. We do not need to try and impress Him. He knows our every thought, so we don't need to pretend. We can come before Him as we are and He loves us.

If we are lacking in any way, He will help us grow. Furthermore, Jesus is our understanding High Priest. He went through everything we do and was victorious.

The other rest we see in the above verses is that we can come with confidence before the throne of grace to find grace to help in time of need. No matter how crazy life gets, we can turn immediately to Him,. We don't need to pretend to be brave. We can lay our every thought before Him.

This next scripture is one of those treasures that can change our lives if we apply it regularly. At first it seems difficult to do, but once we do it, we have peace we cannot explain.

> ***Philippians 4:4-9***
> *Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, **rejoice**! **5** Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. **6** Be **anxious for nothing**, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; **7** and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

To be anxious[13] means "to have a painful or apprehensive uneasiness of mind usually over an impending or anticipated ill, an overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by physiological signs; to be worried."

In some families and cultures, someone who worries = someone who *cares*. Although this person might be made fun of: "Oh, she's such a worrier," it is still understood that

[13] www.merriam-webster.com

she is such a worrier because she *cares* for someone, which we then equate with loving them. So worrying, though ridiculed, remains a good trait in the minds of some.

Others see worrying as a sign of someone who is *responsible*. A responsible person will take great care in all he does. We may say, "He needs to mellow out," but at the same time we admire the man who is concerned about something, who takes great care in what he does.

The problem is God tells us <u>not</u> to be anxious, not to worry. How can we do this? Won't it mean we don't care or that we are being irresponsible? First of all, when God tells us to do or not to do something, it implies that we have the ability to do or not do it. To say, "I can't help it," is to imply that God is being unreasonable or asking the impossible. If He says, "Don't worry," then we have the ability to not worry. Thankfully, as in so many instances in Scripture, He gives us a better alternative. Instead of doing the thing that is harmful to us or to others, God gives us something better to do. When we take His advice, He blesses us with PEACE. Following is an expanded paraphrase of verses 6-7.

> *Don't be anxious or worry about anything, not about money, people, circumstances, your needs, the needs of others, war, personal conflicts, an upcoming event, things out of our control, earthquakes, storms, terror, evil doers, your physical appearance, whether or not people will accept you; fear of failure, or even insecurities. Instead, tell God specifically what it is that you want with a thankful heart. Thank Him for what He's done in the past along with thanking Him for what He will do in the current situation. If you do this, a miracle will happen. God will give you His peace. You will experience a peace that you have never known before. The peace will not make sense. How can you be peaceful when the world seems to be falling down around you? Yet you will be calm, without internal conflict. You will have total faith that He is in control of your life.*

Peace I leave with you,

My peace I give to you;

not as the world gives do I give to you.

Let not your heart be troubled,

neither let it be afraid.

John 14:27

Freedom to Be Blessed

You are free to enjoy the blessings of God. You already have everything you need. In fact, what God provides will always be over an above what you need.

> ***John 20:29***
> *Jesus said…"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*
> ***1 Peter 3:14***
> *But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed.*

1 Peter 4:14
If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.
1 Corinthians 2:12
Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.
2 Peter 1:2-4
*Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, **3** as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, **4** by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*
Ephesians 1:2-3
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.
Ephesians 3:20
Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us

Freedom to Have a Future and a Hope

In Jeremiah's prophecy to the captives in Babylon, he wrote, "'For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,' says the LORD, 'thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope,'" (Jeremiah 29:11). Even though His people had rebelled against Him, God still had plans for them that included their peace, future, and hope. How much more are we, who have been washed in the blood of His Son, able to smile at the future?

Paul wrote in Romans 5:10, "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." God did not go to the extent of having His Son die for us, just to leave us to save ourselves afterwards by our own works, but rather, we are now saved by His life.

In fact, we can live in constant and confident hope that we already have eternal life. John wrote in 1 John 5:12-13, "He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. 13These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.[14]" If we believe in Jesus, we can know without one doubt, that eternal life is ours.

We can also know that life on earth as we know it is not all there is. One day, things are going to be different. Jesus will return for us. So, no matter what we go through or how difficult life gets, we still have hope. Paul wrote in Romans 8:18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

We have a freedom that non-believers do not possess. We are free to dream, to plan, to hope even when everything looks hopeless. God has a plan for our lives and we will fulfill it. Nothing can stop us from doing God's will. Furthermore, we are not bound to live in this life only. When we are completely overwhelmed by the world in which we live, we

[14] NASB

can have an ever far-reaching hope…hope for a future spent with Him far removed from any current stress.

> ***Titus 2:11-14***
> *For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, **12** teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, **13** **looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ**, **14** who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.*

Freedom to Love and Be Loved

There are millions of people who at this very moment do not know the love of even one individual. This earth is full of violence, hatred, and corruption. People and nations live self-centered existences with no thought of caring or loving someone else. It is shocking that even in a time when we are so advanced, countries still commit genocide against one race or people. We hear about it on the news and think, "How awful," but feel powerless to change things. Millions are slaughtered for no greater reason than they are an annoyance or hindrance to gain of power or wealth. We are disturbed, even deeply, but how do we respond?

Most of us are not able to do anything personally. Packing a suitcase of clothing and food to take to someone who is suffering across the globe will make little impact. In fact, it is a waste of money and time. Thankfully, there are Christian organizations already in place who are working daily to minister to the needy around the world. By giving to their work, we partner with them as they go into these far away places and help those who are suffering[15].

We can also help the needy in our own communities. Look in the phone book and you will surely find a Christian organization who is helping the poor. You can donate time as a volunteer and/or money to help support the work there. Or just look around you. Everywhere, there are people who need your practical acts of love.

We are also free to love our fellow believers. When we see they need help of any kind, we can give of our resources to minister to them.

> ***1 John 3:16-18***
> *By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. **17** But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? **18** My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*

If you have something to give, but find your heart closing when you see a need, please take a moment to reflect. It is easy for someone to accuse you of being greedy, but more often than not, the answer is found by personalizing the verse above, "How does the love of God abide in you?" Many times when someone does not yet have the freedom to

[15] www.samaritanspurse.org; www.worldvision.org; www.operationblessing.org

love others in practical ways, it isn't because he is greedy, but because he does not truly understand how much God loves him.

We love,

because He first loved us.

1 John 4:19

If we don't love in a way that produces tangible acts of kindness, it could be because we don't fully understand how much we are loved by God. In the above verse we see that the reason we love is because He first loved us. If we are having difficulty opening our hand to those in need, we need to explore the depths of God's love for us. When we experience the freedom of being loved, we then know the freedom to love others.

1 John 4:10-11 says, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. **11** Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." God gave His son to satisfy the punishments for our sins so that we could have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that He GAVE…" Love gives. In God's case, He gave all that He could, His only Son…again, because He loved us.

This blessed loved is ours forever. We are free to receive it at all times. Nothing can ever separate us from His love.

Romans 8:31-39
*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? **32** He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? **33** Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. **34** Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. **35** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*

***36** As it is written:*
" For Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."
***37** Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.*
***38** For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, **39** nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he prayed that they would know God's love.

Ephesians 8:14-19
*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ **15** from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, **16** that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, **17** that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, **18** may be able to comprehend with all the*

*saints what is the width and length and depth and height— **19** to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

As we receive God's love, we will find the freedom to love each other. We will easily open our hearts and hands to those in need. We will be free to love and be loved, to both give and receive.

OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S LOVE

Freedom to Have Freedom

God wants us to be truly free, and He has done all that we need in order to live a daily life of freedom. No matter what our circumstances may be, we can walk in His liberty and confidence. You will hear that the Christian life is very difficult, but ask yourself, "Compared to what? Living in the world?" There truly is no comparison.

Without a doubt, life with Jesus is far superior to life without Him. Everyone on earth goes through difficult times, but we as Christians will never face any situation without the love and support of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We are truly free to live freely.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REVIEW

1. In your opinion, what is freedom?

2. Was there a freedom discussed in this lesson that you did not previously know was yours? Explain.

3. In what areas would you say you still need to hold fast to your freedom in Christ?

4. Explain your thoughts how being a Christian is infinitely preferable to being in the world.

5. How does the freedom to love affect you personally?

6. What other thoughts came to you as you read this lesson?

3

THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

WE BELIEVE . . .

. . . that subsequent to salvation the baptism of the Holy Spirit is available to all believers.

Three Baptisms

In Ephesians 4:4-5 is says, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism". In context, this is said in reference to keeping unity among the brethren, and should speak to us today. All of those who are truly born again have one hope of their calling, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.

The one baptism about which this speaks is likely water baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but could refer to the process by which we are baptized into the body of Christ (are saved).

In his letter to the Hebrews, Paul encourages the believers to go beyond the basic teachings of Christ to perfection. We read that one of the foundations of Christ is the "doctrine of baptism**s**".

> ***Hebrews 6:1-2***
> *Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, **2** of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.*

So we see there are other baptisms mentioned in the Bible. First of all, there was the baptism of John. The Jewish people of that day came to John confessing their sins in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. This was also a way of identifying with the community of those who believed His coming was near. We also have the baptism of Jesus. Though Jesus did not actually baptize anyone, His disciples did (John 4:1-2). This baptism likely signified that the person believed that Jesus was the Messiah or that he identified himself as one of his followers. Neither one of those baptisms are what concern us today. For us there are three actions referred to as baptisms: baptism into the body of Christ, baptism in water, and baptism in the Holy Spirit and fire. As with any baptism, we have the person that is doing the baptism and the element into which the person is baptized. Here is a chart that explains these three baptisms.

Baptizer	INTO/WITH	Scripture
Holy Spirit	***The body of Christ***	***1 Corinthians 12:13*** *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.*
Minister/ Believer	***Water***	***Acts 2:38*** *Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* ***Matt. 28:19***

		Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Jesus	***Holy Spirit & fire***	***Luke 3:16*** *John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*

The Born Again Disciples

In understanding the baptism of the Holy Spirit, it is most important to realize that before the Promise of the Father[16] was poured out, the disciples of Jesus were already born again. There are many denominations that believe that it was when the Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost that believers were born again, but there is plenty of Scripture to show otherwise.

It is clear that no one was born again until several realties came into play. The first two were the death and resurrection of Christ. In the previous lesson, we learned that it was through the cross of Christ that eternal salvation was made available. So, prior to the cross, no one could be born again. As to the resurrection, in 1 Corinthians 15:16-17 we read, "For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. **17** And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" No one could be born again unless Jesus had been crucified and resurrected. Both events had to take place before anyone could be saved. We also learned in Lesson One that just because salvation was made available to all men through the death and resurrection of Christ, a person has to believe in his heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and receive/confess Him as his Lord.

Considering that after the resurrection, the disciples saw Jesus, it is safe to conclude that they believed with all of their hearts that He had risen from the dead. Paul speaks of the many persons who saw Jesus personally after he had risen.

> *For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, **4** and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, **5** and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. **6** After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. **7** After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. **8** Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.*

We can read of a very touching moment that took place after the resurrection recorded in John 20 19-21. The disciples were gathered together and had locked the door out of fear. The women had said that they had seen Jesus alive, but the disciples had not believed their report.

> *Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." **20** When He had said*

[16] The Promise of the Father is the same as the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

> *this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.* ***21*** *So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."* ***22*** *And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."*

Imagine this scene. Their hearts had been broken. Their beloved leader had been brutally crucified. They were in fear of their lives from the Jews who had just had Jesus killed. What would they now do to them, His followers? Then Mary was told them He was alive. They were a tumbled mess of emotions, not knowing whether to hope or fear. Suddenly, Jesus appeared even though the door was locked. It says, "the disciples were glad when the saw the Lord". He tells them that just as the Father had sent Him, He would send them. After this, He breathed on them telling them to receive the Holy Spirit. It is safe to assume that they did just what He said. At this moment, all the pieces to the salvation puzzle were in play. Jesus had died and risen again, providing a way of salvation for all. The disciples believed and when He breathed on them, they received salvation. As it is written in 1 Corinthians 12:13, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free," At the moment when Jesus breathed on them and they received the Holy Spirit and were baptized into the body of Christ.

Further evidence that the disciples were born again before the day of Pentecost in found in 1 Peter 1:3 which reads, "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has **begotten us again** to a living hope **through the resurrection of Jesus Christ** from the dead." So, we see that the requirement for someone to be able to be born again is that Jesus was resurrected from the dead.

So, the disciples were born again prior to being baptized in the Spirit. What happened at Pentecost was a separate event from salvation.

The Promise of the Father

Before Jesus ascended into heaven He gave instructions to His disciples. This event is recorded in Acts 1:1-4.

> *The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,* ***2*** *until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen,* **3** *to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.*
> **4** *And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me;* **5** *for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*

Clearly Jesus was referring to something different than salvation. He breathed on them and told them to receive the Holy Spirit prior to this moment. Certainly, they had done so. Here, He is telling them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father which He called the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Even John had prophesied that Jesus would baptize His followers with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

> ***Luke 3: 16***

John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

This promise was not meant only for the first believers, but for all believers to come. We can read of this assurance in Acts 2:38-9 where Peter said,

*"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **39** For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."*

Day of Pentecost

In Acts 2:1-4 we catch up with the disciples. Jesus appeared to them for forty days after he rose from the dead, after which he ascended to the Father. Ten days later, during the feast of Pentecost, they gathered together in an upper room.

*When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. **2** And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. **3** Then there appeared to them divided tongues[17], as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. **4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.*

Imagine this event. They are expecting something, but they really don't know what. Then quickly, they hear a sound coming from heaven. It sounds like a rushing strong wind. The sound filled the room. What were they were thinking? I know I would be wondering what would happen next. Then appearing and then sitting upon each one of them was a divided tongue of fire. I'm sure they thought, "This must be it!" Then they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and started speaking in other languages as the Spirit gave them the language. The Spirit gave them the language, and "they" spoke it.

We know from the following verses that the disciples spoke in languages they had not learned, and that these languages were understood by those who could hear them. From this account we also learn what they were saying.

Acts 2:5-13
*And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. **6** And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. **7** Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? **8** And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? **9** Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia,*

[17] Both uses of "tongues", one translated *tongues* and the other often translated as *languages*, are the same word in the Greek.

*Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, **11** Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God." **12** So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "Whatever could this mean?" **13** Others mocking said, "They are full of new wine."*

Of course, it seems that whenever God is doing something new, or something that no one has heard of before, there will be mockers. "Oh, don't pay attention to them. They are just drunken babblers." So, it is today. There are Christians who do not understand the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Instead of investigating the matter thoroughly, they are content to dismiss it as emotionalism; or worse, they twist the Scripture to express their own opinions. However, with an honest look at Scripture, we can see that this same baptism is available to believers today. Read again what Peter said to the crowds after he had explained what this event meant.

For the promise[18] is to you

and to your children,

and to all who are afar off,

as many as the Lord our God will call.

Acts 2:39

Purpose of the Promise

The Holy Spirit is at work in <u>every</u> believer. By the Holy Spirit we are baptized into the body of Christ. It is erroneous for Pentecostals to speak as if non-Pentecostals do not have the Holy Spirit working in their lives. First of all, it is NOT possible to have only two-thirds of the Godhead living in a believer. God is not divisible. When someone is born again, all of God comes to dwell inside of them. Furthermore, it is ridiculous for any Pentecostal to express any sense of superiority over someone who is not. God's love for us is without partiality. The same power that caused one to be born again caused the other to be born again. If we have a gift another does not yet have, there is no room to boast since we did nothing to earn it.

However, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is an experience separate from salvation. It is the Promise of the Father as was evidenced in Acts 2, and as we read in Acts 2:39, it is available to every believer. It was sent for a special purpose and that purpose is this:

Acts 1:8

[18] We believe that this event was subsequent to salvation. Other denominations teach that this event was when the disciples were born again. So, they say that the promise that was to all generations was that of salvation. This ignores the fact that the disciples were already born again, and the subsequent records in the book of Acts in which born again disicples, after their salvation, were baptized in the Holy Spirit.

> *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."*

What did Jesus mean by this? In Luke 9:1 we read, "Then He called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases." The word for *power* here is the same word for *power* in Acts 1:8. Remember, the disciples did many of the miracles that Jesus did. So, this would be something like that, but even greater.[19]

> *The Greek word used for "power" is "dunamis" and denotes miraculous power, ability, might, or strength. It is the root word from which we derive our words "dynamic," "dynamite," and "dynamo." This clearly speaks of the presence and anointing of the Holy Spirit as being the power source in a believer's life. It was this anointing power of the Holy Spirit that worked miracles in the life of Jesus (Acts 10:38). We receive the same Holy Spirit power and we can expect to see it accomplish the same miraculous works that Jesus did (John 14:12) if we will believe.*

This *dunamis* which exceeds the power that the disciples had previously been given is available to any believer who wants to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit. We see that with this power, or perhaps by this power, we are to be witnesses of Him to the ends of the earth.

Initial Evidence

You may be aware by now, that there is some debate among Christians, even Pentecostal Christians, as to what the initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is. Some say, "speaking in tongues", and other insist "power", or "being a witness". To help calm this storm we have an expression "the initial *physical* evidence". It is meant to refer to the first *physical* evidence there is that someone has received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We believe that the initial *physical* evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the same today as it was the first day it was given. The disciples all spoke with tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now we will examine the instances in the book of Acts that are recorded in which other believers were baptized with the Holy Spirit, also referred to as being *filled* with the Spirit. We will show how that each time the believers spoke with tongues.

Scriptural Reference	Person Being Baptized in the Holy Spirit	Response Recorded	Rational Evidence and Evaluation
Acts 2:1-4	And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.	They spoke with tongues.	The first evidence that they had been baptized in the H.S. was that they spoke in tongues.

[19] The following is quoted from Andrew Wommack's Living Commentary, Acts. 1:8.

Acts 8:14-19	Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. **18** And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, **19** saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit."	These were already believers. It doesn't say explicitly that they spoke in tongues, but Simon saw something happen that made him want to buy the power that made it happen.	The most logical explanation is that they spoke in other languages.
Acts 9:17-19	"Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." **18** Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized.	Ananias referred to Saul as a brother. He was already born again. He prayed for him to receive the Holy Spirit, and he did. It doesn't say that he spoke in tongues, but we know from 1 Corinthians 14:18 that Paul did speak in tongues frequently.	It is safe to conclude that since Paul admitted to speaking in tongues, that at this incident he spoke in tongues.
Acts 10:44-46	While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. **45** And those of the circumcision who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. **46** For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God.	Here we have people getting saved and the Holy Spirit fell on them immediately. The others were amazed that this gift was given to the Gentiles. Here they clearly spoke in tongues.	The way that Peter and those who came with him knew that they'd been baptized in the Holy Spirit was that they heard them speak in tongues. This was the normal experience.
Acts 19:1-7	When they heard *this,* they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. **6** And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.	Once again, it is clear that these were already born again, for they had just been baptized in water. When Paul laid hands on them, the Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues.	Again, this is the normal experience for someone who is baptized with the Holy Spirit.

OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S LOVE

Receiving the Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Before someone can receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, he must first be born again. If you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, and you have confessed Him as the Lord of your life, then you may receive this Promise of the Father.

Receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit is as simple as receiving Jesus. In fact, it has similarities. You must *believe* that God wants to give you this gift, you must *receive* it by faith, and <u>you</u> must *speak*.

We have already looked at Acts 2:39 in which Peter said that this Promise was to all who believed in Jesus, even those who are far off, namely to us. In Luke 11:9-13 we read the words of Jesus that assure us of the Father's desire to give His children this gift.

> *"So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. **10** For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. **11** If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? **12** Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? **13** If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"*

We see here that if we ask for the Holy Spirit, God is going to give us what we ask. He won't allow us to get an imitation or substitute. Notice also that we are to ask. It is

nothing complicated. "Father, I *believe* that this promise is for me. I ***ask*** you to baptize me in the Holy Spirit. I *receive* it by faith."

Speaking in Tongues

The next step is to speak. This is where the experience can become quite comical. So many people have the misconception that the Holy Spirit is going to take control of their lips and vocal chords and make them speak. Some of this is from what people say to us. When I was asking the Lord to baptize me in the Holy Spirit, I would hear words in my mind, and someone would say to me, "Give God your lips, sister." So, I would sit there with my lips relaxed waiting for them to start moving. Every time a group of Christians would pray for me, I would do the same thing, but nothing happened! I had grown up in a Pentecostal church, and had heard stories of how the Holy Spirit would come on people, perhaps in the middle of a class, and they would uncontrollably speak in tongues. This frightened me as a child. I remember sitting in class in the sixth grade quite worried that this might happen to me! So, when my friends would pray for me, I'd relax my lips and let them hang low, but at the time I was so frustrated.

One day, a sister asked me if I'd been baptized in the Holy Spirit yet. I said no, but I had tried, and nothing happened. She simply asked me if I was hearing words in my mind. I told her I was. She said, "That's the Holy Spirit giving you the language, but you have to speak it." At first, I thought this to be quite an unspiritual approach. Did she want me to fake it? She told me the Spirit was not going to force me to speak, that I had to do the speaking. Then she prayed for me, and I began to speak the words I'd been hearing for weeks, and when I did, I began to speak in tongues, and I knew I had been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Still, that's my *experience*, what does the *Scripture* actually say about the speaking part? It says, "And **they** were all filled with the Holy Spirit and **began to speak** with other tongues, **as the Spirit gave them utterance**." Do you see it? The Holy Spirit gave them the ability to speak the language, but THEY are the ones who spoke it. God does not force us to do anything. We believe/ask, receive, and speak. It is a step of faith to put voice to the words God gives you.

God Reveals by His Spirit

Besides the power, and the ability to be witnesses, there are many other benefits to praying in tongues. The word says that we are baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire. I remember the day I first spoke in tongues. Something happened that I did not expect. The cleansing fire of the Holy Spirit went somewhere very deep in my heart, and I "heard" God speak to me. It went something like this, "I want you to apologize to your father." I kept praying in tongues, not sure I wanted to continue this conversation, even though I wasn't talking in English, I was saying to God, "Me? Apologize to him? He is the one who has been so horrible to me all these years!" I kept praying in tongues and I was weeping. God was touching me somewhere very deep inside. "You owe him an apology for being so disrespectful, for all the mean and hateful things you have said to him." I was still speaking in tongues, yet in my mind thinking in English and arguing with God about who owed whom an apology.

It would take several drafts over the next few days in order to write a letter apologizing without letting him know he deserved my hatred, but finally I told him I was sorry for treating him disrespectfully and that God had spoken to my heart to apologize. I was surprised to get a response which included these lines, "I probably provoked you."

It was the beginning of a work God wanted to do in my life to set me free from every sin and pain that held me bound. Not everyone has the same experience when baptized in the Holy Spirit. Some simply worship God deeper than ever before, or feel a certain peace. When we pray in the Holy Spirit, He reveals to us the deep things of God. He knows what we need. 1 Corinthians 2:7-11 says,

> *But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory,* ***8*** *which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*
> ***9*** *But as it is written:*
>
> *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,*
> *Nor have entered into the heart of man*
> *The things which God has prepared for those who love Him."*
>
> **10** *But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.* **11** *For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.*

The Spirit Helps Us When We Pray

Praying in the Spirit also helps us when we aren't sure how we should pray. In Romans 8:26-27 we read,

> *Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.* ***27*** *Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*

When we pray in tongues, we know that we are praying the perfect will of God over a situation. This gives us rest in our hearts. In fact, when Isaiah prophesied about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, he said the following:

> ***Isaiah 28:11-12***
> *For with stammering lips and another tongue*
> *He will speak to this people,*
> ***12*** *To whom He said, "This is the rest with which*
> *You may cause the weary to rest,"*
> *And, "This is the refreshing"*

Praying in the Spirit Builds Us Up

Another benefit of praying in tongues is that we build up our faith. Jude 1:20-21 says, "But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, **21** keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

Just by praying in tongues, we are edified. This can be an ongoing practice, but is especially a blessing when we feel weak or discouraged. As we pour out hearts out to the Lord, speaking in tongues, we realize that He is encouraging us to put our faith in Him. Thus, we are kept in the love of God.

Worshipping God in Tongues

When we pray in the Spirit, we speak mysteries to God[20]. We give him praise for His wonderful works. We can pray in the Spirit in our mind when it isn't appropriate to speak out loud. We can quietly speak, or we can joyfully praise. We can even sing in tongues our praises to the Lord.[21] Each time we do, we are filled to the brim with His power; power to live this life, and power to share it. Praise God for His wonderful gift.

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[20] **1 Corinthians 14:2**
For he who **speak**s in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands him; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries.

[21] **1 Corinthians 14:14-16**
For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. **15** What is *the conclusion* then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REVIEW

1. What is the baptism in the Holy Spirit? How is it different than being baptized into the body of Christ?

2. What did Jesus say would happen to the disciples when the Holy Spirit came upon them?

3. What Scriptural evidence does the author give to show that the disciples were already born again before the Day of Pentecost?

4. Review the instances in the book of Acts in which believers were baptized in the Holy Spirit. What evidence do we have in each instance that the believers likely spoke in tongues after receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

5. What are the benefits of speaking in tongues?

6. If you have not yet been baptized in the Holy Spirit, you may ask to receive it at any time. Or, if you'd like, ask your group leaders to pray with you.

7. Record here other thoughts you had while studying this lesson that you want to remember.

4
LOVE ONE ANOTHER

WE BELIEVE . . .

. . . that Christians have two commandments to obey, to believe on the name of God's Son Jesus Christ and love one another.

A Neglected Topic

When is the last time you heard a sermon about loving each other? If you could guess, how many sermons specifically about loving one another have you heard in your time as a Christian? At the time of writing this book, I have been an adult Christian 34 years. I have heard thousands of sermons on just about every topic, and I have taught many as well. I am sad to admit and sad to report that I estimate having heard zero sermons on loving one another. It is stunning to think that the main commandment of Jesus is scarcely taught except in passing.

During my lifetime, I have put a strong emphasis on loving others in every aspect of my life. I personally have understood that loving other believers is commanded and essential and have lived my life with that as one of my goals, to love people. Here and there, I have thrown in a comment about related topics that concern loving each other, such as forgiveness, giving, and seeing each other in the Spirit and not in the flesh, but I honestly don't think I've deliberately emphasized Christ's command, and certainly not to the extent it deserves considering it was His only command.

I became stunningly aware of this lack upon reading the book Love Revolution by Gaylord Enns. In his book, Gaylord tells of his journey to discovering the lost command of Christ. He was in full-time ministry for forty years with twenty-five years as a senior pastor, but only recently was he able to see this deficiency in his own life. He was so busy trying to love God with all his mind, soul, and strength, that he neglected to love others.

Although love has always been central to my life, and loving others is my goal as to how I live my life, I had to admit that I was not teaching this command, this only command of Christ, and I didn't know *anyone* who was!

Believing

Gaylord pointed out in his book that the first of the two commandments is actually God the Father's. Notice how it is worded: "believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ". Since Jesus is God the Father's Son, then this command can only come from the Father.

Believing on Jesus is not only the initial act of believing and being saved. Believing has to do with a lifestyle. We put our trust in Him and in His Word on a minute by minute basis. We completely cling to Him for our right standing with God the Father and do not have confidence in some perceived ability to save ourselves. Believing also includes trusting in His love for us. Believing, as we said in Lesson One, is our response to God's love for us. If He did not love us and send His Son to die for us, we could not believe. When we

believe in Jesus, we bring joy to God the Father. In essence, when we believe in His Son, we are loving the Father. Believing in Jesus is our greatest expression of our love for God.

A New Commandment

In order to study the topic of Christ's commandment to love each other, let us return to the moment in time in which He gave it. Jesus had just washed the disciples' feet and told them to serve each other, then He said,

> ***John 13:34-35***
> *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. **35** By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*

Jesus had many things to teach the disciples that night. They would be his last words before his crucifixion including, "If you love Me, keep My commandments," (John 14:15), and "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love," **(**John 15:10**).**

Surely these men wondered what Jesus meant. Jesus taught so many things. *Which* commandments? Jesus stated the importance of keeping His commandments, and without pause answered the obvious question and explained what "the commandment" meant (John 15:12-17).

> *This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. **13** Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. **14** You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. **15** No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. **16** You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. **17** These things I command you, that you love one another.*

A Sign to All Men

This commandment, when fulfilled by the disciples, would speak louder than words for Jesus told them that all would know that they were His disciples if they loved each other. He wasn't talking about our modern day meaning of the word love, that intangible warm and cuddly *feeling* for someone that is gone with the wind at the first sign of conflict. He was speaking of the same love He had for them, a love that would lead Him to the cross. Jesus told them there was no greater love than for someone to lay down his life for a friend. He would set an example, and ask them to do the same. This commitment to love and the demonstration of this love is what still speaks today. Each time we give of ourselves unselfishly to each other, the world stands up and takes notice that we are His disciples.

Evidence of Our Relationship with God

The same apostle John who wrote the Gospel bearing his name also had some very clear instructions in the book of 1 John where he wrote about the imperative of loving each other.

- ***1 John 3:10***
  In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.
- ***1 John 3:14***
  We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.
- ***1 John 4:20***
  If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?
- ***1 John 4:21***
  And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

So, we see that John, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit speaks some very revealing truths. He makes it very clear, that loving each other is an assurance to us that we are of God and that we truly love God. He also points out that if someone hates his brother is not a true believer. John also wrote,

Beloved, let us love one another,

for love is of God;

and everyone who loves

is born of God and knows God.

He who does not love

does not know God,

for God is love.

Beloved, if God so loved us,

we also ought to love one another.

1 John 4:7-8, 11

OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S LOVE

A New Family

When we come to Jesus and believe on His name, we become part of the body of Christ. Of course, we still honor those who are in our natural families, but we also become increasingly committed to our new family. One of the first responses to the elaborate love that God has demonstrated to us will be that we love each other. This is nothing short of a miracle.

The church I attend is a perfect example of this miracle. Our town is very racially divided. It is better in some ways today than it was when I was a child growing up here in the 1960's and 1970's when nearly every church was segregated by color, but even today, there are bitter and harsh divisions between races among members of the community.

Come to church with us one Sunday, and you won't know you are in the same town. Filipino Americans, African Americans, Caucasians, Italian Americans, Latino Americans, Nigerians, Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, Native Americans, different combinations of mixed races; have I left someone out? We come together, and lay aside our differences and worship God together.

We are not only of multiple races, but mixed political views. Oh, we each think the other person should know better than to think the way they do, but we know how to keep that to ourselves for the sake of peace and unity. Do the rich despise the poor? No. They give. Do the poor walk around with their heads hanging low? No. Do they resent the rich? No. They feel loved and accepted by all. How about the one who was living a questionable lifestyle last week, but who now is in love with Jesus? Does he/she walk about in shame around those who have been serving Him most of their lives? No. We all know what it's like to be forgiven.

If someone has a need, it doesn't matter to us what his/her race is, we do our best to help each other. You don't have to be of a certain race to be in leadership. If someone is willing to go to the Bible school and study, he/she will soon be leading something. We are an equal opportunity servant church. We are willing to serve each other and learn from each other. We are one in Christ. Do we get on each other's last nerve sometimes? Yes! We aren't perfect; we are still learning, but one cannot walk into our church and not see that we love each other sincerely.

This isn't happening because we have sensitivity or diversity training classes going on in the church. You won't read one word in our Constitution and By-Laws that mandates a certain amount of racial integration. It is happening because we all believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and honor Him by loving each other. In my estimation, it is a radiant miracle and testimony to the fact that we are His.

As human beings we have certain emotional needs. Two of the most important needs we have are that of acceptance and forgiveness. If you find a healthy church you will find these qualities there. When you are weak, someone will pray for you and encourage you, and you will learn to do the same.

A good fellowship will also be committed to helping you grow into maturity. It will offer classes that will teach the Word and encourage you to believe in the Lord in every area of your life. You will have the example of mature believers who will disciple you by opening their lives to you and provide training so that you can discover the gifts God has placed inside of you so that you may one day disciple someone else.

When you are discouraged or in need, a good fellowship will help you in every way possible. They will either point you to the resources for which you qualify or open their own to assist you. They will share your joys and sorrows and be there to agree with you in prayer for a happy and prosperous life.

Jesus said in Matthew 18:18-20,

> **18** "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.
>
> **19** "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. **20** For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

This is and interesting passage because He is already living in us, and we know that He has already promised to answer our prayers. Yet, something special happens when we come together in His name. His presence is with us in a special way, and it appears that our prayers are even more powerful. There is such great power in agreement and unity.

So, without hesitation, we recommend you find a place where you can participate as a member of the family of God, where you can both be loved and love; where you can learn and eventually teach, where you can receive, but even more importantly, a place where you can give.

This gathering together might or might not be a formal church. You might find a small group of believers who sincerely love the Lord worshipping together in a home. As long as they are sound doctrinally and do not try to dominate your life decisions, don't be afraid to become part of the family. Many larger churches now, offer both small groups and a larger celebration.

You may find yourself in a situation where there is no fellowship where you live, then gather together with your immediate family or neighbors or with a church live on the internet. Whatever you decide is best for you, enter into the joy of the family of God.

And let us consider one another

in order to stir up love and good works,

not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,

as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another,

and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10:24-25

Love is Tangible

Remember love is not that dizzy feeling you get when you realize you love someone and they love you. Love is a choice, a choice we are free to make because the God who created the Universe and sent His Son to save us, loves us. Because He loved us, we love. Love is also more than words, but action. John encouraged us to not love in word, but in deed and in truth. So, we do not simply *pray* for someone and *wish* them well if they are in need, but we do our best to help them meet that need. We will discuss this more in the next lesson.

Obstacles to Love

SELF-CENTEREDNESS

There are some very ugly monsters you might have to tackle in order to be joined to a community of believers. The first and most dangerous raging month is the **BEAST OF SELF-CENTEREDNESS.** Seeing everything from your own perspective and not being flexible and cooperative with others is a killer of love. This can be most clearly seen in a marriage, but is also very obvious in families, friendships, and yes, the body of Christ. When we are wearing our ME-ME-ME glasses, our perspective is sorely bent. If things don't go how ME-ME-ME wants, we are easily offended. When we are only thinking of ourselves, we will not respect others as we should, and there is not a chance that we would give our lives for others. It will take some practice, but as you allow the love of God to grow in your life, you will find it easier and easier to take off those nasty glasses once and for all and begin to see the needs of others as more important than your own.[22]

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit,
but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.
Let each of you look out not only for his own interests,
but also for the interests of others.
Philippians 2:3-4

INSECURITY

Another beast that can hinder love is the UGLY MONSTER OF INSECURITY. He is a cousin to the Beast of Self-Centeredness, but more subtle in nature. Insecure people tend to make certain assumptions such as, "No one likes me. Everyone hates me." Feeling unworthy of love, they find it difficult to believe anyone loves them. So, the fear of rejection holds them back. There is only one hope. As we spend time with the Lord, in prayer and in His word, we discover how much we are loved. Then we can step out in faith

[22] My favorite book on this topic is Self-Centeredness, the Source of All Grief by Andrew Wommack.

to love others. Gradually, we gain confidence. Perhaps you will always have a tendency to be shy, but as you begin to put others' needs ahead of your own insecurities, you will find more and more peace.

We love
because
He first loved us.
1 John 4:19

UNFORGIVENESS

Another obstacle to love is UNFORGIVENESS. As you grow in closer association with other believers, you will become more aware of their faults and weaknesses. Anyone who is married understands this. When we first marry, we have certain unrealistic expectations.

After getting married, we face reality. No one is perfect. Not you and not your spouse. It is similar in the body of Christ.

We can be offended by the behavior of others. We can misunderstand each other due to personality or cultural differences. However, as we grow together, we learn how to love each other and to forgive. We can choose to forgive because we ourselves have been forgiven. We learn to extend the grace to others that we have received. Over time, forgiveness becomes a way of life.

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor,
and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.
And be kind to one another,
tenderhearted, forgiving one another,
even as God in Christ forgave you.
Ephesians 4:31-32

The Challenge of Clear Communication

COMMUNICATION can also be a challenge in our efforts to learn how to love each other. As we grow up, we each develop our own skill set for communicating, and no one is exactly the same. This opens the door for misunderstandings, hurt feelings, and unresolved conflict. Following are some nasty habits of communication that we all need to eliminate so that we can learn to love each other better.

MAKING ASUMPTIONS IN THE ABSENCE OF INFORMATION

If you are dealing with someone who isn't that communicative, it is easy to fall into this trap. When someone doesn't give us input, it's easy to "fill in the blanks" with our own insecure assumptions. When we eventually speak to the person we assumed held a certain

opinion, their perspective couldn't be further from what we thought! We fell into our own trap. One way to avoid this is simply to not allow yourself to think for the other person. If you need to know their thoughts ask them directly.

REFUSING TO APOLOGIZE FOR STEPPING ON TOES

Oh, we can be so stubborn sometimes, always needing to prove we are right. I learned this lesson young in life, and taught it constantly to my children. If you step on someone's toes, that is, if you do something that hurts someone as an unintended consequence, APOLOGIZE!!! Think about it. YOU stepped on their toes. You didn't mean to. Understood, but YOU stepped on their toes. Their toes hurt because YOU stepped on them. It is not a time to make sure the person knows you didn't *mean* to hurt them. It is time to simply say, "I'm sorry." Usually, that's all you need to do. They will be able to tell from your tone of voice that you didn't do it intentionally.

This stubbornness can ruin an otherwise healthy marriage. One person says or does something that in no way was deliberately meant to hurt the other, but it does. The offended expresses that he/she was offended, and the other says, "Well, I didn't *mean* it like *that*!" which is the wrong answer. Just say you are sorry, and all is well. It is when people take too much time defending their honor that love gets lost.

MANIPULATION

Most people can tell when you are pouring on the charm in order to get them to do something. Some people actually use sales techniques to motivate other believers. Manipulation is dishonest. Dishonesty breeds distrust. So, as much as possible, be upfront about all you do, especially if you are in a place of leadership. Many a soul has been turned off 100% from church because leaders used manipulative techniques.

PUTTING OTHERS IN A BOX

Don't you find it annoying when someone talks about you like they know you so well, but they don't know you at all? We don't like it when people put us into a box. They decide for themselves who we are and what we are like, and we are forever in that box, even thirty years later. This is especially true in families. My aunt used to tell me I was "such a brat" based on who knows what from my childhood. One day I said to her, "I'm NOT a brat, and I wasn't a brat as a child," then I continued to let her know the evidence proving me correct. She apologized. I forgave. Case closed. Thankfully, my aunt is a Christian.

However, this is not usually the story. Usually the same negative stories are repeated year after year, and the offended one is so offended, he doesn't say a word…just goes on feeling resentful. Of course we will analyze each other, but keep in mind; it takes a very long time to know someone well. Also, remember we are new creations. We have changed. Love means begin willing to truly know someone. Allow your opinion of someone to develop, and don't hold them to how they used to be. See them how God sees them.

Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh.

Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh,

yet now we know Him thus no longer.

17 Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, he is a new creation;

old things have passed away;

behold, all things have become new.

2 Corinthian 5:16-17

NOT LISTENING

Listening is a special skill. Most of us are more interested in getting our own point across or we are in a hurry to get to the next "thing" we need to do. Love has a difficult time taking root if we don't give each other time. If someone wants to talk to you, take a deep breath, and listen. What can you do that will help them? Maybe it is just listening. Don't keep looking at your watch, or looking away in the direction you need to go. Just stop a minute and see if God wants to use you to love this person.

WRITING SOMEONE OFF

I think everyone has either done this or had it done to them. You meet someone; you get to know them; everything seems just fine; then suddenly, you get the cold shoulder. You notice this person all lovey-dovey with others, but when you stroll by, they get stiff and quiet. You greet them normally, but they respond with mere politeness. You aren't imagining this. They have decided you are not their cup of tea or that they simply don't "like" you. This has either happened to you, or worse, you are currently doing this to someone.

Remember that God did not write us off. Even though we were His enemies, He sent His Son to die for us. Certainly we can extend love and friendship to all persons even if they aren't perfect.

The Fine Line between Love and Hate

One of my favorite thoughts in Love Revolution by Gaylord Enns is his description of the difference between love and hate. He observes in Scripture that there is no gray area between love and hate, but a sort of continuum going in opposite directions. He sees as the

beginning of love as *compassion* that moves out progressively to giving one's life for his friend. He sees hate as beginning with *indifference* and moving toward murder. He sees no middle ground. It is the indifference that should give us pause. As we read in 1 Peter 1:22, "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart. This leaves no room for indifference.

When we look at it this way, there is no room for, "I *love* him, but I don't *like* him." There is no space for feeling neutral about a brother. There is no middle ground. We either love or hate to one degree or another. The Apostle John seemed to understand this best.

> ***1 John 3:14-16***
> *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.* ***15*** *Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.* ***16*** *By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*

Now, Go Love One Another

Love involves sacrifice, but if you make it a goal in life to sincerely and fervently love each other as Christ commands, it can be a constant source of joy. When we love others, we are responding to God's love for us. Jesus said in John 15:11-12,

> These things I have spoken to you,
>
> that My joy may remain in you,
>
> and that your joy may be full.
>
> 12 This is My commandment, that you love one another
>
> as I have loved you.

So, go ahead, and enjoy!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REVIEW

1. How many sermons have you heard that specifically taught Christ's command?

2. Assuming that ministers are not purposely avoiding the topic, in your opinion why might it be that the topic is not often discussed?

3. In what ways is following Christ's command influential and beneficial in an individual's life and in the lives of those around him/her?

4. In your opinion how is it that the family of God can be as close to us sometimes than our own relatives?

5. What are the many benefits of gathering together with other believers?

6. In what ways is forgiveness an act of love? Share your own frustrations or victories in this area.

7. What changes can you make right away that will make it easier for you to fulfill the command of Jesus to love each other?

5

The Joy of Grace Giving

We Believe . . .

. . . that we are to give as we purpose in our hearts, not grudgingly or out of necessity because God loves a cheerful giver.

One of the first areas in our lives that the Lord will ask us to consider is money. He knows that if we are guided by a love of or a trust in money, our destruction is certain. He will, if we allow Him, teach us His perspective that will be for our good and freedom.

Demands of Modern Society

While the United States is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, the culture in which we live is very demanding financially. We are expected to have a certain amount of possessions; whereas, in some countries, if you are poor, you do the best you can to build a tent or structure to protect yourself from the elements. There might even be a certain amount of respect due you for doing the best you can. In Mexico, for example, there is the expression "mucha honra" which means "much honor". It is often used when referring to the poor working class, who though they have no status in society, still have self-respect and the respect of their peers for working hard to move forward and succeed to the best of their ability.

However, in the United States, there are laws that prohibit us from living in a tent or constructing a house out of whatever materials we can gather. Even state parks have limitations as to how many days one can camp there so that no one ends up as resident of the park. The homeless are discouraged from sleeping on the streets, and it isn't acceptable to sleep in one's car. Let's face it, if you live here, you have to live in a building that has been built to meet strict codes, and you will have to either rent it or buy it. Rare are the exceptions. If you are blessed to have a house, this will cost you, too. There's the mortgage, the gas and electricity, water, garbage, repairs, and maintenance. Don't forget the insurance for every imaginable potential catastrophe!

Furthermore, if you live somewhere like California, you will need a car. While there are the very few who choose to not own a car for ecological standards they themselves have set (and not normally due to financial concerns), most people, even many who are truly homeless, own a car. Oh, and don't forget, it is illegal in most states to drive without purchasing car insurance!

Next, you need clothes. You can't walk around naked. You need to have shoes, and most places would prefer you also have undergarments. If the weather is awful, it is not considered normal to wrap yourself in a blanket and walk around. You will need a coat when it gets cold.

Did I mention food? Only land owners and co-ops have the luxury of planting and growing food, and that is normally a hobby, though there are some who grow their own food in order to save costs or have healthier choices.

What about health care? We hear of all the woes of our health care system. Actually, it is easier in California to afford healthcare if you are poor. Under a certain level, you can receive free medical care. However, once you reach a certain level of income, if your employer does not provide healthcare, you will need to pay for it out of pocket or purchase your own healthcare package. This can approach the cost of renting a small apartment. You might never go to a doctor, but the possibility that something catastrophic would happen, keeps you paying.

All children are expected to go to school, and usually, if someone wants to make a more substantial salary, he/she will need to go to college. While the first two years of a college education is relatively inexpensive, the next two years will cost thousands of dollars.

Then along came technology! Ten years ago, we had one computer in our house, now we have three. Cell phones, televisions, gadgets and gizmos galore…all seem like necessities in our society. This list continues. . . What I am trying to point out is that life is very expensive, and the more civilized the place where you live, the more demanding it is. So, out of necessity, money is a central issue in our lives.

Discussing money can be a touchy topic as well. We hold on tightly to what we have worked so diligently to earn. We invest it, put it in a bank, budget it, and save some up for retirement. Most people have a strong sense of being the boss when it comes to money. We don't like to be taxed, and we don't like people telling us how to spend our hard earned cash. We worked for it, so we get to decide what we do with it.

A New Perspective

As Christians we learn that the Word of God has much to say about money. The important thing for us to remember when considering the topic of money is to not form our opinions about it based on what *others* tell us to do or even what *we* think is best. The safest and happiest way to deal with finances is to examine what the New Testament actually has to say about money and specifically about giving.

You may think you have heard "this" before, but I challenge you to open your heart and examine the New Testament teachings about money and God's view on giving. You will learn in this chapter the joy of giving, and instead of wanting to know how much you *have* to give, you are going to *want* to give more than you ever have before. It won't be out of guilt either, but out of love.

We often hear of how "hard" it is to be a Christian. I used to think that way myself, seeing the Christian life as a source of misery. Now, it is sad to hear people characterize the Christian life as difficult. Jesus had something to say about what life would be like for those who followed Him. We can hear His heart in **Matthew 11:28-30**.

Come to Me,

all you who labor and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.
Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me,
for I am gentle and lowly in heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.
For My yoke is easy
and My burden is
light.

When I read those lines, something in me takes a deep breath and relaxes. Jesus did not come to lay burdens on us. In fact, He wants to give us rest from the burdens we bear. When we take His true yoke upon us, and learn how He really is, we find in Him a loving gentleness and a humble servant. We find rest for our souls, for our innermost core, true rest. He assures us that His yoke is easy, and His burden is light.

If for some reason, you read this verse, and it seems far away from your reality, God wants to set you free. Most likely you have picked up someone else's yoke, not His, someone else's burden, and not that of Christ Jesus. If money is one of those areas in which you do not have rest, but in which you are burdened and heavy laden, I invite you to read on. God is going to give you rest for your soul.

God's Promise to Meet Our Needs

Jesus taught His disciples a new perspective on life. He knew that money is what made their world go around. He also knew they were worried about these things. This is what He said to them in **Matthew 6:25-34**.

> *"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? **26** Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? **27** Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? **28** "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; **29** and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. **30** Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? **31** "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' **32** For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. **33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you**. **34** Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

Seek God's kingdom first, and His righteousness (not your own kingdom or your own righteousness), and all of these things that you normally worry about will be given to you. Don't worry about tomorrow's needs; your Father will take care of you.

It sounds like rest to me, but so does a dance through the daisies. We would be tempted to call this *naive* if it were not Jesus who said it. It is a little difficult for us to debate God. Yet something in us isn't sure. "You mean, seek His kingdom, not mine, and His righteousness, not mine, don't worry about my needs being met, and He'll provide for me?"

We must not miss the point here. Jesus didn't say not to work. He didn't say to sit around and do nothing. He said not to *worry* about these things. Why shouldn't we? He told us why. Our Father knows we need them. He takes care of plants and birds, and we are much more valuable than lilies and sparrows.

This was not a new concept to Jesus' Jewish followers. They had read **Psalm 23**. So have you, but read it again very slowly. Instead of picturing a Shepherd with sheep, see Jesus gently taking care of your every need. Let His rest enter your troubled soul. Record your thoughts as you go.

The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
2 *He makes me to lie down in green pastures;*
He leads me beside the still waters.
3 *He restores my soul;*
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.
4 *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,*
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
5 *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;*
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.
6 *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me*
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD
Forever.

By simply giving our lives to Christ, God has promised to take care of our needs, not just our spiritual or emotional needs, but our financial needs. You won't find anything in this world that offers you such a guarantee. This world will only *demand* from you. This is one enormous way in which the Christian life is one of rest. He promises to meet all of our needs if we seek His kingdom and His righteousness first.

More Than We Give

Not only will God meet our needs, He will give us an abundance. Perhaps you have heard of the story of the rich young ruler. This man came to Jesus to ask Him what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus quoted the part of the Ten Commandments that had to do with loving others, but not all of them. The man said He had done this since his youth. The

Scripture says that Jesus loved the man. He told him that he lacked one thing. He was to go sell his possessions, give to the poor, pick up his cross, and follow Jesus. The man left sorrowful as he was very rich, and obviously not willing to make such a sacrifice.

Jesus said, "How difficult it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God," but when His disciples wondered who could then enter, He said, "The things which are impossible to men are possible with God." His disciples reminded Him that they had left everything to follow Him. Jesus then said something very remarkable to them in **Mark 10:29-30**:

> *Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My (name's)[23] sake and the gospel's (the kingdom of God)[24], **30** who shall not receive a hundredfold (many times more)[25] now in this (present)[26] time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life.*

I find Jesus' response stunning. It does not fit in with what we typically assume is the normal Christian life. We only emphasize the sacrifices we must make to follow Jesus. We seldom mention this promise He made to all of His believers. No matter what we give up for the kingdom of God, He will give back to us a hundred times more than what we give up. We automatically think, "Oh, yes of course, in the age to come!" No. Jesus said in the age to come we would receive eternal life. The hundredfold blessing we receive is "in this life".

When I came to the Lord, my whole life was on the table before me. In my mind, I was a rich young ruler. Money-wise, no, but in other areas I was rich. I was an excellent college student, respected by my professors and peers. I was about two weeks from getting engaged. I had plans for my future to become a lawyer. I was applying for U.C. Berkeley. In my mind, I had it "all together". So, when Jesus began to work in my heart to give it all to Him, I gave it considerable thought. I knew He not only wanted my present, but my future. I rather enjoyed having complete control of those. In short, my life, in my mind, was great! I even asked Him once, "Why are You coming to me now when I don't really need You." I think I had an image in my mind that one day, my life would fall apart, and then I would come to Him.

I am happy to say that when I accepted Jesus I gave it *all* to Him. I wasn't rich, but what I had was everything to me. I didn't know what He would do with my life, but there was a sense of trust that whatever He did would be best.

What happened in the subsequent weeks indicates how off the mark my life was. My boyfriend left me because I became a Christian (this is why my own father left my mother). I lost interest in my Psychology major and changed it to Spanish. I lost my desire to become a lawyer and returned to my childhood dream of being a teacher. All of those college "friends" I thought I had, one by one disappeared as I shared my faith with them and no longer wanted to party with them. Although I was accepted to Berkeley, I didn't go, deciding to stay in Chico. In short, <u>everything</u> changed.

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[23] Matthew's account says ,"for my name's sake".
[24] Luke's account says, "for the sake of the kingdom of God".
[25] Luke's account says, "many times more" instead of "a hundredfold".
[26] Luke's account emphasizes using the word "present".

When I look back at what I thought was so much, I realize that I was holding onto garbage compared to what God gave me in return. Or we could say figuratively, I gave God the hundred dollar bill in my hand, and God traded it for a trillion dollars. In about one year, I was engaged to David, a man as committed to and in love with Jesus as I was. God fulfilled my dream of having a lasting marriage (33 years and still in love). I not only was able to become a bilingual teacher, but ended up teaching Spanish (which was more than I thought I could ever do). I became an ordained minister and am now fulfilling my dream of being both a teacher of the Word and a writer. I gave birth to three lovely children who all know and serve the Lord (also a deep desire of mine), and five adorable grandchildren (one more on the way), which again was more than I ever imagined. Having grown up in rented housing, I hoped to live in my own house with a yard one day. I do. There was a day when I owned one pair of slacks and only a couple tops, now my closet is full. Growing up, having fried chicken for Sunday dinner was living high, as most of our meals were casseroles, beans, and rice, and delicious foods like creamed tuna on toast[27]. Now, we have plenty of anything we want. For all those friends who turned on me and relatives who shunned me for my faith, God has given me hundreds more. The body of Christ both in and out of my natural family is closer to me than any of those fake friends.

If you find this to be boasting, you are missing the point which is that the life I planned for myself was junk compared to the life He gave me. He has fulfilled His promise to give me a hundredfold in this life which He has over abundantly exceeded, and I look forward to eternal life in the age to come which will not compare to life on earth.

It is important to notice that Jesus did not tell the rich young ruler about this promise of receiving more than he would give. Jesus knew that the man might have become a follower for the sake of greed, more like a financial investment than a true commitment. If the man had known that Jesus would give back to him a hundredfold what He was asking the man to give, he would have done it. It would have been a sound decision. He also knew that the man's possessions were what were binding him. He wanted to <u>do</u> something to inherit eternal life, but only if it didn't include his pocketbook.[28]

So, we see that not only does Jesus promise to meet all of our need for the basic necessities of life, but He will give us much more than we give up. Some people do come to Him with nothing to give but their lives, but that is everything, and He will restore to us much more beauty than we can imagine.

Greed and Trusting in Riches

We see from the story of the rich young ruler that trusting in riches can get in our way of seeking first the kingdom of God. We read in **Mark 10:23-24** that when the rich young ruler walked away sorrowful,

> *"Jesus said to His disciples, 'How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!' And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, 'Children, how hard it is for those who **<u>trust</u>** in riches to enter the kingdom of God!'"*

[27] I still really enjoy creamed tuna on toast, but now I sometimes make it creamed chicken on toast!

[28] It is often pronounced that this man was eternally lost. However, Jesus stated clearly that it would not be impossible for the man to be saved. It is my personal belief that eventually, this man did turn to Christ. His desire for eternal life would eventually be strong enough to help Him let go of his love of money.

We see that Jesus was not saying that *having* riches is the problem. It is *trusting* in riches that dooms us. Our trust is to be in God, not money.

The concept of not allowing money to rule one's life was not new to the Jewish followers of that day. Here are just a few Scriptures from the Old Testament that reflect this way of thinking.

> ***Proverbs 1:19***
> *So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain;*
> *It takes away the life of its owners.*
> ***Psalm 37:16***
> *A little that a righteous man has*
> *Is better than the riches of many wicked.*
> ***Proverbs 11:28***
> *He who trusts in his riches will fall,*
> *But the righteous will flourish like foliage.*

Jesus taught us to not focus on wealth, but on things that pertain to the kingdom. He said in **Matthew 6:19-21,24**,

> ***19*** *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;* ***20*** *but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.* ***21*** *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* ***24*** *No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (money).*

It's good to ask ourselves from time to time, "Where is my treasure?" Any treasure we have for ourselves here on earth can be stolen, but the treasures we lay up in heaven cannot be taken away. This is not to say that we cannot have a savings account. In fact, having a savings account is a good thing for many reasons. For one thing, you will have some money to help you so that you do not need to be a burden on others. A savings will also be there for you if you have a lapse in employment. A savings can also be a blessing to someone else in need. If you have no money stored up, it will be more difficult for you to help someone. How much savings you have is between you and the Lord. Ask Him to help you find the balance, and never trust in your savings account. Trust in the Lord and lay up treasures in heaven.

In Luke chapter twelve we read of a time when an "innumerable multitude of people" had gathered together to hear Jesus. He began to speak first to his disciples.

> *Then one from the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."* ***14*** *But He said to him, "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?"* ***15*** *And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."* ***16*** *Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.* ***17*** *And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'* ***18*** *So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.* ***19*** *And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."'* ***20*** *But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have*

*provided?' **21** "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*

The line that we should hold dear is the one that reads, "Take heed and beware of covetousness for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." If ever a line was written for our day and age, it is this one. We make fun of the saying "keeping up with the Joneses," and then spend our lifetime keeping up with them. We have a good cell phone, but a better one comes out. We buy it. We live in a wonderful house, everything we could ever want or need, until the new ones are built. Our car is working perfectly, but the neighbor just got a new car, and it's so beautiful, that we go get one also. Before we know it we are consumed with being a consumer. When we put our focus on possessions, we are distracted from spiritual things.

The next scripture illustrates this perfectly. In Matthew 13:21-22 we read, "Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful."

Being fruitful means two main things. The first area we know to be the fruit of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control".[29] Another refers to what God will do through us in His kingdom; our individual ministries. All Christians, out of a response to God's love will want both of this type of fruit in their lives. We see here, though, that the cares of this life, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and we become unfruitful. The cares of this life can refer to the daily things we have to do or the concerns we have to meet our own needs or our family's. Focusing constantly on our list of TO DO's in order to produce wealth can choke the word. Notice, too, on the other side of the spectrum, that when we become rich, we can become deceived. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see why. Jesus said that *trusting* in riches is

the problem. When we trust in our ability to produce wealth, we are deceived. It is God who gives us that ability, and our trust must always be in Him.

God is not against you having wealth. In fact, if He knows He can trust you with it, He will give it to you. Paul gave instructions to Timothy on what to tell the rich. He said,

1 Timothy 6:17-19
*Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. **18** Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, **19** storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*

We see here the teaching of Christ being repeated by Paul. Timothy was to instruct the rich to not trust in uncertain riches but in the living God. They were to store up treasures in heaven by doing good with their resources and by being willing to share. This helps us to see a balance. If we are rich in the present age, we are not to be high-minded about giving our resources, but to give willingly. We'll discuss this further a little later in this lesson.

A Word about Laziness

[29] Galatians 5:22-23

Ahh! This is the life. All I have to do is seek God's kingdom first and His righteousness and all of my needs will be met! True, but this does not mean you are not to work. Here are a few Proverbs that give us God's wisdom about working.

Prov. 10:15
The rich man's wealth is his strong city;
The destruction of the poor is their poverty.
Prov. 6:6-11
Go to the ant, you sluggard!
Consider her ways and be wise,
7 *Which, having no captain,*
Overseer or ruler,
8 *Provides her supplies in the summer,*
And gathers her food in the harvest.
9 *How long will you slumber, O sluggard?*
When will you rise from your sleep?
10 *A little sleep, a little slumber,*
A little folding of the hands to sleep—
11 *So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler,*
And your need like an armed man.
Prov. 10:4-5
He who has a slack hand becomes poor,
But the hand of the diligent makes rich.
5 *He who gathers in summer is a wise son;*
He who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame.

You might say, "That's from the OLD Testament. I'm a NEW Covenant believer." While the Proverbs were written by Solomon, who was under the Old Covenant, this does not mean that what he wrote is irrelevant. Solomon asked God for wisdom to lead God's people, and God answered His requests. Now, Solomon did not always follow the wisdom He recorded, but we can trust that it was accurately recorded. Proverbs was given by God to Solomon from God. We can trust that as long as it does not conflict with New Covenant doctrine, that wisdom can be relied upon today[30].

Let's say for the sake of argument, one rejects Proverbs as a standard for diligence in work (which we do not). Does the New Testament have anything to say about this area of working? Yes, let us then consider **2 Thessalonians. 3:6-12.**

But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. ***7*** *For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you;* ***8*** *nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,* ***9*** *not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.* ***10*** *For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.* ***11*** *For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.* ***12*** *Now those who are such we command and*

[30] The opposite view is often presented in hermeneutical materials. We believe that it is unwise to randomly pick and choose which parts of God's Word are valid.

exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

This almost seems harsh, but Paul had every right to give this instruction. Although he had the right to receive from those among whom he labored in the gospel, he chose instead to set and example and work. We know from **Acts 18:2-3** that Paul worked as a tent maker. We also know from **Acts 20:33-35** that Paul supported other gospel workers who labored with him. He refers to people who refuse to work as "disorderly". He frowned on those who were a burden to others. He had a commandment of his own. If someone refused to work, they were not to eat. He said that those who don't work are busybodies. This makes sense because since they didn't spend their time working, they had plenty of time to be nosey. He told them to "work in quietness and eat their own bread."

So we see that we are to be responsible and work so that we do not need to be a burden on others. Of course, we realize that there will be those among us who are on the road to recovery from financial devastation, who may not be working at this moment, but who are working diligently toward that goal. If we can help them along the way, let's do that. We also know that within the early church, those who were truly needy were cared for by the church.

Additionally, never underestimate how much work it takes to be a homemaker and mother. A mother who chooses to stay home and work as mother and wife, should not be looked upon as someone who refuses to work. Caring for a home and training children is a full-time job and a worthy one. However, a single mother will likely have to work to support her family.

True Prosperity

With such strong cautions about trusting in riches, where do we get the idea of Christians being prosperous? First, let us look at the definition of "prosper" which is, "to be successful, especially in terms of one's finances; thrive"[31] When we are prosperous, we are successful. We thrive. Prosperity includes success in all areas of our lives, including our finances.

The idea of prosperity comes from Scripture. Prosperity was promised to the Children of Israel <u>if</u> they followed the law of Moses. We are not under the law. The promises we have been given are <u>better</u> than those given to them. So, I believe it is fair to look at the promises for obeying the Law and to conclude that our blessings would be better. You could say that the blessing of obeying the Law is the Old Testament definition of prosperity (underlining mine).

Deuteronomy 28:3-14
<u>Blessed</u> shall you be in the city, and <u>blessed</u> shall you be in the country.
4 *"<u>Blessed</u> shall be the <u>fruit of your body</u>, the <u>produce</u> of your ground and the <u>increase</u> of your herds, the <u>increase</u> of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks.*
5 *"<u>Blessed</u> shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.*
6 *"<u>Blessed</u> shall you be when you come in, and <u>blessed</u> shall you be when you go out.*
7 *"The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be <u>defeated</u> before your face; they shall come out against you one way and <u>flee</u> <u>before</u> <u>you</u> seven ways.*

[31] American Heritage Dictionary

8 *"The LORD will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you.*
9 *"The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways.* ***10*** *Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you.* ***11*** *And the LORD will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground, in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you.* ***12*** *The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.* ***13*** *And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them.* ***14*** *So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right or the left, to go after other gods to serve them.*

If under the Law every aspect of one's life was blessed, including their financial increase; how much more are our lives to be prosperous, those who have been given a better covenant based on better promises.

But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry,
inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant,
which was established on better promises.
Hebrews 8:6

Following are some more Scriptures and commentary about prosperity.

It is God's will for us to prosper. It is His doing. It is His delight	***Psalm 1:3*** ***He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,*** ***Which yields its fruit in its season*** ***And its leaf does not wither;*** ***And in whatever he does, he prospers.***	***When we seek God's kingdom instead of our own and walk in His counsel, we will be like a tree that is always fruitful. Everything we do will be successful.***
	2 Corinthians 8:9 *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was* ***rich****, yet for your sakes He became* ***poor****, that you through His poverty might become* ***rich****.*	*This is a striking verse in that it clearly shows that part of our salvation includes prosperity. The word "rich" in Scripture refers to both monetary richness and spiritual richness.*

	Psalm 35:27 ***27*** *Let them shout for joy and be glad,* *Who favor my righteous cause;* *And let them say continually,* *"Let the LORD be magnified,* *Who has <u>pleasure</u> in the prosperity* *of His servant."*	*The word "prosper" in other places in the Old Testament is translated: willing, desires, favors, wishes, and delights. It is no stretch whatsoever to conclude that it is God's desire, His wish, His delight, and His favor that we prosper. He is the One causing it, and He enjoys seeing it happen!*
	3 John 1:2 *Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.*	*The word "prosper" here can refer both to financial blessings and success in one's endeavors (Rom. 1:10, 1 Cor. 16:2). It is God's will for us to prosper in all things as our soul is prospering (which should be significant since we are in Christ), AND that we be in health.*
God bring the poor out of their poverty into prosperity, both spiritually and financially.	***Psa.68:6*** *God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those who are bound into prosperity.*	*God is watching out for those in need. If you lack a family, God will put you in one and prosper you.*
	Psalm 113:7-9 ***7*** *He raises the poor out of the dust,* *And lifts the needy out of the ash heap,* ***8*** *That He may seat him with princes—* *With the princes of His people.* ***9*** *He grants the barren woman a home,* *Like a joyful mother of children.* *Praise the LORD!*	*If you are so poor you live in dust and ashes, He will lift you up and seat you with princes. If you are barren, He will give you a home, and give you joy. In other words, if in any way you are poor, whether it be in this life, or in finances, God is going to change things!*
	Ps. 72:12-13 *For He will deliver the needy when he cries, the poor also, and him who has no helper.* ***13*** *He will spare the poor and needy, and will save the souls of the needy.*	*If you are needy, He will deliver you. If you are poor and have no one to help you, He will be your helper. He will spare you and keep your soul safe.*
There is no sorrow in the prosperity God brings to us.	***Isaiah 48:17*** *Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer,* *The Holy One of Israel:* *" I am the LORD your God,* *Who teaches you to profit,* *Who leads you by the way you should go.*	*If we will listen to God's wisdom, He will show us how to profit or this word can mean succeed, or be advanced. His ways are better than ours. If we put His kingdom first and His righteousness, we will not fear failure.*
	Prov. 10:22 *It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, and He adds no sorrow to it.*	*If we are rich, it is a blessing. If we surrender that to Him, there will be no sorrow for us.*

A Word about Rain

We often heard it said, "Into each life a little rain must fall," as if that is a scripture! The clear implication of that saying is that everyone is going to have bad times, so just accept it. Now, while it is true that in this life we will experience hard times, it is not Scriptural to use rain as a type of something negative. Rain in Scripture is predominantly used to refer to blessings. So, next time someone uses this expression, be glad! God is sending you showers of blessings, not showers of troubles. It is clear from Scripture that sometimes this blessing is financial.

Ez. 34:26
I will make them and the places all around My hill a blessing; and I will cause showers to come down in their season; there shall be showers of blessing.
Deut. 28:12
The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season, and to bless all the work of your hand. You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.
Matthew 5:44-46
But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, ***45*** *that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*

Rain is a good thing in the eyes of God for those whom He loves. We can expect the rain of His blessing and success in our lives, not the rain of bad times and troubles. Oh, they will come, but not because He is sending them. Part of it has to do with living in this evil world, and the other part will be attacks of the enemy. Our God is bigger than both, so we are safe!

Our Response to God's Love

The Purpose of Prosperity

Right before the Children of Israel went into the Promised Land, God reminded them that He was the one taking care of them the whole time. Even their clothes did not wear out in forty years. He told them that He was going to bless them in the new land, and He gave them a warning. After they would become prosperous, when they had been successful in battle and had the wealth God caused them to obtain, they were not to then turn and take the credit by saying, "My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth." There is this tendency. We submit to God. He blesses us. We take credit. God reminded them of this very important truth, "And you shall remember the LORD your God, for *it is* He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as *it is* this day **(Deuteronomy 8:17-18)**.

This can be viewed in two ways. First, that God was giving them wealth in order to prove that the covenant He made with their fathers was true, thus establishing it. The other way to see this is that by giving them the ability to produce wealth, His covenant would be established. God was not giving them the ability to produce wealth so they could ignore God and live for themselves nor to take credit for what God had done. The ability to prosper had a purpose.

How would this concept translate into the New Covenant? I think it would be easy to conclude that God gives us the ability to produce wealth so that we can give Him glory and thanksgiving and advance His kingdom, not so that we can spend it on our unending lusts.

God has a purpose for prospering His people. In Ephesians 4:28 Paul writes, "Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need." This verse gives the reason for

working. It isn't to lavish oneself with abundance, nor to merely make ends meet. The reason to work is to have an abundance so that we can give to those who have need!

That's just one verse, but here's another. I have omitted parts of this section (as they will be discussed later) and included what I need to show that there is a reason God gives us more than we need (parenthesis my commentary).

> **2 Corinthians 9:1, 6-8, 10,12**
> *Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you;* **(Paul is writing the Corinthians to talk to them about their giving to the saints' needs)** ***6*** *But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.* **(He is clearly talking about giving goods and finances.)** ***7*** *So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.* ***8*** *And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.***(You will have everything you need plus an abundance, enough to do <u>every</u> good work.)** ***10*** *Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,* **(God supplies seed for a purpose and to a particular type of person. He gives to the sower so that he will sow by giving to help other believers.)** ***12*** *For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God.* **(Their giving was supplying the needs of other Christians and causing praise to be given to God.)**

So, we see above that God is the one who supplies our needs and more. The *more* is the seed. He gives us the joy of willingly planting that seed. The more we plant, the more we get so that we can give more. So, we see that the Old Testament principal of their being a purpose higher than personal gain for God to prosper us is continued in the New Testament.

The Giving—Receiving Principle

People often get very angry when discussing the following topic, that of giving and receiving. Many completely reject the thought that by giving we will receive. This is ridiculous. The Bible clearly shows the correlation between giving and receiving. However, what are the best motives to give? Obviously it is best to give out of a heart of love, in an effort to seek God's kingdom and His righteousness than it is for us to give so that we will receive income to spend it on our lusts.

It was <u>Jesus</u> who said, "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you." **(Luke 6:38)** It is impossible to read those words and deny a correlation between giving and receiving. Not only that, but it is obvious that we will receive to the same degree that we give. If we give abundantly, we will receive abundantly. This goes beyond God's basic promise to supply all of our needs if we seek His kingdom first. Here he is clearly saying that He is going to see to it that men

give to us to the point that the blessing will run over. In other words, we will receive back more than we need and more than we give.

Going back to **2 Corinthians 9:6** we read," But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." Undoubtedly,

Paul is telling us that if we give a little, we will reap a little. If we give abundantly, we will receive abundantly. He is clearly talking about giving to the saints in this passage. If we give bountifully to those saints in need, God is going to give back to us abundantly. Again, it is not so that we can spend it on our lusts, but so that we can give even more abundantly. He goes on to say in verse eight, "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work." An abundance…for what purpose…for every good work.

Paul spoke of the generosity of the Philippians Christians in **Philippians 4:10-19**.

> *But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity.* ***11*** *Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:* ***12*** *I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.* ***13*** *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* ***14*** *Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress.* ***15*** *Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only.* ***16*** *For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities.* ***17*** *Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.* ***18*** *Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.* ***19*** *And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.* ***20*** *Now to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

We like to quote verse 19, that God will supply all of our need according to His riches in Glory by Christ Jesus, but often don't notice that verse 19 is a result of verse 10. The Philippians had sent another gift to Paul, and he assured them, that because they had given, God would supply all of their need. Again, we see the giving—receiving principle at work.

More Blessed to Give

We don't mind receiving if we have worked hard. However sometimes, we get in a situation when what we have is not enough. If you have ever been in the position when you were in need, you know how difficult that is. Receiving might be fine on Christmas morning, but it is very humiliating to have to receive your basic needs from someone else. The implications are so loud and clear. You feel like a failure. You feel like the scum of the earth. You are afraid people will think you've been lazy or irresponsible.

When we went through a time when we had to receive, even borrowed to try and make ends meet, it was awful. On one occasion I will never forget. . . in order to get one bag of groceries, I had to sit and listen to a lady from a local church explain to me how to cook low cost meals. The implication was clear. The reason we were in need is I spent too much money at the grocery store. I kindly told the lady that I could give her some recipes to share! It was so humiliating to have to be taught to cook after I'd been married thirteen

years. We promised ourselves that when we came to a place where we had abundance, we would do all we could to make receiving the least humiliating process possible for others.

Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," (**Acts 20:35**). To this, I say, "Correct!" I'd much rather give than receive. This is such a short statement, but so full of truth. Giving is a joy. Yet, we cringe when we hear the topic taught. Whether it is because of the phony coercions of certain ministers, or because we lack complete understanding, it is worth our time to consider the topic fully.

Special Blessings for Giving to the Poor

Before discussing the blessings that are ours when we give to the poor, let us consider what the Lord thinks about those who oppress the poor.

> ***James 5:1-4***
> *Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!* ***2*** *Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.* ***3*** *Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.* ***4*** *Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.*

God does not take lightly the oppression of the poor. Let there be no doubt about this. He is their friend. If we oppress them, God will hold us accountable. How do we treat the poor? Do we leave a cheap tip for the waitress or give more than expected? Do we pay our gardener less than we would our son? Do we pay our employee as little as possible even though the work he is doing merits more? Think about it. What is our attitude toward the poor? Do we leave a little extra in our budgets to give to those in need? Is our heart moved with compassion, or do we sit in private judgment? These are questions we all need to ask before the Lord. It is important to have the proper heart toward the down-trodden.

Giving to the Poor

Following are some Scriptures that show the blessing of giving to the poor. You can see how God has the opposite reaction toward those whose hearts are compassionate.

Scriptures about Giving to the Poor	Instructions or Blessings of Giving to the Poor
Psalm 41:1-3 ***1*** *Blessed is he who considers the poor;* *The LORD will deliver him in time of trouble.* ***2*** *The LORD will preserve him and keep him alive,* *And he will be blessed on the earth;* *You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies.* ***3*** *The LORD will strengthen him on his bed of illness;* *You will sustain him on his sickbed.*	1. Deliverance in time of trouble 2. Preservation and be kept alive 3. Blessed on the earth 4. Not delivered to the will of our enemies 5. Strengthening during illness 6. Sustained while sick
Lev. 19:10 ***10*** *And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the LORD your God.*	Don't consume every penny you produce. Save some for those in need.

Lev. 23:22 *When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleaning from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the LORD your God.*	Here we see that we are not only not to glean every last cent, but purposely leave something for the poor, in this case, the corners of the crop.
Psalm 37:21 *The wicked borrows and does not repay,* *But the righteous shows mercy and gives.*	While this doesn't specifically mention the poor, it does speak of mercy in the act of giving.
Matthew 6:1-4 *Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. **2** Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. **3** But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.*	We give, not for recognition or spiritual brownie points, but out of compassions and love.

Without Love, I Am Nothing

In our efforts to help each other and to reach out to the poor, we must never forget that all of our works will do little good without God's love.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor,

and though I give my body to be burned,

but have not love,

it profits me nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:3

In other words, the act of helping the poor alone is not enough. First of all, feeding the poor can never earn salvation for anyone. Many have dedicated their lives to caring for the poor, the sick, and the fatherless, in hope of gaining salvation, but they themselves did not submit to Jesus Christ. Yes, they helped the poor, but they themselves were lost, and those they fed who never knew the gospel were also lost. Without God's love in our hearts, the work is in vain, and without giving them what they truly need, we do little good.

We've all heard the expression, "If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day, but if you teach him how to fish, you feed him for a lifetime." Of course, this makes perfect sense in the natural. In the spiritual realm we might say, "If you show kindness to the poor, your comfort the body temporarily and may perhaps gain a friend, but if you

share the love of God through the gospel of Jesus Christ, you may save a soul for eternity and gain a brother." We can offer temporary hope by feeding the poor, but it is hope for

this life only. However, when we offer eternal life to the poor we feed, we offer every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus in this life and in the life to come.

Giving to the Family of God

As Christians our priority in giving is to other Christians. Some might find this shocking! Yet it could not be clearer in Scripture that there is a sort of order in giving. Here is the proof (parenthesis author's commentary).

> ***Galatians 6:6-10***
> *Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.* **(This means that whoever teaches us the word should be given "all good things" which refers to either finances or goods. The easiest way to give to those who teach is to support the local church.)** ***7*** *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.* ***8*** *For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.* ***9*** *And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.* ***10*** *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all,* **(we are to help both Christians and non-Christian as we are able)** *especially to those who are of the household of faith.* **(Our priority in giving is to those who are part of the family of God.)**

This concept was also present in the Old Covenant. **Deut. 15:7-8** says,

> *If there is among you a poor man of your* ***brethren****, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor* ***brother****,* ***8*** *but you shall open your hand* ***wide*** *to him and* ***willingly lend*** *him* ***sufficient*** *for his need,* ***whatever*** *he* ***needs****.*

Most people will help someone who is truly in need in their family. We feel a certain obligation to care for our own. Few people would deny refuge to a relative. Believers in Christ are a family, a family of God. We need to fulfill the command of Christ to love one another in tangible ways by giving. James, taking a pragmatic approach puts it this way.

> ***James 2:15-17***
> *If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,* ***16*** *and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?* ***17*** *Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

What James is saying is that if you merely say, "God bless you. I hope things get better," you have done nothing. If someone does not have clothing (is naked), how ridiculous it would be to tell that person to be warmed! No, we need to cloth the naked. If someone is hungry, we don't send them off with a blessing, but rather make sure the person gets fed. Anything less than this is not love.

John, the "disciple whom Jesus loved" put it this way,

1 John 3:17-19
17 *But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?* ***18*** *My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.* ***19*** *And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.*

John was there when Jesus gave His command to the disciples to love each other, and now he shows us what that means. If we have this world's goods, and we see a brother or sister in need, and then shut up our hearts, we must question whether or not God's love is in us. Love is action, not words. That means that sometimes, love is going to be an inconvenience. We will have to stop our busy day and take time to care for someone. So, we not only give up money, but time, our two most valuable resources. And if we were in need? Would we not also be thankful that someone bothered to care for us?

Grace Giving

WHY GIVE

The why of giving can be summed up in four letters: L O V E. He gave because He loved, and we love because He loved. So we love by giving just like God. As we all know, love is not just a warm cuddly feeling. It is an action. If you love, you will give. Jesus said,

Matthew 25:31-40
"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. ***32*** *All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.* ***33*** *And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.* ***34*** *Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:*
35 *for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;* ***36*** *I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'* ***37*** *"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?* ***38*** *When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You?* ***39*** *Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'* ***40*** *And the King will answer and say to them,*

'Assuredly, I say to you,
inasmuch as you did it
to one of the least of these
My brethren,
you did it to Me.'"

If it your goal to love God, then love His people. Yes, it can be an inconvenience, but once you get started, you will realize that it truly IS more blessed to give than receive. Giving to God's people when they are in need will give you more joy than you can imagine.

It will also bring joy to the one in need. They will feel God's love in a tangible way. Most likely, you already know this joy. If not, give it a try!

HOW MUCH SHOULD I GIVE?

In determining how much one should give, it is important to refer to instructions and examples in New Testament Scripture. Following are some Scriptures that can be helpful.

Mk. 12:41-44 ***Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. 42 Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. 43 So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; 44 for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."***	**In this passage, Jesus supports the idea of giving everything. The rich looked like they were giving a lot, but they also had a lot to give. They gave out of their abundance, and she gave out of her need. They gave a little compared to what they had, and she gave all she had. The Pharisees despised her gift because it was small in comparison, but Jesus saw value because He was looking at her heart.**
Acts 2:44-45 *Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, **45** and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.*	Again, we see that people were selling their possession and goods to give to other believers in need. There was a strong sense of community and sacrifice for each other.
1 Corinthians 16:1-2 *Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: **2** On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.*	Here we are only told that they were to put aside "something", and store that up, so that when Paul visited, he wouldn't have to ask for money for the saints' needs.
2 Corinthians 9:6-8 *6 But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. **7** So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. **8** And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.*	● First it tells us that we will reap in proportion to the amount we sow financially. ● Next, it tells us that we give as WE <u>purpose</u> in our hearts. We are the ones who purpose to give a certain amount or in a certain way. ● We are not to give grudgingly. ● We are not to give because we have to. ● All of this is because God loves a cheerful giver. He wants giving to be from the heart.

The Amplified Bible translates **2 Corinthians 9:7** this way,

> *Let each one [give] as he has made up his own mind and purposed in his heart, not reluctantly or sorrowfully or under compulsion, for God loves (He takes pleasure in, prizes above other things, and is unwilling to abandon or to do without) a cheerful (joyous, "prompt to do it") giver [whose heart is in his giving].*

There you have it. That is the New Testament's standard for giving. You choose without external compulsion, without reluctance, and joyously. This brings pleasure to God.

WHAT IS TITHING?

I'm not sure why this is, but it seems the *same* people that become angry when we speak of the correlation between giving and receiving also come unglued when we discuss the topic of tithing. When I was a little girl, I was taught to tithe and to give a little more. Each Sunday I gave 20 cents for my tithe and five cents for the missions offering. So, when I recommitted my life to the Lord as an adult, tithing was a familiar practice which I readily accepted without question. My husband and I tithed on everything, and we never made excuses. If it meant feeding our own children beans and rice for one week, that is what we would do. We also practiced giving what is called "out of our need". In other words, we needed the money, but instead helped someone else.

However, we did this out of tradition. We were told by our leaders that this was what we were *supposed* to give, so we did it. We never searched the Scriptures for ourselves to see if this was what we were supposed to do. They said it was, so it was, and so we complied. If someone had presented a different idea about giving, we would have patiently showed him/her the error of his/her ways.

We did this for nearly 25 years before taking a second look. It was during the time when we realized we had come under certain Christian laws, and the Lord was untying each tradition by showing us the truth in His word.

Tithe means "tenth". The practice of tithing is that of giving 10% of all income. Some say you pay the tithes from the gross and others say you pay it from the net. However, when God challenged me to examine the Scripture only on the topic of tithing, I was shocked. Before anyone takes up stones to stone me, I challenge you to search the New Testament for yourself. Tithing is NOT a New Covenant requirement.

WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY?

I said tithing is **not** a requirement for New Testament believers. What I just said could get me kicked out of almost every church in America. Remember, we are dealing with M O N E Y here. If I say that tithing is not a New Testament requirement, I have just set myself in opposition to nearly every minister in my own denomination as well. Believe me, I LOVE my denomination, but tithing is so imbedded in our beliefs that in order to be a minister, you have to explain how you will *teach* tithing to the congregation when you take the written test for ordination.

When I went in last year to have my ordination reinstated, I was called on the carpet for my answer on that subject from the test we had taken. I will explain my reasoning in a minute. All I can tell you is that an otherwise friendly interview nearly went south as friends of ours looked down their suddenly long noses at me and told me how wrong I was. I was so frightened, but I could not deny what God had taught us. With each point they made to prove that tithing is still a requirement for believers, I patiently explained my belief. Then one of the ministers pointed out that even though I did not believe tithing was a requirement, I gave more than that. This seemed to satisfy them. I didn't believe it was a requirement, but I did at least that well in my personal life, and by God's grace, it was not held against me.

I might add that the practice of tithing is not one of our denominations Fundamental Truths, but I know that there are few ministers who would not appreciate this part of my book. Some will even eliminate the whole series based on what I am going to write, so it is

risky to write this. The more diplomatic thing would be to skirt the issue. I cannot do that with a clear conscience. I ask you to hear me out, and then decide for yourself based on your own study of the topic.

1. Tithing was a practice mandated in the Law of the Old Covenant. New Testament believers are free from the requirements of the Law.
2. Under the Law one was cursed for not tithing. Christians are under no curse.
3. No where in the New Testament are we told to give ten percent.
4. Jesus did not tell his disciples to tithe.
5. There are no recorded instances in the books of Acts of people tithing.
6. Although Paul wrote frequently about money, he never instructed the believers to tithe.
7. The other writers of the New Testament such as John, Peter, or James never gave instruction to tithe.
8. In the book of Revelations where believers are corrected for how they are falling short, not one mention is made of not tithing (not even for not giving).

If this is the case, why do people say we need to tithe today? First of all, there are many Christians today who think that when Jesus died, only the ceremonial laws were done away with and that now we are still under the requirements of the law, including tithing. Others point out that Abraham tithed to Melchizadech who was a type of Christ. They say that since this happened before the Law, that tithing supersedes the Law since it was practiced before the Law. First of all, Abraham only tithed once to Melchizadech and only the spoils of battle. He was a very wealthy man and he did not tithe his belongings. He did not continue tithing to him either. It was a one time tithe. Secondly, there were many things practiced before the law, such as CIRCUMCISION and ANIMAL SACRIFICE which are clearly not required of New Covenant believers. We can't pick and choose when making applications.

If you read the passage in Hebrews carefully about Melchizadech, you will find that tithing is not the point of those passages. The whole point of those passages is to show that Jesus is our high priest. Not sure? Read it all again. Never in that entire passage is there any implication that because Abraham tithed to Melchizadech that we should tithe. That is not what it is discussing.

If you tell someone that Jesus never told His disciples to tithe, they will likely quote this Scripture:

> ***Luke 11:42***
> *But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.*

Those who use this Scripture to prove that we are supposed to tithe break a few hermeneutic principles, the first one being that we must always consider to whom Jesus was speaking when deciding the impact and import of His message. Obviously, He is speaking to Pharisees. They were under the Law. Of course, they should have tithed their mint and rue. It was appropriate for Him to say this to them. He also told a leper to go to the priests and go through the ritual cleansing required. You never see anything like that happening after the cross.

The next rule forgotten is what was the purpose of what He said in context? Was Jesus giving a teaching on tithing? No. He was not. He was rebuking them for their blind hypocrisy in how they dealt with others. It is very important to note, that Jesus never mentioned tithing when speaking to His disciples.

In the book of Acts, we see that the believers were much more generous than ten percent. They were selling properties to give to each other's needs. There is no record of them selling their properties and figuring ten percent and giving that. Out of hearts of love, they gave, some of them, all that they had. There is zero record of the believers giving ten percent in the book of Acts.[32]

Paul frequently talked about giving, but never mentioned the tithe. He had every opportunity, but failed to bring it up. There has to be a reason he never mentioned it, and I believe that is obvious. Paul taught that we are not longer under the Law of Moses, and it would have been inconsistent for him to turn around and then say, "Well, except for tithing; you still need to give ten percent." No, not once did he say this. What he did say was to give abundantly and especially to other believers.

John, who emphasized so much that we love one another and that this love includes giving to the needs of the believers, never said anything about tithing. Nor did Peter mention it. Not even James bring it up, who so forcefully rebukes the believers for saying that faith didn't require actions such as helping those who are destitute. What about the book of Revelation? If ever there was a place for correcting Christians, it would be there, but it doesn't even mention giving, let alone tithing!

The days I set myself to study this topic using New Testament Scripture was quite shocking for me. I remember sitting stunned at my desk. I had searched the places I was sure would confirm my belief in tithing, and I could not, with an honest heart, continue believing what I had been taught, had practiced for so long, and had taught others.

I have asked ministers about this. The normal response I have heard is that if they don't tell the people how much to give, they won't know. These same people use the same

[32] We cannot know the hearts of man, but perhaps by mandating ten percent we can somehow overlook how much the original believers actually gave. Ten percent seems miniscule compared to 100%.

reason for teaching the Law. If we don't teach them right from wrong, how will they know? How little faith we have in the grace of God!

Two things happened after my husband and I began to practice grace giving. The first amazing thing is our financial situation greatly improved. We had "tithed and given out of our need" for so many years, but we were still barely making it each month and going deeper and deeper into debt. When we began to give as we purposed in our hearts, not grudgingly, but out of joy, things changed for us for the better fiancially.

The second thing that happened to us is we discovered the absolute amazing joy of grace giving and our giving increased beyond what we ever thought we could afford. Besides giving substantially to the church, we started looking around for people to bless. Did someone mention they didn't have gas money? Did someone need a little more money for rent, hooray, another opportunity to give! Jesus said that it is more blessed to give than receive, and we are learning what He meant. Giving is the most wonderful aspect of Christian love we have ever known.

So, while I understand the normal reaction to saying that tithing is not a requirement (because we had the same reaction), I also know what the word says and challenge you to take an honest look into the word of God for yourself. Then get out there and give like a grace-filled child of God!

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR ALWAYS HAVING SOMETHING TO GIVE

Here are some practical tips on how to always having something to give.

1. Paul tells us to give as we "purpose" in our hearts. Purpose in the Greek means: to choose for oneself, to prefer, to propose, to intend. Decide how much you want to give. This could be on a week by week basis or you could set a goal such as a certain amount or percentage. If you want to see an increase in your income, increase how much you give.
2. If you have no money to give, do not feel ashamed or guilty. Remember Jesus admired the woman who put in two mites. If you only have two pennies to put into the offering, do it with confidence. God sees your heart.
3. For those who have no money, and for the rest of us as well, give the other item that is so precious to us, that of time. Do you have an hour or two you could minister somewhere, perhaps at a homeless shelter, in the nursery, church landscaping, helping a single woman do a chore she dreads, like change a high light bulb, or figure out what's wrong with her plumbing? There are ways we can give that don't cost money, but that can be so meaningful. What about all the children without fathers or mothers? Perhaps you could be a friend to one of them, or start a church sports team, or throw a party for the youth group. There is no end to what you can do with your time and love.
4. Paul mentions setting money aside for giving. He also talks about "always having an abundance for every good work". So, consider opening an account in which you can deposit your giving. Then instead of emptying this account each time you give to the church, save some for potential needs that arise among the saints. Someone might need a little money for gas or food, or you might help a single parent with school supplies for her children. Treat someone to lunch who you know needs

encouragement. There are thousands of little acts of kindness we can do for each other to help each other along. If you have a separate account and have the discipline to not use these funds except for giving, it can make you a more versatile giver. Often, ministers visit the church, and an offering is taken for them. If you have some stored away, you will have something to give.

Do all of this cheerfully. Remember, it **is** more blessed to give than receive. Once you get started giving, you will find that you are always looking out for some way to bless someone. Giving becomes the most enjoyable thing you can do. Remember, too, that God loves a cheerful/hilarious giver. When you give to others, you bring joy to His heart.

So let each one give

as he purposes in his heart,

not grudgingly

or of necessity;

for God loves

a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 9:7

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REVIEW

1. What is God's basic promise to all those who seek His kingdom and His righteousness first?

2. In what ways does God give us much more than we give Him?

3. What is the connection between giving and receiving as described in the New Testament? Why does this teaching upset some believers?

4. What special blessings come to those who help the poor? What is feeding the body only not enough?

5. To which group of people are we "especially" supposed to help financially?

6. Why do we give?

7. How do we determine how much to give according to New Testament teachings?

8. What reasons does the author give to support her views that tithing is not a New Covenant requirement?

9. Share what you learned about giving that you didn't know before that you believe will motivate you to give more in the future.

6

KNOWING THE WILL OF GOD

WE BELIEVE . . .

. . . that desiring to do God's will is a normal response to God's love.

Wanting to do the will of God is the most natural response we have when we give our lives to Jesus Christ. He is our Lord, and whatever He desires, we can rest assured it is the best possible road to follow. Even if we find within ourselves resistance to the divine calling, we don't have to worry. We need only bring this to our Father, and ask Him to work in our hearts until we are willing to obey. In **Philippians 2:13** we read these comforting

words, "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." This means that not only did God go to all the great extents He did to bring us to Him and give us eternal life; He not only made us new creations by extending His grace, but He actually is at work in our hearts to bring about a desire and an ability to do His will. The Amplified Bible puts it this way, "[Not in your own strength] for it is God Who is all the while effectually at work in you [energizing and creating in you the power and desire], both to will and to work for His good pleasure and satisfaction and delight."

In some ways, the Christian life is just not fair! God has done it all. He's provided our salvation, made us His righteousness, continually cleanses us from all sin, speaks to us (and the list goes on forever), and to think He is also working in us to give us the will to obey Him! He doesn't even ask us to come up with that! ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS COORPERATE!!! That is not asking much. He does all the work, and we just let go and obey!

What is the Will of God?

Of course, before we can do the will of God, it is imperative that we know what the will of God is. **Ephesians 5:17** reads, "Therefore[33] do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is." We learn two very important things in this Scripture. One, God's will is *knowable*. It isn't something flying out there in the air that we hope to be able to catch now and then. We can know for sure what His will is. Also notice that by knowing what the will of God is, we have wisdom. This makes perfect sense, doesn't it? To know God's will is to know His wisdom.

Understanding the Sovereignty of God

Before we can understand what the will of God is, we need to discuss the meaning of the word *sovereignty*. When we say someone or something is sovereign, we mean that it is its own supreme power and is free from external control.[34] For example, when a nation says that it is a sovereign nation, it is declaring that it has the right to govern itself, and will not accept dominance by other nations.

God is sovereign. He is His own supreme power and He is free from external control. He's the boss. Human begins do not get to set the universe as we'd like it, for example. We don't create the laws of physics. They exist because God established them. Similarly in spiritual matters, we don't get to tell God on what terms we will have a relationship with Him. He gets to do that. He has provided eternal redemption through His Son, and He has said there is no other way. So, no amount of arguing on our parts is going to change that.

When it comes to the sovereignty of God, most people believe what I've written so far, but then go in different directions from this point. Some people believe that because God can do what He wants how He wants, when and where He wants to whom He wants, etcetera, that *everything* that happens <u>is</u> the *will* of God. They believe that if God is not

[33] Because the days are evil, therefore…
[34] Merriam-Webster's Dictionary

the instigator of a certain event, He at the very least "allowed" it to happen. This is to clearly state their belief that God is in perfect control at all times of every action that takes place on the face of the earth. So, if something horrible happens, God either did it or allowed it to happen. Another way I've heard quite religious people put this is, "Whatever happens in this life is for a divine purpose."

Take an extreme example, that of the terrorist attacks of 9-11. People who take this view would say that God either caused these to happen or He at the very least allowed them to happen. Well-meaning Christians reacted just this way after the attack. They said things such as 9-11 was God's judgment on the United States, and then depending on their particular point of view, it would be for a certain reason. Some said He was judging the U.S. for allowing millions of abortions; others said it was because homosexuality is permitted in our society; others said it was because we haven't been a good enough friend to Israel. That is to say, in effect, that God was responsible for the deaths of over 3,000 people many of them born again Christians who had not engaged in any of the activities listed here! This point of view of God's sovereignty also means that anyone who is murdered, raped, robbed, or discriminated against can legitimately look to God and ask, "Why? Why did this happen? Why did You *allow* this to happen?" In fact, those who take this to an extreme believe that when horrible things happen we should actually thank God for them.

Sovereignty Verses Fatalism

What I have described above amounts to fatalism with a religious twist. Fatalism is "the doctrine that all events are predetermined by fate and are therefore unalterable"[35]. The religious twist is that "fate" is God. If we believe that everything that happens on the earth is God's will, we live in essence the same as the fatalist. ¡Qué será, será! Whatever will be, will be. However, in order take on this point of view we must ignore the multitude of Scriptures that indicates otherwise.

Let us go back to this verse, "Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is." With just this verse the concept of God's sovereignty as described above begins to erode. If God does what He wants, there is no need for us to know what His will is since it will automatically happen anyway, and even if we don't do His will, that ends up being His will since it will be *allowed*. It doesn't matter that we are not to kill someone. According to that concept of God's sovereignty, it ends up being God's will anyway. If God wanted to stop it, He could have, we are told. This is ridiculous thinking. Here are some more Scriptures that negate the concept of fatalistic sovereignty.

In Matthew 6:10 Jesus taught His disciples how to pray. One of the things He told them to pray was, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Jesus told us to ask that His will be done. If we are to believe that everything that happens *is* God's will, there is no reason to pray that His will be done here on earth, just as it is in heaven. We know also, that in heaven, where God's will is done, is a place of life and peace, completely opposite of earth.

In **Mark 3:35** Jesus responded to those who had told Him that His mother and brothers and sisters had come to visit Him. Looking at His followers, He said, "For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother." Jesus was clearly implying

[35] American Heritage Dictionary

that there would be those who did NOT do the will of God. That shows that God's will is not always done.

We also know that God gave His Son, so that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life. In 2 Peter 3:9, we read that God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." Do all come to repentance? No. Every day hundreds die who will perish. It is NOT His will than any perish, and yet they do.

Consider also that we have an enemy in this life named Satan. He is defeated by Jesus, but still seeks to "steal, to kill, and to destroy" anyone who will believe in him. It isn't God's will that any of His children be robbed, murdered or destroyed, and yet, sadly, it does happen. I believe that many times it happens because we do not understand the true nature of the sovereignty of God. Instead of knowing God's will concerning a certain situation, we pray, and if nothing happens, we consider *that* to be the will of God. In other words, because we do not know what the will of God is, we cannot receive it. "Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

A Proper Perspective

God is sovereign. That is still not debated. He is the One who created it all, and He is the One who gets to decide how things will be. As all Kings He has ordained that certain things will be certain ways in His kingdom. Because He is a righteous and just King, He will not allow things to be any way but as He determines is best for His citizens. At first glance, you might think that this just described fatalism. Yet, not at all. Simply, we declare that God is sovereign, and that our sovereign God has established certain aspects of His kingdom that He has declared unalterable.

There is one thing that our sovereign God cannot do. In fact, the Word says that it is IMPOSSIBLE for Him to do this. Don't be shocked. He Himself has decided that He would place this limitation on Himself. In fact, if He were to violate this limitation, the entire universe would implode! In **Hebrews 6:18** it says that "it is **impossible** for God to lie." He never has, He does not, and He never will lie. Consider **Numbers 23:19**.

> *God is not a man, that He should lie,*
> *Nor a son of man, that He should repent.*
> *Has He said, and will He not do?*
> *Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?*

God cannot and will not lie. This is the way that He wants it, and because He is sovereign, He will abide by this limitation He has chosen. What He promises to us, He will always do. We can rest in this fact. If He has spoken something will be, then it will be.

This is only one of the many examples that refute the false concept of fatalistic sovereignty. There are others. For this reason, understanding the King of the Kingdom of God is very important. What other principles has He set out?

Another very important aspect of God's sovereignty is His Word. It does what it is supposed to do. Whatever He promises, it is ours if we believe. In **Isaiah 55:8-11** God speaks of Himself saying,

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.
9 *"For as the heavens are higher than the earth,*
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.
10 *" For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,*
And do not return there,
But water the earth,
And make it bring forth and bud,
That it may give seed to the sower
And bread to the eater,
11 *So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;*
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."

The sovereignty of God establishes that His word will accomplish what it was sent out to do. This is closely linked with His inability to lie. That is why Paul confidently declares in **2 Corinthians 1:20**, "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us." **His promises are His word, and if He were to ever not keep His word, He would be a liar, and that is IMPOSSIBLE.**

So, we see that the sovereign God in His infinite sovereignty is who He is based on principles He has chosen. Because He is a benevolent God, He has determined that certain things will come about in certain ways. For example, He tells us to ask, to seek, to knock (**Lk. 11:9**). He tells us we will receive from Him whatever we ask in prayer believing (**Mt. 21:22).** He says that whatever we ask the Father in Jesus name, He will do it (**Jn. 16:23**). He tells us we can have whatever we say (**Mk. 11:23**). He has made it so that if we believe, all things are possible to us (**Mk. 9:23**). In His sovereignty He has decided that if we abide in Him and His words in us, we can ask what we will or desire and it will be done (**Jn. 15:7**). All of these Scriptures indicate that we are in many ways involved in bringing about the sovereign will of God. This should honor and amaze us.

Free Will

Our sovereign God has also determined that mankind has a free will. This means that we have the God-given right to choose. God could have created man as a robotic or puppet-type, or he could have made us like the animals that live their lives primarily by instinct. However, God wanted to love and be loved. A being that is programmed to obey or one that is ruled only by automatic reactions cannot love because it cannot choose.

A good example of this is the love between a man and a woman. If the woman has no choice, we call this rape. There is no satisfaction in this act beyond the demented. However, in marriage, if she chooses to give herself, we call this love. It is a mutual free

choice that springs from a desire to give joy to the object of one's love. Additionally, when this sharing becomes a duty instead of a gift, it loses meaning.

Man has demonstrated his free will repeatedly over the course of human history. God wanted Adam and Eve to live in the Garden of Eden and to have unobstructed fellowship with Him. He gave them everything, but He also gave them a free will. He

created man to love and to love Him in return. Giving man the choice to obey was an act of love. Obeying God would have also been an act of love. We know that man chose to submit to Satan instead of to God.

Did God know this was going to happen? Yes, of course He did[36]. He knows everything. In fact, it says that Jesus "was slain from the foundation of the earth." This means that while God created the earth, the plan of salvation had already been made.

God has always given man a choice, and He urges us to obey. Sometimes He intervenes to help us obey (consider Balaam[37] and Jonah[38]), but the choice to obey is still always ours. It is therefore inaccurate to say that everything that happens is God's will.

God's will is NOT always done, that is why bad things happen in this earth, but God has made a promise to us as believers in His Son. In **Romans 8:27-29** it says,

> *Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. **28** And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. **29** For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

God determined beforehand that those who would come to Him would be conformed to the image of His Son. This is our destiny. God is working in us to make the will of God happen. No matter what happens, even if it is not God's will, God will turn it around for our good because we are called according to His purpose. The New Living Translation puts it this way,

> *And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. 28 And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. 29 For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.*

Instead of finding meaning in adverse situations by attributing to God every event in history, let us instead gain a proper perspective on the principles of the King and His kingdom. When we realize that He has given us authority to pray that His will be done, and that by believing in His promises we can also see His will accomplished, we regain the rightful sense that God is in control as far as we are concerned. We also find peace in

knowing that even if something horrible happens that is against us, God will turn it around to actually work for our good.

OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S LOVE

[36] Some debate the foreknowledge of God to this extent, but at the very minimum, God knew it was a possibility because he had given man the choice.

[37] Balaam was hired to curse Israel. God intervened by allowing a donkey to speak to him. Balaam could have gone on with his plan, but the donkey and the angel of the Lord rather got his intention that God was clearly NOT in favor of the plan (Numbers 22).

[38] God told Jonah to go to Nineveh to tell them to repent. Jonah didn't want to do it, so he went in the opposite direction. When a storm arose, Jonah jumped ship and was swallowed by a large fish where he spent three days. He could have still refused, but finally decided to go to Nineveh (Jonah).

In this section we hope to equip you so that you can understand the will of God for yourself. Remember, His will is knowable, and God has given us many tools to be able to understand His will. By keeping a few principles in mind, you can know what God's will is.

His Word

Since we are born again, it is now our nature to want to please God by obeying Him. We are told it is unwise not to understand His will. We are told to pray that His will be done. We also know that it is our choice to follow His will. Yet the question is still before us, how can we, who are not God understand the will of God?

The supreme way to understand God's will is through His Word, specifically the New Testament[39]. Matthew through Revelations is how God desires to communicate His will to us. Do not misunderstand. *Reading* the Bible is not the will of God. Reading the Bible is the primary way to *know* the will of God. There is a huge difference. Reading the Word of God has many purposes and should not be reduced to some religious discipline.

When you read the four Gospels, for example, you will see that Jesus was constantly healing people. In some stories, it might be just one person, and in other account, He would heal thousands of people. As you read, you begin to notice that for every single person who came to Jesus in faith, He healed them. Many said to Him, "IF you are willing, you can make me whole." He *always* said, "I *am* willing. Be healed."

The only people He could not heal were those who did not believe. You will not find one record of Jesus denying to heal someone. He never says, "You need to be sick just a little longer to learn a lesson God is trying to teach you." He never says, "It is your time to die, so I can't heal you," or the dreaded, "I'm sorry, I can't heal you. You are needed in heaven." Those are traditions, not Scripture. So, in just one area, that of healing, we can learn from the Word of God that the will of God is to heal us. As we continue to read and study the Bible, our understanding of God's will for us will grow.

His Voice

God also speaks to us is in our spirits, but He will never speak to you anything that is inconsistent with His revealed Word. God will not tell you to do something that contradicts the written Word. He won't, for example tell you to divorce your spouse to marry you friend's spouse. He won't tell you to be unloving to another brother or sister.

It is not wisdom to ask God to speak to us about a situation when He has already made His will clear in the Scriptures. Let's say you go out for lunch with a brother or sister in the church, and in the course of the meal, you discover that his/her family is going through difficult times. They are a hundred dollars short of being able to pay the rent, and there is no food in their pantry. You have the money to help, but you don't. That's your choice. However, what you cannot do is say that you didn't feel "led" to help the person

because in **1 John 3:16-18** we read, **"**By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. **17** But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? **18** My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in

[39] The Old Testament also has much to teach us, but the New Testament is where we as New Covenant believers learn the will of God in our lives.

deed and in truth." The revealed Word of God tells us to lay down our lives for each other. If one of our brothers or sisters in the Lord is in need, we are to help them if we are able. We do not need to ask God to speak to us personally as to whether or not it is His will. It clearly is his will. Now of course, if your friend has a personal problem that would cause him to waste the money, you might want to bring food or go with him to pay the rent. However, simply wishing your brother in Christ well when he is truly in need, is not the will of God.

That said, God does speak to us. We need Him to speak to us because there are many decisions we make that are not specifically in the Scriptures. Usually, these fall into the category of needing wisdom such as picking the right job, finding a spouse, how many children to have, whether to home school or send your child to public or private schools, what house to buy, where to live, and this list can go on and on. There is nothing in the Bible to tell you whether to live on Sacramento Street or Sonoma Blvd. To know what God's will is for things like that, you need to hear Him speak to your heart.

Prayer

Sometimes the decision seems obvious, and it is. God opens a door, and we walk in. However, sometimes there is a choice of which way to go, and we are not sure. Not surprisingly, God has an answer for us. **James 1:5-8** says,

> *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.* ***6*** *But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.* ***7*** *For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;* ***8*** *he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

So, if we lack wisdom, all we have to do is ask. God is our Father. He sees all, knows all, has all power, and loves us without end. When we come to Him in faith asking Him for wisdom, it will be given to us. Sometimes, before we even get the words out of our mouth, the wisdom comes. God doesn't need time to think things over. He already knows, and He will give this wisdom to us freely. The Amplified puts it this way, "If any of you is deficient in wisdom, let him ask of the giving God [Who gives] to everyone liberally and ungrudgingly, without reproaching or faultfinding, and it will be given him."

Praying in the Spirit

We all go through times when we are unsure of God's will. We search the Scripture but can't seem to find anything that precisely gives us guidance. We have asked for wisdom, but for some reason (not caused by God, of course) we still don't seem to understand God's will in the situation. God in His immense kindness toward us has made a way for us to pray in which we can pray that God's perfect will be done.

> ***Romans 8:26-27***
> *Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings*

*which cannot be uttered. **27** Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*

When we pray in the Spirit, that is to say, when we pray in tongues, something wonderful takes place. The Spirit of God makes intercession for us. Since He knows the will of God, He is able to pray through us and for us that perfect will of God.

While we pray in the Spirit, we will often understand God speaking to us about the situation. The Spirit of God reveals to us while we pray in the Spirit what the will of God is. He will bring Scriptures to our mind that shed light on the situation. He will speak to us of things to come. He will show us areas in our lives that can be bettered by following His counsel. On top of all of that, our faith is strengthened, and we are better equipped to believe to receive God's promises (which are His will).

John 16:13
However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.
John 14:25-27
25 "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.
Jude 1: 20-21
But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

Our Desire

Jesus said something astounding to His disciples which is recorded in **Mark 11:24**, "What things soever your desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them."[40] What a stunning verse. At first glance, this looks like a blank check to have whatever we want.

God is not going to give us something that is outside of His will[41]. On the other hand, if we are submitted to His lordship in our lives we will not desire anything that is not what He wants. If our desires line up with God's Word we are safe in asking. So it is important that we have an understanding of the will of God as revealed in His word, and that we have motives that seek to please Him as the Lord of our lives.

Earlier in this lesson we mentioned the Scripture in **Philippians 2:13** which tells us that God is working in us to both desire to do His will and to have the ability to do His will. We can trust that God is working all the time to give us the desire/will to do what is

[40] KJV, the *ye* was changed to *you*, and the underlining is the author's.
[41] You've heard it said, "Be careful what you ask for, you might get it." That's ridiculous. You might get what you ask for, but not if you are seeking the will of God. He will not give you something that will harm you and then sit back and say, "I told you so!" God loves you and He will not give you something evil if you are sincerely desiring to do His will.

pleasing to Him. So, in many decisions we face, we can ask ourselves, "What do I desire?" Our desire can be an indicator of God's will.

A lack of desire can also speak to us about God's will. If we sense something in us that is negative toward a certain decision, we have reason to believe that God is giving us this lack of desire. So, don't rule out entirely what might seem to be "just you". God could very well be speaking His good pleasure, that is to say, His will, by your own will/desire or lack thereof.

If God is giving you the will to do something, He will also give you the ability. This might come in the form of wisdom on how to go about it, an open door, physical or mental strength, or financial provision (among other things). Let's say that you believe God is calling you to get involved in a different ministry. It might be something you had never considered before or something you've thought about in the past. It seems the desire is growing. He will not leave you with desire only. After you ask for what you desire (which it is assumed is His will), He will not only give it to you, He will open the door to the ministry for you.

In **Psalm 37:4-5** we read, "Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. 5 Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass." This verse works well with the one above and adds another beautiful dimension, that of delighting ourselves in the Lord. To delight means "to take great pleasure or joy."[42] When we do this, He gives us the desires of our heart. Some say this means that He gives us the desire, others that He grants us our desires. I believe that from this verse we learn that He grants our desires, but we know from the Scripture above, that He gives us the desire. So, both are true. He gives us the desire and He grants us the desire when we simply delight in Him.

Multitude of Counselors

There are some life decisions that are so enormous and life-changing, that we do well to also seek the counsel of others before proceeding. This is especially true if you are married. It is unwise for you to make a major decision without being in agreement with your spouse, especially since your decision will likely affect your spouse. That is why we counsel married couples to take their time and come to peace with each other before making major decisions. Sometimes the couple will seek out the counsel of others in the decision making process. This counsel is not to take the place of God's Word or of us seeking God to know His wisdom in situations.

> ***Proverbs 11:14***
> *Where there is no counsel, the people fall;*
> *But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.*
> ***Proverbs 15:22***
> *Without counsel, plans go awry,*
> *But in the multitude of counselors they are established.*
> ***Proverbs 24:6***
> *For by wise counsel you will wage your own war,*
> *And in a multitude of counselors there is safety.*

[42] American Heritage Dictionary

Seek out someone whom you respect who is well-versed in the Word of God. Good godly counsel will help to either confirm what you believe God is saying, or give you more to consider. If you are a young person, ask your parents to share their points of view. Perhaps there is someone in leadership in your church who is willing to listen and share his/her experiences. Remember, the idea is to get other points of view to consider as you seek to know God's will.

We should not rule out practical considerations when making a major decision. For example, if you are considering making financial investments in a certain company, you should do the research. If you are planning to buy a house, you should have it inspected. If you are considering a certain medical procedure, you should do some research and get additional opinions.

Word of Wisdom

A word of wisdom is a gift of the Holy Spirit (**1 Corinthians 12:8**). The best way I can explain it is that God speaks though one brother or sister wisdom to another. When this gift is in operation, the person receiving the word of wisdom can be greatly encouraged.

This gift, properly and authentically in use can be of great benefit, but there are many who abuse this gift. The most serious abuse of this gift is that of those who constantly seek out "a word from the Lord" or a "personal prophecy" INSTEAD OF knowing the Word of God for themselves and seeking the Lord for guidance. They use it almost the same as going to a palm reader or fortune teller. Without a personal knowledge of God's Word, and no attempt at all to seek God for His guidance, people will stand in a long line for prayer by someone, usually a complete stranger, whom they believe has this "gift" because they think they will be hearing from God directly.

The other abuse of this gift is that it is often for pretense. There are those who pretend to have a gift like this (or who believe they have this gift, but do not) and will say just about anything to the person coming up for prayer. They will prophecy that God is sending a mate, or sending them as a missionary or that they will be getting a new job. They know that the person listening is too ignorant of God's word to evaluate what they say, so they don't mind saying whatever pops into their brain. I have even known of those who charged money in order to give a word "from God". Amazingly, people pay it.

It is therefore important to seek God by yourself and learn what His will is for you. Don't be lazy or you could be misled. If someone has given you a word of wisdom, then carefully evaluate what has been said. Check the Bible to see if the advice given agrees with the Word of God. Also, does what was said match up with what you believe God has already been saying to you in your own heart? What do others think about it?

My husband and I have always felt called to minister here in the United States. We have never once had a desire to travel or minister in other countries. There was one year in our lives in which we were seeking God about what to do and where to go next in ministry. We went up for prayer one Sunday, not to hear a word of wisdom, but just for prayer that God would give us wisdom. The minister seemed irritated for some reason I'll never understand, and then spoke out of what seemed like frustration to us that God was sending us as missionaries to a foreign land. We knew instantly that this was not a word from God as it did not match up with what God had spoken to us previously.

This can often happen to ministers and to the children of ministers. Some people use the pretense of this gift to attempt to direct the lives of others. They seek to look super spiritual by pretending to have divine knowledge.

My mother was a pastor's daughter. When she was a young woman, someone told her by a "word of wisdom" that she was going to be a missionary to China. I remember my mom telling me, "God had never told me I was going to be a missionary to China, so I just ignored that." So, don't feel intimidated by supposed words of wisdom. You have the ability to know God's will apart from this gift.

His Peace

We have learned in this lesson that God has given us many ways in which to perceive His will. He is not hiding His desires from us. There is one more thing we need in understanding God's will. It is peace. Peace is what we must have before making any major decision in life. Colossians 3:15 says, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts." The word rule here in the Greek means to govern or to arbitrate. Govern means to rule. Arbitrate is to settle disputes.[43] The peace of God is to govern/settle disputes in our hearts.

James 3:17 says, "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." So, it is important that after seeking God for wisdom, that peace rule in our hearts.

[43] In context, this Scripture is talking about Christians getting along with each other. So, in it's place, the peace of God is to settle disputes between us.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REVIEW

1. What is our supreme guide for determining what the will of God is in our lives? Discuss the purpose of having such a guide and how it serves as a safety net.

2. List the different tools God has given us for understanding His will in our lives?

3. What is the proper and Biblical understanding of the "sovereignty" of God? How does this correct understanding differ from fatalism?

4. What place does desire have in our understanding of God's will? Discuss how desire or lack of desire can help us, but also how it might mislead us. What should we consider when using desire or the lack of desire in making decisions?

5. How does peace help us finalize our understanding of God's will? Is it necessary to figure everything out in advance (in detail) before making a decision?

7

THE LIVING WORD OF GOD[44]

WE BELIEVE . . .

. . . that the Word of God is an expression of God's love for us and that our response to this love is to diligently endeavor to understand His Word and to apply its principles to our lives.

The Nature of the Word of God

Without any debate, the word of God is a wonder. It consists of 66 books spanning at least four thousand years written by forty authors who exalted in amazing harmony the same glorious and almightily God by painting a masterpiece of the character of God and His revealed love for mankind. Amazingly, these writings were preserved and kept safe until such a time a they could be put together in one work which we call the Bible.

It is estimated that 7,500,000,000 (7.5 trillion) Bibles have been distributed since 1456 when Johann Gutenberg first produced one using movable type. Worldwide 100,000,000 Bibles are sold each year. This does not include digital versions of the Bible.[45]

This precious gift which we hold in our hands is more than the imaginations of ancient prophets, more than creative poetry, and not merely a collection of historical accounts, but the actual inspired (God-breathed) word of God.

> ***2 Peter 1:19-21***
> *And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts;* ***20*** *knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation,* ***21*** *for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*
> ***2 Timothy 3:16-17***

[44] Part One of the Love of God Disicpleship Series, God's Love for You, Lesson Two, discusses at length the validity and authority of Scirpture. This lesson focuses on the effect of the Word of God in our lives.
[45] http://www.biblestudy.org/beginner/why-are-there-so-many-bibles-in-the-world.html

*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, **17** that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Because of its divine origin and purpose, it can be nothing less than completely relevant to us today. It not only informs us, but transforms us into the image of His Son equipping us for every act of worship. As we open ourselves the Word of God, and yield ourselves to the will of God while receiving the promises of God, we become partakers of the divine nature and escape the corruption that is in the world **(2 Peter 1:4)**.

The Reliability of the Word of God

Because the Bible is the inspired word of God, we have reason to trust in the promises of God, for we do not believe in someone's clever twisting of interesting words, but in the very promises given to us by God. Our God is completely reliable and incapable of deception or lies. So, when He makes statements such as, "All things are possible to him who believes," we can trust that what God has promised, He is perfectly capable to do.

2 Peter 1:16

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

2 Corinthians 1:20

For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.

Numbers 23:19-20

"God is not a man, that He should lie,
Nor a son of man, that He should repent.
Has He said, and will He not do?
Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?

Hebrews 6:17-18

***17** Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, **18** that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.*

Interpretation of the Word of God

In understanding what we read in Scripture it is important to keep a few principals in mind. First and foremost is that everything written has a singular meaning. We cannot stretch the word of God to mean whatever we want it to mean. It means what it means and we receive from it best when we seek to understand the actual meaning.

2 Peter 1:20-21

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, ***21*** *for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*

However, one passage might have more than one application. When we are told to "love one another fervently", this can apply to the attitude of our hearts or to practical acts of giving to the needs of other believers. However, it would be immoral to apply the verse beyond brotherly affection and acts of kindness.

When attempting to understand a passage it is important to evaluate it within its context, for example, to whom was it written and for what purpose. It is also helpful to know the historical and cultural setting. Also interesting might be the literary style.

A verse is not an isolated thought. It is part of a chapter, which is part of a book which is part of the Old or New Testament which is part of the entire Bible. The understanding of one verse is bettered not only by studying its immediate context, but also by knowledge of the whole of Scripture.

It is also important that a student of the Bible have a clear understanding of the New Covenant and of the changes that occurred in God's relationship with man after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For example, Old Covenant believers were cursed if they did not obey all of the Law of Moses. However, New Covenant believers are free from the curse of the Law. Under the Old Covenant, man had to repeatedly atone for his sin using animal sacrifice, but under the New Covenant, our sins have been forever forgiven by the one time sacrifice of God's Son. Before Christ, man was distant from God, but through Jesus Christ we have been brought near.[46]

Hebrews 8:6
But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises
Ephesians 2:13
But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

The Word of God Verses Tradition and Experience

The Christian world is full of generations of tradition and experiences. Over time, these are repeated so frequently that they are given credence equal to that of the Bible. Some of these ideas are written into songs which perpetuate them even further. It is not uncommon for someone to quote the words of a song as if it were a scripture. We need to be careful that we place our faith in the word of God and not in our own experiences, traditions, and music that have no foundation in the meaning of Scripture. Otherwise, we drain the power from the true word of God and find ourselves deceived, even robbed of its power.

[46] See Lessons 7-9 in God's Love for You. For more specific information on the accomplishments of the cross, see the chart by that name in Lesson 8 of God's Love for You.

Colossians 2:8
Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.
Matthew 15:6
Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.

The Power of the Word of God

The word of God is creative. We see this so clearly in creation. God spoke, and it came to pass. From nothing, His words made something exist. When we speak His words, we also see miracles take place.

Hebrews 11:3
By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

Mark 11:22
22 *So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God.* ***23*** *For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says.*

By hearing the word of God, we have faith to believe that Jesus lived, died, and was resurrected, and faith to receive and confess Him as our Lord and be saved. Again, we see that when we speak our belief in His words, the miracle of new birth takes place.

Romans 10:17
So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.
1 Peter 1:23
Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.
Romans 10:9-10
That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ***10*** *For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

Not only are we born again by the word of God, but we are sanctified by it. Jesus prayed to the Father that He would, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth," (**John 17:17).** Paul also wrote of this cleansing by the word of God.

Ephesians 5:25-27
Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ***26*** *that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,* ***27*** *that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.*

Not only are we sanctified by the word of God, but so is the food we eat!

1 Timothy 4:4-5
*For every creature of God is good[47], and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; **5** for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.*

We live by the words of God. It feeds us more than food does.

Luke 4:4
But Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'"

The word of God is also one of the weapons of our warfare. The better we know His word, the more effective we will be against the enemy.

Ephesians 6:17
And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

The word of God is alive and it is full of power. It can penetrate into our hearts and help us know if what we are thinking is of ourselves or of the Lord. We never have to put on pretense.

Hebrews 4:12
For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The word of God is able to make us wise, not just knowledgeable. It can correct us and strengthen us and will teach us what is right. It will prepare us to serve Him.

2 Timothy 3:14-16
*But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, **15** and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. **16** All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, **17** that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

The Tragic Results of Not Having a Firm Understanding of the Word of God

It is amazing that many Christians in the body of Christ today have never read the entire Bible. Tragically, they get most of their information from Sunday sermons, television, radio, music, and Christian literature. I do not say this to condemn, but to warn.

There is so much JUNK out there in the Christian world today. If you don't not have a firm understanding of what is written in the word of God, and a clear understanding of

[47] In context, this is refering to animals.

the grace of God and New Covenant, you are making yourself vulnerable to deception. Yes, there really are people out there who are plotting to deceive you.

You might think, "I won't fall for that," but most people think that way, and yet the numbers are shocking. There are nearly 14 million Mormons and 7 million Jehovah's Witnesses world-wide with millions more in other "Christian" cults[48]. Additionally, Christian fads are constantly introduced into the body of Christ, some of them completely heretical. Additionally, we have all seen a Christian church go under when an entire congregation followed a strong leader into scriptural error. What happens is the people become loyal to the church leadership, but have no firm foundation in the word of God as individuals. So, when the leader begins to teach things that are not true, they have no idea that this is even happening.

This is what happened to my husband and I. We were truly born again, but then got involved in a church where a "different gospel" was taught, that of being made perfect by our own religious activity. Loyalty to the pastors made it impossible to challenge what they were saying, and before we knew it, we were nearly lost. Only a supernaturally orchestrated chain of events was able to answer our sincere prayer, "What is wrong? You know I love You. I believe You love me, but why do You seem so far away?" [49]

In order to be able to tell the difference between truth and error, you have to know the truth. In order to learn the truth, you have to read and know the Bible.

> ***Matthew 24:24***
> *For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.*
> ***Romans 16:17-19***
> ***17*** *Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.* ***18*** *For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.*
> ***2 Timothy 3:13***
> *But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.*
> ***1 John 2:26***
> *These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you.*
> ***2 John 1:7***
> *For many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.*
> ***2 Corinthians 11:13-15***
> ***13*** *For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.* ***14*** *And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.* ***15*** *Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.*
> ***Ephesians 4:11-15***
> *And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,* ***12*** *for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,* ***13*** *till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure*

[48] For a side-by-side comparison of true Christianity and cults read, Kingdom of the Cults by Walter Martin.
[49] A more detailed explanation of our story is in Lesson Ten of God's Love for You, which is Part One in the Love of God Discipleship Series.

> *of the stature of the fullness of Christ; **14** that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, **15** but, speaking the truth in love, **may grow up** in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— **16** from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

Additionally, it is crucial that you not leave your brain behind when you listen to teachings and sermons. If something sounds "funny" to you, maybe it is! Any teacher who is truly from God will patiently explain his point of view. Let's take an extreme example. Perhaps your pastor reads the verse that says women should submit to their husbands (which is true), but then concludes that women are inferior to men (which is not true). Let's say that this doesn't sound "right" to you. You could go to www.biblegateway.com, limit your search to the New Testament, and search for "women" or "female". Eventually you will find that women are equal to men before God. Don't be afraid to speak to or email your pastor with your conclusions. You might actually add to his understanding. However, if you are met with a hostile or dismissive response, you might want to consider a different fellowship.

It is actually your responsibility to use the mind of Christ which God has given you to evaluate what you hear. By the way, just because someone says something that isn't quite right doesn't necessarily make him a false prophet. It might just mean that he doesn't know everything yet or is simply mistaken. So, be gracious when you hear, but also be careful. Paul told the Galatians that even if he himself came to them preaching a different

gospel than the one he had taught them, that he should be accursed. That is how seriously we are to take the preaching of "another gospel". The more you know the word of God, the less likely you will fall into deception.

> ***Acts 17:11***
> *These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*
> ***Galatians 1:6-9***
> *I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, **7** which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. **8** But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. **9** As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.*
> ***1 Thessalonians 5:21***
> *Test all things; hold fast what is good.*

OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S LOVE

The Application of the Word of God in Our Lives

DESIRE

When we initially realize that God loves us, it is our normal desire for to read the Bible. Unfortunately, in some churches, this is immediately regimented by leaders teaching new believers that they "need" to read a certain amount of the Word, and that they "need" to read the word "everyday". This is done with all the best motives, but results in turning the grace of God which produces a *desire* to read the word of God into a law about reading the word of God which tends towards resistance. Those who are naturally self-disciplined can develop a sense of righteousness based on reading the word regularly, and those who are not as disciplined tend to develop guilt and condemnation for not reading it "enough". All of this can be avoided, by simply not setting down regulations[50].

In order to facilitate a new believer's desire to read the word the church should provide them with a New Testament[51] and give some basic guidance about its contents.

> **1 Peter 2:2**
> As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.

Notice the word "desire". This is what needs to be cultivated. Desire. When the desire is present, the feeding will follow. In fact, if you've been around a healthy newborn baby, especially if you are the nursing mother, you KNOW that they DESIRE milk, and they will let you know it LOUDLY. "Feed me! Feed me now. Feed me often. Burp. Now feed me some more!" That is the type of desire we can cultivate in our own hearts and in those of other believers.

If you are someone who has been a believer for awhile, and reading/studying the Bible has lost its original appeal, please understand that this is quite common but not what God intends. More likely than not, you were given a list of rules when it comes to the word, and it became a chore rather than the joy you originally experienced. Not to worry. Keep reading this lesson. Hopefully, you will be able to untie this knot in your life and be free again to *desire* His word.

RELATIONSHIP AND REVELATION

In my opinion, the primary purpose for reading and studying the word of God is to get to know the character of God better through studying the word and to fellowship with God. God *wants* to open His word to us. This is one reason why setting a goal of reading a certain amount each day can be unhelpful. We tend to make "accomplishing our goal" or fulfilling a "spiritual discipline" the reason to read, and often miss the wonderfulness of His words to us.

Think of reading the word as eating a gourmet meal which has been carefully prepared for you by a trained expert. While we might gobble down a Big Mac[52], we are less likely to gobble when eating at an expensive restaurant. We want to enjoy each bite, appreciate the spices we are tasting. We chew a little slower, and pay attention to the experience.

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[50] Often, the person setting the regulation fails to meet the same standard.
[51] A new believer might say they have a Bible, but often this has been provided to them by a cult, such as Jehova's witnesses and is not an accurate translation. This should be pointed out and a new Bible provided.
[52] No offense, I love Big Macs.

Stop, Look, and Listen

When you sit down to read the word, try not to rush. I suggest beginning in Matthew and eventually reading the whole New Testament, though this is not a rule either. Read a little while, then STOP. Then LOOK, perhaps read it again. Give it some time to soak in. LISTEN. Ask God if there is something in the passage that He would like to apply to your life or something He would like to speak to you. Sometimes, it will just be information. Other times, God will open your eyes to something you didn't know before. You see, God will speak to you as you read His word. Allow His word to feed you. As He speaks to you, enjoy His presence. How much you read is not the point. Some new believers like to read the whole New Testament through and then go back and read slowly. This is entirely up to you.

Some people enjoy journaling through the Scriptures. Should this appeal to you, this can take on many forms. One way is to record what stood out to you that day, what you prayed, and what you believed the Lord spoke to your heart. Others keep lists of areas that currently interest them, such as God's love for you or divine healing. For this method, you start a list, and as you come across insights into the Scripture, you record under the topic what you learned. This can become very exciting as your lists lengthen and your topics expand. It is like searching for treasure.

Don't worry if you aren't a Bible scholar yet. Little by little, you will learn. Keep in mind that before you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, the word of God was hidden to you because your mind was not capable of understanding it. Now, you have the mind of Christ! The Holy Spirit will teach you as you go, and for the rest of your life you will be discovering the depths of God's love for you in His words to you.

No Need for Separation

Somewhere along the line, someone decided that prayer and reading the word would be two separate Christian chores. The norm in my church when I first came to the Lord was "pray one hour and read ten chapters a day". So, I'd do my best to fill up an hour, and then I'd push myself through the chapters. I didn't think of the word when I prayed, and I didn't pray while reading the word. What a pity!

Now I open the word and pray as I read. If I think of a need for myself or another, I stop reading for awhile and pray. This may lead to praying a little more, then I'm back to the word. God speaks to us through His word. If I read something that seems to be very relevant to me or someone I know, I stop and pray using that Scripture. Sometimes I spend more time in prayer than the word, and sometimes I spend more time reading. As you get to know the Scripture better, one verse will remind you of another in a different location, so then you can go look that one up and see how they work together. This is how I enjoy praying and reading the word. You may find that another pattern ministers to you. Whatever you do, enjoy!

> ***1 Corinthians 2:14-16***
> *But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.* ***15*** *But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.* ***16*** *For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.*

1 John 2:27
But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.

APPLICATION AND GROWTH

If you have sincerely given your life to God through receiving Jesus Christ, you will not only desire to *know* the word of God, but there will grow in you a desire to *do* the will of God. As we studied in the previous lesson, we know His will primarily through His word. Additionally, God is working in us to will and to do of His good pleasure (**Philippians 2:13**), and His grace is constantly teaching us how to live (**Titus 2:11-12**).

Following is a well-known parable given by Jesus. Notice what He has to say about those who hear His word and then live it out.

Matthew 7:14-26
"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. 26 "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

When we not only hear God's word, but obey what we hear, we are building our spiritual house on a firm foundation. When trouble comes, we will stand.

So important to Jesus was the concept of doing the will of God that He was willing to distinguish between his natural family and those who obeyed His words. When His mother and siblings came to visit him, and He was told they were outside waiting to see them, His reply was "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it," (**Luke 8:21).**

Interestingly, Jesus' natural brother who wrote the book of James (who was probably present the day this was reported), wrote in his epistle,

James 1:21-25
*Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. **22**But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. **23** For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; **24** for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. **25** But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.*

When we read the will of God, and don't apply it to our lives, we can actually fool ourselves into thinking that all is well, when perhaps it is not. Let's take the example of Paul's exhortation to the Galatians in chapter five, verse one to "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of

bondage." Paul was telling them not to add religious requirements to the gospel of grace. He was telling them this so that they could live freely, but if they chose to ignore this message and submit themselves to the rules and regulations that were being imposed on them, they would be deceived into living under bondage.

As well as coming under bondage we fail to grow and mature when we do no apply the word of God to our lives. Instead of growing up in the Lord and getting to the point where we can teach others, often believers end up continually needing to be taught. However, when we use the words of God in our lives we become mature and more discerning.

A principle one might apply is "use it or lose it". Another way to look at it is, you haven't really learned something until you've done it. Take riding a bike, for example. Someone could study the anatomy of a bicycle, the engineering and the process of riding a bicycle, and claim, "I 'know' how to ride a bicycle," but that is just mental knowledge. We all know that unless you get on the bike and put the peddle to the metal; you don't know how to ride a bicycle. So, it is with the word of God. When we experience what we learn, THEN we truly *know* it.

> ***2 Timothy 3:15***
> *And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*
> ***Hebrews 5:12-14***
> *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food.* ***13*** *For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.* ***14*** *But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

> ***Luke 8:15***
> *But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.*

The word of God implanted in our heart is able to save our souls. However, when we hear it only and do not do it, we deceive ourselves. Another example of this would be the person who is very knowledgeable about the Bible, but who lacks love. As Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 13:2, "**And though I. . . understand all mysteries and all knowledge. . . but have not love, I am nothing." One might put confidence in the fact that he is quite knowledgeable, but just knowing the word of God is meaningless unless it is applied to one's life.

CHANGE YOUR MIND

Before we come to saving faith in Jesus, our lives are guided by the world's values and by Satan. Most people eventually develop a philosophy of life that more or less guides their decisions. However, when we come to Christ, we are given the mind of Christ. Our thinking begins to be transformed. When we allow our thinking to be transformed, our way of living is changed. Don't let anyone tell you it is the other way around. You will not be changed internally by changing externally. True change occurs when we allow the word of God and the Holy Spirit to teach us and to change our mind!

Have you ever noticed that Christians seem to grow at different rates after coming to the Lord? This can be due to a variety of reasons. For example, if the person was raised in the church and was taught the word of God growing up, they will seem to grow faster when they make an adult decision for Jesus than the person who has zero Bible background. The word of God was already sown into the first person's heart, so the Holy Spirit can bring more to their remembrance. The other person has no foundation.

Another thing that can affect growth rates is the person's mental health. Often people who come to Jesus have years of drug use or other health habits that inhibit the mind's ability to understand, but God can heal the person's mind over time so that they can receive the word of God better and better. Obviously, someone who comes to the Lord with his mind intact will be able to understand more sooner.

The one factor over which we have control is the rate at which we learn and apply the word of God. Any Christian leader has observed this over the years. Those who mature more quickly are those who can't seem to stop reading and applying the word of God to their lives. Before you know it, they are teaching a Sunday School class, and your are thinking, "Hey! That's not fair. They came to the Lord when I did. Why are they teaching?" It isn't that they are better than you or that God loves them more. It is likely that they have taken time to absorb and live God's word more than you have. This is not to place blame. It's not a contest. Sometimes our lives are so busy raising families or working that we don't have or don't take time to read the word as much as someone who has more time. So, your growth might be slower, but don't worry about that. As you continue in His word, you will grow, too.

Additionally, God puts in the body of Christ teachers whose job it is to educate those who are growing up in Christ. Consider that you are a sheep, and the local leaders are the shepherds. It is their responsibility to help you in your Christian faith, and one of the things they will help you do is understand the word. They do this by "feeding" you the word of God. If you are a new believer or someone who hasn't studied the Bible yet, find a church where the word of God is taught regularly. Some churches offer local Bible schools that you can attend that will help you grow. If you find yourself in a church that doesn't really teach the Bible, don't feel guilty looking for one that does.

However, the Holy Spirit will guide you and teach you individually. You should not rely solely on the teachings of those in the church. In fact, as they teach you, you need to be comparing what they are saying against what the Bible says. We try, but teachers are not always 100% accurate. If someone says something that doesn't "sit right" with you, don't ignore that thought. Do some research on your own. Feel free to ask the teacher for clarification. A good teacher will welcome the opportunity to explain. However, if your sincere questions are met with resentment or impatience, this should give you pause. Maybe a different teacher (or church) would be more open to helping you.

Romans 12:2
*And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the **renewing** of your **mind**, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

Luke 8:11-15
*"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. **12** Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. **13** But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who*

*believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. **14** Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity. **15** But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience.*

1 John 2:27

*But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not **need** that anyone **teach** you; but as the same anointing **teach**es you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.*

Acts 18:11

And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Ephesians 4:11-12

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, **12** for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*

PERSECUTION BECAUSE OF THE WORD

If you are going to be a person of the true word of God, you can fully expect persecution. I am sorry to say that the group of people most likely to persecute you will be religious people, yes, even other Christians. The amount of persecution you experience will depend largely on where you live. If you live where being a Christian is legal and generally acceptable, there will be less persecution for sharing the word of God. However, if you live where Christianity is illegal or not acceptable, you will likely suffer more persecution.

Mark 4:17

And they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble.

Revelation 1:9

I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 6:9

When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

Revelation 20:4

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

If you are living under persecution, you will gain great comfort reading the book of Acts which gives stories of the different saints that were persecuted for speaking the word of God. Amazingly, you will read of stories that speak of joy in the midst of it all.

Patterns of Bible Reading and Study

Reading the Bible is not a religious requirement, it is a wonderful journey to knowing more about the God who loves you. Applying His word to your life is a means of renewing your mind and growing spiritually. Don't let anyone turn this blessedness into a meaningless routine. However, that being said, for most people, it is helpful to set goals in the area of Bible reading. Here are some *suggestions.*

IF YOU HAVEN'T READ THE NEW TESTAMENT BEFORE

The first thing we suggest is that you read the entire New Testament through to get an overview. It will inspire and empower you in your Christian walk. There are no set ways to go about this, but I suggest beginning in Matthew and reading straight through. My husband read the entire New Testament the first week he was a Christian. He was so hungry for the word of God that he just couldn't stop! He also was not working full-time and was single. Just read it as much as you want and as fast as you want until you get to the last verse in Revelations. Keep in mind that you will read the New Testaments multiple times throughout your life, so you don't need to understand each and every line the first time through. Just absorb and enjoy!

IF YOU HAVE READ THE NEW TESTAMENT BUT NOT THE OLD

There is much value in having an overview of the Bible. If you haven't read the Old Testament before, I suggest you buy a Bible that has the Scriptures divided up into daily readings. I prefer the versions that have you read a little of the Old Testament and a little of the New Testament each day. There are some that even add to that some Psalms and Proverbs each day. I recommend that you not worry about the dates because that can be frustrating. Start at the beginning and read a day's worth each time you read. Maybe some days you won't have time to read, but on other days you could read twice or even three times or more. Don't worry about the timetable, just keep reading. Soon you will be through the Old Testament for the first time and the New Testament again.

If you can't find just the Bible you want in the version you want, you can simply divide it up yourself. Also, most Christian bookstores have bookmarks that divide it up for you. Another way to do it is use a website that does the work for you. One I found that seems like it has many options is http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/readingplans/.

IF YOU'VE ALREADY READ BOTH THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

Some people set the goal for themselves to read the Bible through each year, but you might want to read it more than that or not be able to read it that quickly. Remember God is more interested in you *applying* what you read that how much you read.

After you've read both the Old and New Testaments, I suggest you begin to read the Scripture a little slower giving yourself time to think about what you are reading and how it might apply to you. Keep in mind that you are a New Covenant believer not an Old Covenant believer. The requirements of the Old Covenant believers were very specific and they were cursed if they did not comply. New Covenant believers are under grace. Our sins are eliminated by the blood of Jesus Christ. So, if you read in the Law of Moses that it is wrong to mix different types of fabrics, this does not mean you need to get rid of clothing

in your closet that are comprised of cotton and polyester for example. Many a Christian has gone astray by trying to live under a Covenant that they are not under.

I suggest you invest in a study Bible. My favorite is the Nelson Study Bible. On the top is the Scripture, and down below is very interesting and helpful commentary which will help you understand what you are reading. However, keep in mind that the commentary is NOT SCRIPTURE. Although I'm sure the authors of the notes in my Nelson Bible are being as honest as they know how, once in awhile their bias shows through. So, feel free to disagree with commentary. I usually even write it in the margin, "I disagree with this," and then give Scripture to prove my point of view. It's my commentary on the commentary.

As the administrator of a local Bible school, the following statement might be shocking. I firmly believe that if you study the Bible on your own you will have all you need to live this Christian life. There are so many resources available to us today that we could literally never run out of things to understand. You don't need to go to Bible college to learn the Bible. In fact, many Bible colleges today are becoming increasingly liberal and steering away from strong doctrine.

However, that being said, if you can find a Bible school that is committed to teaching the word of God from the point of view of the New Covenant and grace, you will likely be enriched by attending. Additionally, often a local Bible school will give you opportunities to get started in ministry. If you do want to attend a Bible school, do much research beforehand. Get advice. Read the school's Statement of Faith which will tell you what they believe. Ask fellow believers if they know of one. Beware of internet degrees. There are many phonies out there who only want your money or who are trying to draw you into a cult.

Whatever goals you do end up setting for yourself, don't feel condemned if you don't meet the goals YOU set. If you do find yourself getting tied up in knots in this area, just stop reading the Bible for awhile and focus more on thinking about what you've already read or putting something into practice or just focus on prayer or service for awhile. Then, when you are ready, pick up the word again, and truly enjoy it!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REVIEW

1. What benefits do Christians receive from better understanding the word of God?

2. Explain the importance and advantages of being a doer of the word and not simply a hearer/learner.

3. What other thoughts have you had while reading this lesson?

4. Write here any goals you would like to make regarding reading and/or studying God's word.

5. What steps might you need to take to keep reading the Bible a wonderful jouney, an interesting treasure hunt or a means to know God better instead of simply a habit or discipline?

8
THE PRIVILEGE AND POWER OF PRAYER

WE BELIEVE . . .

. . . that prayer is a privilege purchased for us with the sacrifice of the spotless Lamb of God, and that prayer brings results.

Out of curiosity I did a search on "how to pray" at christianbook.com which resulted in 518 books. That's just the "how to pray" topic. Other topics on prayer such as "why pray", "purpose of prayer", and "importance of prayer" yielded similar results. In many ways, it would be easy enough to just recommend a good book instead of writing this lesson. It makes me ask myself, as I often do walking through a Christian bookstore, "Why contribute to the madness?"[53]

There are so many prayer books, each with their own prayer formulas or methodologies, that it can be completely confusing. With so many opinions and ways to pray, a person can quickly become tied up in knots. So, one of the goals of this lesson is to present prayer in light of Scripture avoiding legalisms and traditions.

It would be impossible to include everything that is known on the topic of prayer in one short lesson, but it is the goal of this lesson to give you a Scriptural overview and good foundation on this topic which will allow you to study it further. It is hoped that wherever you are in your Christian walk, that you will be liberated to pray more than ever.

At the point I thought I was just about half way through with this lesson, I realized I'd already written fourteen pages! With my goal of close to ten pages per lesson, I prayed, "Lord, help!" Very soon after that, the idea came to me that it would be important to answer the questions people commonly ask about prayer. I sent out an email to five people and two wrote me back instantly. One was very well behaved and kept to five questions, the other had a very long list, and then sent me a subsequent email with more questions. I saw that we would need two lessons on prayer, this one that will discuss the privilege and power of prayer, and another addressing the concerns, confusions, and barriers believers confront about prayer. Another survey went out, and more questions came in. So, as you read this first lesson on prayer, and you have more questions than we've answered, be of good cheer, there is another lesson that will hopefully answer your questions.

After completing the lesson on the questions people had about prayer, we realized that we still had not taught how to pray effectively, and added a third lesson on prayer. I hope all three of these lessons will encourage you.

The Privilege of Prayer

In the sense of communicating with God, prayer has always existed since man was created. We know that Adam and Eve fellowshipped with God; not only that, but God *walked* with them in the garden. His presence was with them. Even after the fall of man, God continued to communicate with His creation. A little forward in time and we meet

[53] It's not that writing about prayer is madness, just that being confronted with 518 books about prayer can drive one crazy!

Enoch who walked with God so closely, that he was translated by God off the earth. Next, to Noah who received detailed instructions from God to build an ark that could house perhaps thousands of animals. God also spoke to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

It is in the Old Testament, in Psalm 34:15 that we read, "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry," so it is not true that the fall of man separated him from God to the extent that God could not hear man or that man could not hear God. In fact, the Old Testament Scriptures are bursting with prayers of every kind from the intercessions of Abraham and Moses, to the lamentations of Jeremiah, and the adoration and praise of the Psalmists. They were human beings as are we. They knew joys and they knew difficulties. Because they did not have the abiding presence of God living inside of them as we do, their prayers often reflected a longing and hunger and thirst that should already be satisfied in us, those who actually have the presence of God abiding in us. That is to say, we have the very things for which they longed.

Before the cross, it was not the right of every believer to be in the presence of God. Of course, individuals could worship God and pray to Him apart from that, but only one man, the high priest, could enter the Holy of Holies where the presence of God dwelt, only once a year, only by following detailed instructions, and of course, not without animal sacrifice. However, we, as born again Christians all have the privilege of entering the Holy of Holies, into His very presence, the very throne room of God at any time! How can this be?

When Jesus died on the cross, a very interesting and nearly incredible event occurred. We can read about this in Matthew 27:50-51. At the time when Jesus was just about to die, we read, "And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. **51** Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split".

When I first took note of this Scripture, I was in awe! It is apparent that God himself tore this veil. Let us briefly take a look at the veil's construction because I know when we think of "veil" we think of a small thin piece of fabric. However, the veil in the temple was no such thing. The veil measured approximately 30' wide by 60' high and was 3"-4" thick! It is the thickness that struck me. No human being could tear a woven fabric that is that thick. Sixty feet is as high as a six story building! Only God could tear such an object from that height from top to bottom. Then imagine the impact this should have had on the priests who guarded the temple. There is no mention of their reaction, but I can imagine myself, the high priest that year, the only man who might have even entered in under that veil being in shock and horror at this event. Only a supernatural occurrence could explain what happened. The Holy of Holies where the presence of God lived had been opened.

Even small children can enjoy this privilege of being in God's presence, but cannot possibly understand it as such or the price that was paid for their ability to enter. They only know that Jesus loves them, and that they love Him. As adults, we begin to see that what had been so normal for us growing up was actually purchased for us at a great and precious price. What the saints of old could not even imagine experiencing, that for which many longed, is our daily privilege and honor.

It is degrading to the sacrifice that Jesus made that this honor and glory is so frequently turned into some sort of religious requirement or methodology to be practiced at least once daily. **Prayer is not a religious discipline.** Prayer is first and foremost the honor and privilege of every believer to continuously *dwell* in the very presence of God purchased for us by the blood of the spotless Lamb of God through His horrific death and

suffering. So, let us not trivialize this honor given to us by making it a *feature* of our religion. It isn't a *part* of our lives, **it *is* our lives**. We have this joy every minute of everyday.

> ***Hebrews 10:19-22***
> *Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, **20** by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, **21** and having a High Priest over the house of God, **22** let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*
> ***Hebrews 4:15-17***
> *For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. **16** Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Rather than learning about prayer via traditions, let us study prayer via the New Testament. As we do, we realize that its power was not found in praying a certain amount of time at a particular time of day using a man-made format. The wonder of prayer is that there is no formulation, limitation or obligation. It is a glorious grace bestowed upon us by the Son of God's gift of Himself.

The Power of Prayer

Some hyper spiritualize prayer by diminishing one of its main meanings and purposes. It is said that prayer in its purest form is that of worship and relationship, and this cannot be debated. However, the New Testament also puts an emphasis on the following purpose as well. One of the definitions of *to pray*[54] is: 1 **:** to make a request in a humble manner". To pray is to *ask*. Paul wrote in Hebrews 11:6, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." One of the reasons we pray is because **prayer works**. James wrote, "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." We pray because God answers. The Scriptural evidence for this truth is overwhelming. Here are multiple examples from the words of Jesus to show that what we ask of God, we will receive (underlining mine).

> ***Matthew 7:7-8,11***
> *Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. **8** For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.**11** If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!*
> ***Matthew 18:19-20***
> *Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. **20** For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.*

[54] Merriam-Webster Dictionary

Matthew 21:21-22
*So Jesus answered and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but also if you say to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' it will be done. **22** And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."*

Mark 11:24
Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.
John 14:13-14
*And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. **14** If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.*
John 15:7
If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.
John 15:16
You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.
John 16:23-24
*Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. **24** Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.*

What we can hear in these words of Jesus is a strong encouragement to ASK, BELIEVE, and RECEIVE. I can almost see Him motioning with his arm to bid us come and ask. The last verse (John 16:23-24) is amazing! He wants us to ask and to receive so that our JOY will be full. Of course, when we pray, and we get what we asked for, we rejoice. Just like the child who wants a bike for Christmas. When he opens that bike, he hugs that bike, jumps up and down and runs around the room, and thanks his parents! We save that gift for last because we know the child will want to go outside right now and give it a try! He is full of joy. His request has been answered. God wants His children to ask and He wants to answer our prayers because He wants to see our joy! It brings Him joy to give us joy. So, go ahead! Don't be shy! Ask. He bids you ASK THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE FULL!

The Prayer Life of Jesus

Many have searched and actually claim to have found an exact system of prayer practice by Jesus. However, we observe that even though Jesus did some things customarily, prayer was not something He practiced as some sort of discipline or religious requirement. He didn't drag Himself out of bed each morning to put in His daily hour of prayer. Jesus prayed as he breathed. For Him, it was not a religious practice as it was for the Pharisees. He did not pray so that He could boast about how long or how often. Nor did He pray so that His Father would love Him more.

It is easy to see that Jesus was in constant communion with His Father because this is what He WANTED to do. As He was going through His life, we would just stop and pray right out loud. He wasn't doing this to impress, but to communicate.

One of Jesus' customs was to get away from everyone to pray. Since the people would begin coming to him when daylight came, His times of preference were the evening

or the morning while it was still dark. Since there was no electricity, He could be completely alone. His place of preference was the mountain. He also had extended times of prayer such as all night. Jesus did not teach or require that his disciples do the same. Some of us live nowhere near a mountain, and where some of us live, it would be unwise and dangerous to be out at night. What we learn from Jesus is that He loved to be with His Father in prayer. It was love that motivated each and every prayer. It was not a matter of

points to be earned. It was a living relationship with His Father. He prayed out of desire or because someone was in need.

WHEN AND WHERE HE PRAYED

Privately or with His Disciples

Matthew 14:23
And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. (Mark 6:46, John 6:15)
Luke 9:18
And it happened, as He was alone praying, that His disciples joined Him, and He asked them, saying, "Who do the crowds say that I am?"
Mark 1:35
Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.
Luke 5:15-16
However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed.
Luke 6:12
Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. (Matthew 10:4, Mark 3:13)
Luke 22:39
Coming out, He went to the Mount of Olives, as He was accustomed, and His disciples also followed Him. (Mark 14:32-33, Matthew 26:36)
Luke 9:28
Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. (Matthew 17:1, Mark 9:2)

WHAT JESUS PRAYED

- Jesus Prayed for Himself & for God's Will to Be Done

Matthew 17: 1-5
*Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, **2** as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. **3** And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. **4** I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. **5** And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.*
Matthew 26:39
He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

▪ Jesus Prayed for His Disciples

Matthew 17:6-18 *(partial)*

*"I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world… **9** I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. **11** Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. **15** I do not pray that You should*

*take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. **17** Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.*

Luke 22:32

But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.

▪ Jesus Prayed for Us

Matthew 17: 20-23

*I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; **21** that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. **22** And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: **23** I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.*

Jesus Instruction about Prayer

Jesus didn't tell us when to pray, where to pray, or for how long to pray, but He did teach much on the topic of prayer. For example, He told us to pray before our Father. He told us to pray that God's will be done. He told us to ask the Father in Jesus name. He told us to pray for those who are our enemies and those who spitefully use us or persecute us. We are told to pray for laborers for God's harvest of souls. He also taught us to believe when we pray that God will answer. One thing you might find interesting to do, is find an empty page in your Bible, and as you read the Gospels, make note of teachings on prayer. Here are some passages on the topic.

Matthew 26:41

Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

Luke 11:2

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Matthew 5:44

But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. (Luke 6:28)

Matthew 6:6

But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

Matthew 6:9

In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

(Notice what we call "The Lord's Prayer" takes about 30 seconds to pray. Of course, you could extend the prayer by focusing more on each topic, but the point is that our prayer, if sincere, will be heard and answered.)

Matthew 9:38

Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.(Luke 10:2)

Matthew 21:22

And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive. (Mark 11:24)

Luke 18:1

Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart.

John 14:13

And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

Jesus Teaching on Hypocritical Prayers

Jesus also gave instruction on why not to pray. We are not to pray in order to be admired by men. Few pray on street corners these days, but there is that subtle matter of someone making sure others know how much he/she prays every day by making reference to it. So, in this way, they aren't physically praying in front of men, but in another way, they are still seeking recognition and admiration. Then there are those who love to make grandiose prayers at church using flowery language as if to impress others.

Jesus also told us not to repeat the same prayers over and over thinking God will hear us or that by repetition, things will come to pass. Reciting the Lord's Prayer ten times will not forgive sin, for example.

We are also not to pray pretentious prayers. This might manifest itself today in trying to influence the actions of others by what we pray publically. Worse would be to be involved in doing some sort of evil, and trying to cover our actions by prayers. Here are some verses about how not to pray.

Matthew 6:5

"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

Matthew 6:7

And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

Matthew 23:14

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.

The Prayers of the Early Church

It is always very interesting to observe how the teachings of Christ were lived out by the disciples after Jesus ascended to the Father. Let us take a look at some of the prayers from the book of Acts which is the history of the early church. While the following does not

include every instance of prayer recorded in the book of Acts, it does give us an overview of prayer among the early believers and perhaps encourage us to pray similarly.

PRAYER WITH OTHER BELIEVERS

What I see in the following prayers is a sense of community not very familiar to us today. As you read these, you will observe a sense of family and belonging. They studied together, fellowshipped together, ate together, and prayed together.

> ***Acts 1:14***
> *These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.*
>
> ***Acts 2:42***
> *And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*
> ***Acts 4:31***
> *And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.*
> ***Acts 12:12***
> *So, when he had considered this, he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying.*
> ***Acts 20:36***
> *And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.*
> ***Acts 21:5***
> *When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed.*

PRAYER SETTING APART SOMEONE FOR A SPECIAL SERVICE

(Notice this type of prayer is often accompanied *by fasting.)*

> ***Acts 6:6***
> *Whom (the newly appointed elders) they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.*
> ***Acts 13:3***
> *Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.*
> ***Acts 14:23***
> *So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*

PRAYER FOR HEALING

> ***Acts 9:40***
> *But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.*
> ***Acts 28:8***
> *And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him.*

PRAYER DURING DIFFICULTIES

Acts 16:25
But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.
Acts 12:5
Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.

VISIONS WHILE PRAYING

Acts 11:5
I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, an object descending like a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came to me.
Acts 22: 17-18
*Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance **18** and saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.*

Let Christ's life and the lives of the earliest Christians be examples to us. Let us be in prayer constantly. Let us not limit the privilege and power of prayer by fixing traditional standards on it such as when to pray, where to pray, and how long to pray. Let us avoid formulas that prevent us from conversing with our Father. Let us especially reject steps to come into God's presence. THERE ARE NOT STEPS. **Jesus opened the way; go into His throne room with confidence at any time without a formulaic approach. Walk in His presence throughout the day. Prayer is an honor and it yields results. Let us avail ourselves of this amazing gift at every opportunity.**

There is much more to say about prayers in the New Testament. Often, the writers of the epistles would tell those to whom they were writing what they were praying for them. We will not discuss each one of those in this lesson, but let us take a closer look at one of them for the purpose of discovering how we can personalize such prayers for ourselves or for someone else.

Prayer of Paul for the Colossians 1:9-12	Personalized Prayer
*For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; **10** that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; **11** strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and*	▪ *Father, fill me with the knowledge of Your will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding* ▪ *Let me walk worthy of You, Lord.* ▪ *Let me fully please You.* ▪ *May I be fruitful in every good work.* ▪ *I ask that I will increase in the knowledge of God* ▪ *I pray that I will be strengthened will all might according to Your glorious power for all patience and longsuffering with joy.* ▪ *Thank-you for qualifying me to be a partaker of*

*longsuffering with joy; **12** giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.*	*the inheritance of the saints in light.*

Personalizing Prayer for Someone Else

Father, I pray for Adriana. I ask that you fill her with the knowledge of Your will. Give her all wisdom and spiritual understanding. Lord, let her walk worth of You in all she does. Let her every thought, word, and deed please You. Let everything she does for You prosper. Help her to increase in the knowledge of You. Strengthen her will all might according to Your glorious power. Let her have patience and longsuffering with joy. Thank-you for qualifying her to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light.

OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S LOVE

Relationship

We have seen that Jesus, His disciples and the early church were constantly praying. Why is this? Well, of course, we know that first of all, they loved the One to whom they prayed. I am sure that they, even more than we, were appreciative of the fact that they could enter the Holiest Place whereas before it had been forbidden to them. They were free to worship Him up close and personal.

Imagine what prayer was like for them. They had *known* Jesus personally. They walked with Him, touched Him, talked with Him, and did miracles in His name. I suppose that they at first had a sense of missing Him when He "left". Yet now, they would know Him even more closely than they had previously. Perhaps they *recognized* Him . . . His presence in their hearts as they prayed. I try to ponder this and can't quite imagine it. The Jesus they had previously known in the flesh, they now knew in the Spirit. When they prayed, they saw His face in their minds and recognized His presence.

Long ago, I heard someone say jokingly, that some people wake up each day, and instead of saying, "Good morning, Lord!" they say, "Good Lord! It's morning!" (That always makes me laugh because I am NOT a morning person.) How we face each day will greatly depend on our perspective. If we can get in the habit of waking each day and being thankful for this relationship with God that we have, we will be much happier.

Relationship with God is our privilege as blood purchased children. We wake in the morning, and while sleepiness is wearing off, we think something like this, "Good morning, Lord. Thank-you for loving me. Thank-you for making it possible for me to come to You unashamed. Thank-you for all the grace you give to me. I don't deserve it, but I receive it with joy." We don't necessarily use those same words each day, but our response to God's presence should be availing ourselves of it. He is our Father. He loves us. He is working in our behalf. He knows what the day holds. He will give us wisdom to deal with every situation.

Paul wrote, "Rejoice always, **17** pray without ceasing, **18** in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you," (**1 Thes. 5:16-18**). Share each moment with Him. When you think of someone, pray for them. When something goes well, thank

Him. When you face a difficulty, ask for His help. Go straight into His throne room. No formula necessary. You are covered by the blood of Jesus. He's your Father. Share with Him your every thought and listen. He will be speaking to you. As you grow in this relationship, you will understand and hear His voice more clearly. You will begin to know the difference between your own thoughts and His, between His and the enemy's. This relationship is meant to be enjoyed and employed.

The Logic of Association

Have you ever observed a child, yours or someone else's say something in the exact tone and using the same expressions and gestures as one of his/her parents? It can be so "cute" and also so e m b a r r a s s i n g! It is logical that we will become like our parents. This can be a good thing, and it can be a not-so-good thing. As we grow up, we also begin to mirror our friends. Then, when we become parents, it happens. We catch ourselves saying something like, "I've told you **fifteen million times** not to do that!" My mother used to say that, and yes, I've said it. We realize we have become our parents in many ways. Hopefully, that is a good thing, but usually, it causes us to reflect and hopefully alter our responses.

So, it makes every bit of sense to realize that if we want to become like Christ[55], one way to do that is to simply spend time with Him. We can read about Him in the Word to see what He is like, of course, but we can also become more like Him by being in fellowship with Him. Whether this is a time alone just talking with Him or just as we go through the day, we become like the Lord we serve. When someone treats us unjustly, we might tend to react in a way that is not Christ-like, but when we turn to Him at that moment, He graciously teaches us a better response . . . one that pleases Him. Over time we realize that these Christ-like ways of responding start to become a way of life.

There is a tendency to think God sees things as we do. I'm sure you've heard people say, "And God said to me…" this and that and the other thing…and AMAZINGLY, God sounds like and has the same attitudes as that person! Of course, what he/she is doing is reading into what they *think* God is saying via his/her own perspective or personality. However, if we will listen, we WILL begin to discern **His** voice and personality, and many times it is nothing like our ideas and attitudes.

Of course, this association is closely paired with our growing knowledge of the Word of God. As we learn more about His teachings and spend time with Him, we begin to change . . . we become like Him[56].

Prayer as Worship

Part of our relationship with God is our ability to worship God. Worship is our heart of adoration, love, thankfulness, and praise expressed by our voice and by our choice. With our voice we declare His goodness and faithfulness, our love and devotion, and our

[55] This is not to infer that the process of prayer somehow perfects the completed work of Christ. We are complete in Him, and this relationship gives us full access to God.

[56] Again, the process of reading and studying the word doesn't complete us. We are complete. Christ is all we need. Knowing what the Father is like by observing the life of the Son in Scripture will serve to teach us and to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

thankfulness. With our choices we express our love in service. Our choices are our response of love to His love.

To put this in human terms, we know that if someone loves someone, his/her voice and choice will reflect that relationship. Since I love my husband, I would never speak evil about him or to him. In fact, I will daily say something to him to build him up by either thanking him for being good to me or our children or someone else, or complimenting him on how handsome he is or tell him what a great sermon that was on Sunday.

Because I love him so much, I will also not do anything that would harm him. In fact, I will do just the opposite. I will lovingly and willingly serve him. I will demonstrate my respect for him by submitting to him when we don't agree. I will offer to do something for him that I don't have to do, perhaps something as simple as offering to make him a snack or bring him a beverage. I go beyond kind and encouraging words to tangible actions.

I will lift and build him up by both my words and my deeds. This is a just a small *reflection* of our worship of God. With our words we extol God's greatness, and with our actions we seek to please Him always, not out of obligation, but joyful willingness.

Paul put it this way in Romans 12:1, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."[57] We thus worship God, not only with our words, but with our actions.

Expect Answers

There is no logical reason to pray unless you believe that God will answer you. Otherwise, it is either simply a religious tradition or some sort of relaxation technique. We pray because we believe God hears. He not only hears, but He responds.

> ***1 John 3:21-23***
> ***21*** *Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.* ***22*** *And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.* ***23*** *And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.*
> ***John 5:14-15***
> *Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.* ***15*** *And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.*

It is important for our confidence in prayer to know that we are praying the will of God. If you are not sure what God's will is, read Lesson 6 of this book which discusses how to know the will of God. When we know we are asking according to His will, we have total confidence. Look at it for a moment in human terms. Perhaps your mother tells you she has a gift for you and asks you to come over and pick it up. What do you do? You don't go to her house and ask her if she wants to give it to you! You go over knowing she is going to give it to you. Similarly, when we pray God's will, we know we are asking for what He

[57] NASB

already wants or for what He has already provided. This gives us confidence that He not only hears us but will give us what we are asking. In one way, it is as if we are putting ourselves in agreement with His will when we ask. Jesus says, "I purchased healing for you with my blood." We therefore ask to be healed with confidence because we know it is His will. He personally purchased it for us, so of course, He wants us to have it.[58]

So, let us not waste our time praying out of tradition or obligation and thereby limit prayer to some formula we read in a book or heard in a sermon. What Jesus has provided for us is far greater than that! Through His blood, we have access to the very throne room of the Most High God who is also our loving Father and we DON'T HAVE TO DO ANYTHING ABOVE THAT TO WALK RIGHT IN. We have a "relationship, not religion", as we often say; so let us NOT turn our relationship back into a religion by changing the powerful privilege of prayer into a method or obligation.

Let us rather avail ourselves of this glorious opportunity, to spend time with Him, to get to know Him, to become more like Him, to receive guidance and help in time of need, to know His love, grace, and peace, and to ask and receive so that our joy, and His, will be full.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REVIEW

1. Respond to this statement, Prayer is not a spiritual *discipline*, it is a privilege and it is powerful."

2. What did Jesus teach about prayer that touches you personally?

3. In what ways is prayer a response to God's love?

4. How is our prayer relationship with God different than those who lived before the cross?

5. Old Testament believers did not have the same relationship that we have. The longed to know God, we do. This does not mean that every prayer in the Old

[58] We therefore do not pray, "If it be your will, please heal me." We already know it is his will. There are other things which are clearly His will. We know it is not His will that any perish, so we do not pray, "If it be your will, save my friend." It is His will to save and to heal, so we can pray in confidence.

Testament is irrelevant, just that things have changed, and our prayers should reflect our understanding of the accomplishments of the cross. Change these prayers of Old Testament believers into prayers of New Testament believers. If you know a Scripture to back up your thought, note it.

Old Testament Prayers	**New Testament Prayers**
Psalm 10:1 *Why do You stand afar off, O Lord? Why do you hide in times of trouble?*	
Psalm 25:6-7 *Remember, O Lord, Your tender mercies and Your loving kindnesses, for they are of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to your mercy remember me, for Your goodness' sake, O Lord.*	
Psalm 27:9 *Do not hide Your face from me; do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my help; do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation.*	

6. Personalize the underlined portion of this prayer for yourself or someone you know.

Ephesians 1:15-20	**Personalized Prayer**
15 *Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,* ***16*** *do not cease to <u>give thanks for you</u>, making mention of you in my prayers:* ***17*** *that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, <u>may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,</u>* ***18*** *<u>the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,</u>* ***19*** *<u>and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power</u>* ***20*** *which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,*	

7. Share what your thoughts have been as you have studied the information in this chapter. What questions do you still have about the topic of prayer that you hope will be answered in the next lesson?

9

PRAYER BARRIERS

WE BELIEVE . . .

. . . that God designed prayer to be as easy as breathing, but a lack of knowledge and unbelief can hinder results in prayer.

We learned in the previous lesson that prayer is a privilege and that it is effective. God sent His Son to remove all barriers between God and man. We live daily in His presence and can go directly into His throne room without fear or shame. Yet, even knowing these things there are so many questions that remain about the topic of prayer.

It is acceptable to have questions, but not doubts. We may freely try to comprehend why a prayer seemed to go unanswered, but not accuse. In other words, God is faithful. He cannot lie. Whatever He said He would do, He will do. We can trust Him always. When situations don't go as we prayed we must resist the temptation to point the finger of blame at God and demand He give us an account.

Instead, let us lay aside such accusations toward our Father who deserves nothing less than our complete trust. Let us worship Him through our frustrations, pain, and mourning, confessing our frailties and His faithfulness. Instead of blame, let us lay our care on Him knowing He cares for us. Even through our tears we can pray, "Father, I don't understand why my mother died. She was too young. I feel so alone without her. You know I was believing You for her healing, so I don't understand why that didn't happen. Yet, I know You are not to blame. You did not kill my mother. I choose to trust You, to believe in You. I believe that one day I will understand because you will help me. Even if I never

understand, I will still praise Your name. I worship You. I love you, Lord. You are worthy of my praise. Thank-you for helping me through this time."[59]

It is also highly important that we not entertain as answers to our questions the *experiences* of others or the *traditions* of the past, but rather look in the Word of God for knowledge and wisdom. So many of the reasons we give as to why prayers go unanswered have their basis only in tradition and have zero substantiation in the Word of God. Yet because they were repeated endlessly, they somehow became "truth". It is time for the church to begin to reject these lies so that we can find real answers; answers that are from His Word and not someone's speculation or personal experience.

Survey Says!

In order to write this lesson, a survey went out asking friends and family to send questions they had about prayer. The questions received ranged from personal to hypothetical, from philosophical to theological, and from comical to tragic. As the list grew, questions began to be repeated and categories were formed. These were legalisms, traditions, emotionalism, hearing God's voice, knowing the will of God, praying with or for others, praying in tongues, unanswered prayers, and questions about what we can do to improve our results in prayer.

The teaching that follows is meant to give Biblical information that will answer these questions. In it, we will first confront a commonly held tradition that has been repeated so often, many Christian accept it as Scripture. Then, we discuss at length the Biblical reasons

prayers can be hindered by a lack of knowledge, satanic resistance, emotionalism, and unbelief. Finally, we will confront many of the legalisms about prayer that clearly turn prayer into a set of rules and regulations thereby diminishing it purpose and effectiveness.

Yes, No, Maybe (Later)

The trouble with traditions is that they usually have no basis in the Word of God but rather are inventions of man. We need to be willing to challenge "truths" we hold dear by putting them to the test of Scripture.

While traditional beliefs often give us a sense of peace, they often rob us of the provision God has given. In **Mark 7:13** Jesus told the Scribes and Pharisees that they made the word of God of no effect through their tradition. So it is with us, when we base our beliefs in tradition, the result is a lack of effectiveness of God's Word.

We have many traditions about prayer, but the following is important to confront because it calls into question God's faithfulness. Because it defames the character and promises of our God and thereby nullifies the power of the Word of God in our lives, it must be the first to go from our thinking.

You have heard this before. This tradition which we believe has Satanic origins is this, that in response to our prayers God sometimes says, "Yes," sometimes says, "Maybe" (another version uses "Later"), and sometimes says, "No". This tradition, the most dangerous when it comes to prayer, appeals to our human reasoning so much so that we readily accept it as truth. Perhaps too busy or in too much pain to analyze it completely,

[59] This is close to what I prayed after my mother died of breast cancer.

we embrace it, allow it to falsely satisfy us, and pass it on with a reluctant confidence as truth.

ORIGINS

Since the Garden of Eden, Satan has challenged God's word in order to turn our allegiance and faith from God and diminish or eliminate the power and authority which we possess. The reason he was cast out of heaven was because he wanted to be above God. Ever since then, he has made every attempt to deceive man into believing that God is a liar and not completely dependable. When we believe in Satan over God, we in essence put him above God.

When we accept that an answer to prayer can be "Yes", "No", or "Maybe" we put words in the mouth of God which He never once uttered. There is NO SCRIPTURE to substantiate this claim. The sad truth is that thinking this tradition IS the answer to our question; we never find the *real* answers. Instead, unwittingly, we accept a statement that defames the God we love and unknowingly bring into doubt the truth of the Word of God. This results in pacifism[60] in prayer.

Believing that God's answer to our prayer can be anything He decides at whim, we also embrace a much more deadly tradition which is "Whatever happens to us in this life *is* the will of God". If we believe that whatever happens is the will of God, we will not be willing or able to resist the works of Satan. We will believe that we are resisting the will of God.

If you are inclined to skip over that last paragraph, I lovingly ask you to please read it again, a little slower this time, until its import takes hold of you. You are going to be tossed and damaged by Satan if you do not understand that **not** everything that happens in your life is *from* God and **not** everything that happens is His will. Please, if you do not understand this, take the time to read Lesson 6 "Knowing the Will of God", especially the section on the *Sovereignty of God*.

THE TRUTH THAT SETS FREE

It is sad to say, but many Christian today get their beliefs about God and their ideas about prayer, from Christian books they've read, teachings they've heard either at church, convincing speakers on radio and television, "worship" songs, or Country-Western songs[61]. We cannot expect to stand strong in our faith or see prayers answered if we rely on these things instead of searching the Word of God for ourselves. While every attempt is being made in this lesson to accurately represent the Word of God, and our deepest desire is that what we write will set you free, nothing will convince you more than studying the Word of God for yourself. Please read the following Scriptures and the declarations that follow.

Numbers 23:19
"God is not a man, that He should lie,
Nor a son of man, that He should repent.
Has He said, and will He not do?

[60] "An attitude or policy of nonresistance" Merriam-Webster Online
[61] Some Country-Western songs do contain some beautiful Biblical truths, but not all.

Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?

GOD IS NOT A MAN.

HE DOESN'T CHANGE HIS MIND ONCE HE HAS PROMISED.

GOD WILL DO WHAT HE HAS SPOKEN.

Hebrews 13:8
Jesus Christ is the same
yesterday, today, and forever.

GOD DOES NOT CHANGE.

Hebrews 6:18
It is impossible for God to lie

GOD IS INCAPABLE OF LYING.

2 Corinthians 1:19-21
For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me,
Silvanus, and Timothy—was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes.
20 *For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen,*
to the glory of God through us.

GOD DOES NOT SAY YES, NO, OR MAYBE.

GOD'S PROMISES TO US ARE ALWAYS AND FOREVER "YES".

So, when considering why it seems that some prayers are not answered, we must first restrain ourselves from blaming God or assuming the result is the will of God. He is faithful to do what He has promised. This then frees us up to do some searching in the word and in our own hearts for actual answers.

Scriptural Barriers to Prayer

Most of the questions asked about prayer have something to do with why certain types of prayers are not answered. When considering these concerns, we must first

understand that God is not the problem. Consider the great extent to which He went to make it possible to know Him intimately and all the many things that were accomplished by His death and resurrection. There are no barriers between us and God.

This seems to imply that if there is a problem it is our doing. Not necessarily. Yet it will not help us at all to ignore the possibility that something in our thinking might be involved. Our lack of knowledge, unbelief, and strife can all get in the way.

We also need to realize that prayer does not just involve us and God. It often involves the will of others. Now, this is not to say that our faith has no effect in the lives of others, just that our prayers cannot override their will.

It is important to acknowledge as well that we have an enemy who is seeking to steal, kill, and destroy, not just in our lives, but in the lives of those for whom we pray. He will run interference to the best of his ability when we pray. We can defeat him in the name of Jesus, but we must always be aware of his devices.

In taking a closer look as to what barriers there might be in prayer, we must be careful to gather our information from the Word of God and not put faith in our traditions passed from generation to generation nor make our conclusions based on experience, ours or that of someone else. Hopefully what follows will give you more possible answers as to what can get in the way of prayers being answered.

Lack of Knowledge

Jesus said in **John 8:31-32**, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. **32** And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." In order to be free, we must know the truth. In order to know the truth we must abide in His word. If we do not know what His word has to say about something, we cannot know the truth, and we cannot be free.

We have heard the expression, "What you don't know can't hurt you," but no one really believes that. Of course what you don't know can not only hurt you but kill you. If this were not true, there would be no need to baby-proof a house.

There are those who think wearing a seatbelt does nothing to protect them, but someone with *knowledge* wouldn't think of driving without one. Now, most people wear a seatbelt because it is the law, but a greater law is at work. Here is the information that might change someone's mind. When you are in a car, even though you do not have the sensation of it, you are moving forward as fast as the car you are in. You are not the car or part of the car, but because you are in the car, you move with it. If the car must stop suddenly and you are not strapped to the car, you will not stop with the car but keep moving at whatever speed the car was moving. If this is fast enough, you can easily fly out of the car through the nearest window, or at the very least be smashed inside the car as if you'd been thrown at whatever the speed the car was going. However, if you are strapped to the car with a seatbelt, even though you will feel the force of the seatbelt holding you to the car, you will remain in the car and stop with the car. This bit of knowledge sets you free to wear your seatbelt and keeps you safer than if you didn't wear it.

So, it is with the Kingdom of God. We need to understand what God has provided for us in His Word so that we can walk in His provision.

THE WILL OF GOD

In **1 John 5:14-15** we read, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. **15** And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him." This is truly Step One when it comes to having confidence that our prayers will be answered when we pray. If we are praying according to His will, we will receive what we ask. This obviously makes knowing what His will is extremely important. For example, if you are not convinced that divine healing is the privilege of every believer, you will not have the confidence to believe. The principle place to discover the will of God is in his Word. (See Lesson 6.)

RIDICULOUS PRAYERS

It is ridiculous to ask God to do things that are clearly not His will. It is not right, for example, to ask God to let you marry someone else's spouse! God will not promote adultery. That seems so obvious, but this does happen. Praying that Satan will get saved is also a ridiculous prayer as his fate has already been written. Seek out the word of God to know the will of God.

TRUSTING IN FORMULA

Many a book about prayer has been written usually including its own formula for prayer. So, we readily accept the prescription and use it with confidence whether it be praying certain things in a certain order or using certain key phrases. What usually happens is we begin to think that this method of praying or particular words somehow contain power.

Some advocate that we must pray certain things in a certain order, but if you examine all the prayers prayed in the New Testament, there really isn't a prescribed order. We don't need to do certain things before we can enter the presence of God. This is absurd and man's religious invention. JESUS ALREADY DID WHAT NEEDED TO BE DONE FOR US TO ENTER THE PRESENCE OF GOD. When He died, the veil was torn. We have access to our Father void of any and all formulas. Whether our lives have been exemplary or something much less, because of the blood of Jesus Christ, we are continually cleansed from all sin and may enter (**1 John 1:7**). Furthermore, the Father Son and Holy Spirit dwell in us at all times. God's presence is always in us, and Jesus promised to never leave us or forsake us (**Hebrews 13:5**).

Some Christians have questions about what words we should say when we pray. Should we always add, "in Jesus name" when we pray? When we pray to the Father "in Jesus name", we must not think that the words "in Jesus name" are somehow magical. That is to say, some begin to put their trust in the formula instead of the power. When we ask "in Jesus name" we are asking in His *authority* (rather than our own). Even if "in Jesus name" is not expressly stated, but someone is aware they are praying in the authority of Jesus, the prayer will be heard and answered without explicitly speaking those words. Our faith is in His authority, not the formula.

SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

Believe it or not, there are many Christian today who have scarcely ever done anything about which they would be ashamed. It is the hope of every Christian parent that their children will fall into this category. Indeed, much happier will they be if they never suffer the results of sinning.

Also among us are those who decades ago gave up their sinful ways, and have been serving God faithfully since then. We made a commitment, and we keep it daily, and have never fallen back into a lifestyle of sinning. This is not to claim perfection each and everyday, just that ever since the day we made an adult decision for Jesus, we have never once looked back.

There are also those who are naturally disciplined and have taken their inclinations and applied them toward their Christian life. They have a regular prayer time each day. They have a consistent method of reading and studying the word. They also have a long list of other things they do. Now, it would be unfair to assume that these people have an empty religion. On the contrary, given the right understanding that these things do not make us righteous, but rather add to our knowledge and understanding of God, being disciplined can be a very positive thing. It is when this person begins to think that these things *produce* righteousness or acceptance before God that they can be deceived.

All of that to say this: We err if we think that because we live a disciplined life, God *owes* it to us to answer our prayers. This is very subtle, so let me say it again. God is not *more* likely to answer your prayers because you live a disciplined and righteous life. If you believe this, you will be putting you trust in *your* righteousness, and not in Him.

Sometimes this manifests itself in a sort of temper tantrum when a prayer is not answered. "God! I've done everything I was ever supposed to do, so why do I feel this way," or "why is this happening to me," or why didn't you answer my prayer?" Perhaps you have felt resentful that someone younger than you in the Lord and less disciplined than you received an answer to prayer, but you haven't, and you heard yourself asking, "Why God?

Why did You answer that person's prayer who barely knows You, but not mine?" If you have said this before, you might be putting your faith in your own goodness.

INFERIORITY

Feeling that God wouldn't possibly answer your prayers because you are not following some perceived list of dooties and don'ties is also a form of self-righteousness. You are putting your trust in your own deeds, but they are deeds you cannot or do not live up to, so you doubt God would do anything for you. Can you see this? Both self-righteousness and unworthiness base God's power in their lives to their own righteousness (or lack thereof), but one thinks they have earned the right and another knows they have not. Neither one can receive from God.

Some believe that the answer for the one who is falling short is to be more disciplined and live up to perceived standards or being a good Christian. When that doesn't work we are told to become even more radical and double our efforts. Ugh! We say, get rid of the list!

There are two core commandments for New Testament believers found in **1 John 3:23,** "And this is His commandment: that we should **believe** on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and **love** one another, as He gave us commandment." Just two things: believe in the name of Jesus, and love each other. Some call this "sloppy agape" or "cheap grace". We call it freedom!!!

GUILT AND CONDEMNATION

This could also be placed under satanic opposition because he is an expert at condemning us, but since it isn't always caused by him, and is often caused by a lack of knowledge, I place it in this category.

If you have a difficult time praying because you feel guilty and condemned, you lack understanding of God's love for you and/or do not comprehend what He accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

First and foremost, you might not understand how much God your Father loves you. This can be caused by never knowing the love of an earthly father or even worse, having an earthly father who was unkind or abusive. The phrase, "God is your Father," does not affect you the same way it does the person next to you who seems to be touched by that declaration. "Father" does not help you understand God's love instead there may be resentments, rejection, shame, and unhealthy fear that are generated when you think of God as your Father.

God wants to heal you of this. It will likely take time, but He will be patient with you and over time you will begin to understand His love for you is unending. One thing that can help to heal is to read or quote Scriptures that emphasize God's love for you. Sometimes when you go before God and sense those feelings, remind yourself of what His word says about His love for you. "Father, I thank You that You love me. Thank-you for demonstrating your love for me by sending your Son. I thank You that nothing can separate me from your love. I thank You that I am Your sheep and You are my Shepherd. I thank you for being a good and loving Father."

The other major reason that people feel guilty and condemned is a lack of knowledge about what was accomplished at the cross. They do not know that past, present, and future sins are all forgiven and that they stand clean before Him when they pray. They do not know that they are the very righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. So, when they go to pray, there is a perpetual sense of unworthiness. When you lack confidence, it is very difficult to even talk to God, let alone ask Him for anything. If you feel unworthy, guilty, or condemned when you pray, you lack knowledge about who you are in Christ.

SEEKING FOR SOMETHING YOU ALREADY HAVE

Another way a lack of knowledge hinders our prayers is when we seek for something we already have. Because we don't know we already possess something, we seek God to obtain it. For some reason, the answer doesn't come, and we are baffled. Some give up attributing it to what they think is a NO from God, or perhaps a MAYBE. Others get

determined and keep asking over and over again. This usually results in emotionalism manifesting itself in those who seek to be "desperate for God", who "hunger and thirst for God" or those who travel around the world to experience the "manifest presence of God".

Looking for the Presence of God

Let us first discuss the latter. There are thousands of Christians today who travel thousands of miles each year in order to experience what they call "the manifest presence of God". They hear that God is "really moving" in this church or through that minister, and off they go to "experience the presence of God". Unable to see their own prayers answered or unable to "feel the presence of God" in their own church and lives, they go to where they believe they will find the "river of God" flowing.

They do not understand that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dwell in them. They have immediate direct and as close as is possible communion with the very presence of God available to them right where they live. They have every right to believe in and receive the promises provided in the word of God without getting in their cars. God's presence is in you. Bow your head and open your eyes[62]. He is already there.

Desperate for God

I was stunned one morning as I picked up one of our own denomination's publications and read the title "Desperate for God". "Being desperate for God" is another manifestation of Christians seeking for something they already have. Part of this movement includes the idea that we must continually hunger and thirst for God. There is no need for a Christian to be desperate, hungry or thirsty.

Let's begin with definitions[63].

> *DESPERATE*
> *1 a: having lost hope b: giving no ground for hope*
> *2 a: moved by despair[64] b: involving or employing extreme measures in an attempt to escape defeat or frustration*
> *3: suffering extreme need or anxiety*
> *4: involving extreme danger or possible disaster*
> *5: of extreme intensity*

For a Christian to say that he/she is desperate is to deny the hope given to us by God. Yet, I do believe I understand why many people get to this point because both my

[62] I believe the first time I heard this or a similar expression was in a teaching by Andrew Wommack.
[63] Merrian-Webser.com
[64] Despair: to lose all hope or confidence; Merrian-Webster.com

husband and I have "been there". For most of us it is due to falling from grace in the true Biblical sense. We begin in the spirit, in love with God, so happy to know Him and love Him, but then seek to made perfect in the flesh, by our own spiritual discipline and service.

We at first knew the joyous news that Christianity is not a religion; it's a relationship, but then little by little our relationship was turned back into religion. When our own efforts did not lead us "closer" to the Lord as we were told they would, we increased our efforts, but we ended up feeling even farther away. I remember so clearly getting to this point. I had two choices, figure out what was going on, or become "desperate for God".

People who are desperate for God are not evil, they are simply mistaken. They have settled for form instead of the true knowledge which will give them hope. They need our help. They are trying so hard to seek God as diligently as they know how, to somehow reach Him, to get Him to do something in their life, to bring revival, or whatever it is that they are seeking as if by their effort, their demonstrated determination, God is going to move. They are acting desperate, but unnecessarily.

Let us first examine a Scripture in which Paul uses the word "despair", which means "to lose all hope or confidence".

> ***2 Corinthians 4:7-11***
> *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. **8** We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but **not in despair**; **9** persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— **10** always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. **11** For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.*

Though this passage reflects the difficulties that Paul faced while on his missionary journeys, it is truly a message of hope. Instead of being desperate, he is victorious. Even though he was dying daily, he also knew the life of Jesus in his body.

Beloved, if you feel the need to be desperate for God, please reconsider. There is no need for you to suffer extreme need and anxiety, but every reason to hope. There are so many verses in the New Testament on hope that we cannot deny that it is **hope** we should have toward God and not desperation. Here are a few.

> ***Romans 5:2***
> *Through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and **rejoice in hope of the glory of God**.*
> ***Romans 5:4-5***
> *And perseverance, character; and character, **hope**. 5 Now **hope does not disappoint**, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*
> ***Romans 12:10-13***
> *Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; 11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 **rejoicing in hope**, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; 13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.*

Romans 15:4
*For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we **through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope**.*
Romans 15:13
*Now may the **God of hope fill you with all joy and peace** in believing, that you may **abound in hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit.*
1 Corinthians 13:7
*(love) bears all things, believes all things, **hopes all things**, endures all things.*
1 Corinthians 13:13
*And now abide faith, **hope**, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*
Ephesians 2:12
*that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, **having no hope and without God** in the world.*
Colossians 1:27
*To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the **hope of glory**.*
1 Thessalonians 1:3
*remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, **and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ** in the sight of our God and Father,*
1 Thessalonians 4:13
*But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow **as others who have no hope**.*
1 Thessalonians 5:8
*But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the **hope of salvation**.*
2 Thessalonians 2:16
*Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us **everlasting consolation and good hope by grace**,*
1 Timothy 1:1
*Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the **Lord Jesus Christ, our hope**,*
Titus 2:13
***Looking for the blessed hope** and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,*
Hebrews 3:6
*But Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and **the rejoicing of the hope** firm to the end.*

Hebrews 6:19
*This **hope we have as an anchor of the soul**, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil,*
Hebrews 7:19
*for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is thebringing in of **a better hope, through which we draw near to God**.*
Hebrews 10:23
*Let us hold fast the **confession of our hope** without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.*
1 Peter 1:3
Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His

*abundant mercy has begotten us again to a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,*
1 John 3:3
*And everyone who has **this hope in Him purifies himself**, just as He is pure.*

There is no need for us to be desperate. God loves us. We have free access into His presence without qualifications other than the blood of His Beloved Son whom He gave for us so that we could have hope. When we start to *feel* desperate, we must remember that God's Word is more real and powerful than our feelings. As we begin to realize who we are and what He has done for us, there will be no room for despair.

Hunger and Thirst

This next thing Christians commonly talk about is "the need" to continually hunger and thirst for God. This is how the reasoning goes. The Scripture is quoted from **Matthew 5:6** which says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." So, the conclusion is then drawn that God wants us to hunger and thirst for righteousness. Then, it is believed that if one does not have a hunger and thirst for righteousness, that person should cultivated a daily hunger and thirst for God. To make matters worse, it is taught that if someone doesn't do this, he is somehow less sincere in his relationship with God. This is a perfect example how a Scripture can be twisted and result in a tradition with no basis in Scripture.

We cannot take one scripture out of the Bible to make a conclusion like the above. When evaluating a topic such as hungering and thirsting for God, we must look at all the other scriptures on the topic. What I am about to share with you, I have shared with someone of this point of view. It didn't matter to her that there was overwhelming Scriptural evidence to the contrary. She was holding on to her belief come what may. I hope you will not hold your tradition above the Word of God.

Let's start with the Scripture in question and move on to others that clearly show that as Christians we do not need to hunger and thirst for righteousness or for anything. Jesus was the one who said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." Now, before continuing, let's read the statement a few times emphasizing different words. This is one form of meditating on the Word of God.

***BLESSED ARE** those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.*
(If you hunger and thirst for righteousness, you will be blessed, happy.)

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst **FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS**, for they shall be filled.*
(It doesn't say here that we are hungering and thirsting for God, rather for **righteousness**.)

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, **FOR** they shall be filled.*
(The word "for" means "because". There is a reason why those seeking righteousness are blessed.)

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for **THEY SHALL BE FILLED**.*
(The reason those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed is because they will be filled.)

The word "filled" here means to be abundantly fed, filled, and satisfied. The Amplified Bible helps us understand it further, "Blessed and fortunate and happy and spiritually prosperous (in that state in which the born-again child of God enjoys His favor and salvation) are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (uprightness and right standing with God), for they shall be completely satisfied!

"Shall be filled" is a completed action in the future. The hunger and thirst will be satisfied. There is no indication here that they will be filled, but then they will emptied out and need to be filled again. It doesn't give any clue that a person, after being filled with righteousness, will need to daily be filled again. It is a completed action. They will be filled. When we come to Christ, we are not only *filled* with righteousness, we actually *become* His righteousness. After we become His righteousness, we are forever so.

1 Timothy 6:11
But you, O man of God, flee these things and ***pursue righteousness****, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.*
1 John 3:10
In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not ***practice righteousness*** *is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.*

What does it mean to *pursue* righteousness and to *practice* righteousness? It means that we are to walk in the righteousness that *has already been given to us by Christ*. By examining the following Scriptures you can see that we have already been given righteousness. We are already filled.

Romans 3:21-22
But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even ***the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe****.*
Romans 10:3
For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and ***seeking to establish their own righteousness****, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.*
1 Corinthians 1:30
But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, ***who became for us*** *wisdom from God—and* ***righteousness*** *and sanctification and redemption—*
Galatians 2:21
I do not set aside the grace of God; for ***if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain****."*
Philippians 3:9
And be found in Him, not ***having my own righteousness****, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ,* ***the righteousness which is from God by faith****;*

For He made Him who knew no sin

to be sin for us,

that we might become

the righteousness of God in Him.

2 Corinthians 5:21

We do not need to hunger and thirst for righteousness because we have been filled. We actually ARE the righteousness of God in Him. To seek to be filled with His righteousness is to ask for something we already have. It is to deny what Christ has already provided for us by His death and resurrection.

Perhaps you still think we need to hunger and thirst for God. Perhaps if Jesus had something more to say on this topic of hungering and thirsting you would be more convinced. Thankfully, He does. Jesus clearly taught that if we came to Him we would never hunger or thirst again.

> ***John 4:13-14***
> *Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will NEVER thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.*
> ***John 6:35***
> *And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall NEVER hunger, and he who believes in Me shall NEVER thirst.*

Jesus is saying that not only will we *NEVER* hunger or thirst again, but that we will overflow like a fountain of water flowing out of us.

I shared this truth once with a worship leader of a church we visited one Sunday because one of the songs we sang was about hungering and thirsting for God. I shared the Scriptures above that say that we will never hunger and thirst again. His response to me was stunning and went something like this, "We as a worship team have purposed together to cultivate in the people a hunger and thirst for God."

What about what Jesus said? Evidently, what Jesus said wasn't what mattered, it was what the worship team *thought* that was important. I did not pursue the discussion because as long as leaders insist that what *they* believe is true over the clear teachings of Jesus Christ, who am I to try and reason the point. If someone won't hear Jesus, they won't hear me[65].

I hope you are not lost to that degree. Still, all of this leads us to a fair and reasonable question. If there is no need to feel desperate, hungry, or thirsty why do we often feel desperate, hungry, and thirsty?

There are several reasons why someone might feel this way and it would vary as to the individual. The main reason, of course, is they do not know that they already are the righteousness of God and that Jesus said if we give our lives to Him we will always be satisfied. So, when they have feelings like this, they fall back on human reasoning to explain it. They conclude if I "feel" this way, I must really be this way, so I will seek God to fix it.

[65] It is important that we as worship leaders carefully evaluate what songs we use. Let us not be guilty of teaching the congregation something that is opposed to the New Covenant of grace. We need to be aware that many Old Testament Psalms reflect the view of Old Testament believers who truly did hunger and thirst because they did not know or possess the indwelling presence of God as we do. Too many of the songs we sing reflect tradition, not New Covenant teachings.

Another common reason why Christians feel desperate, hungry, or thirsty is that they've been taught they *should*. Some people actually spend time in prayer trying to work up these emotions.

A third reason we often "feel" desperate, hungry, or thirsty is just the nature of the world in which we live. Life can be very difficult and intense at times. There are situations that look "desperate" to us, and indeed without Jesus, would be hopeless. We all face sorrow and strife, so much so that it seems we cannot bear it, and without Him, it might be impossible to overcome, but with Him we can.

The answer to all of these is a better understanding of the word of God. When we feel any of these emotions, we can confess His word. When we hear His word, faith comes. The enemy will try and keep us in a continual state of desperation, but it is a ploy. If he can keep us hungry and thirsty, we will not be satisfied which is what Jesus died to give us: satisfaction and overflowing peace and joy.

This brings us firmly back to prayer. We all have needs, and sometimes these needs are very intense. This past summer, as our daughter was rushed to the operating room because her unborn baby's heartbeat had suddenly dropped and her uterus had ruptured. We were in need. We needed a miracle, and we needed it now. Both of their lives were in serious danger. Almost immediately this Scripture came to me.

Let us therefore come boldly

to the throne of grace,

that we may obtain mercy

and find grace to help

in time of need.

Hebrews 4:16

I closed my eyes full of all the emotions one would expect to have at a time like that. Fear was swarming all around. The enemy was assuring me she would die, telling me that the word in which I believed was "just words". I came to the throne of grace and threw myself at His feet. I had need, serious need. I had nowhere to go, but to my Father. As the enemy continued to lie, I held on tight in faith, confessing His word of healing and hope, crying but believing. There was no time to call for a prayer chain, no time to call our pastor. It was time to go to Him for help[66].

So, when we face life's difficulties and the attack of the enemy, let us not be desperate. Desperation will <u>not</u> help us when we need hope. Let us believe in what Jesus has done for us. Let us hope.

Satanic Opposition

When endeavoring to understand the reasons a prayer is not always answered, we tend to either blame God or ourselves and don't immediately take note that we have an

[66] I'm happy to say that both mother and daughter survived and are perfectly whole today.

enemy who wants nothing more than to prevent the will of God from taking place. His major goal is to defame God by making it look like He is not doing what He promised. If He can get us to doubt that God means what He says, we will have no foundation on which to stand.

Many times when answers to prayer are delayed, it is because of enemy resistance (not because God is saying "no" or "maybe"). In the next series, "God's Love through You". we discuss the topic of spiritual warfare. We will learn in that lesson the tools God has provided to stand strong against an enemy that has already been defeated.

Wrong Motives

Sometimes our prayers are not answered because we have the wrong motives for asking. In James 4:2-4 we read,

> *You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. **3** You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. **4** Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*

Any prayer that is based on worldly lust and pleasure will go unanswered. God loves you too much to give you something that is not in your best eternal interest.

Lack of Love & Unforgiveness

Perhaps you have never thought about this possibility, but if you lack love for your brothers and sisters in Christ, your prayers will be hindered. Read the following Scripture out of **1 John 3:10-23** carefully (underlining mine).

> ***10** In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. **11** For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should <u>love one another</u>, **12** not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. **13** Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. **14** <u>We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.</u> **15** Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. **16** By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And <u>we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren</u>. **17** But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and <u>shuts up his heart from him</u>, how does the love of God abide in him? **18** My little children, <u>let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth</u>. **19** And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. **20** For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. **21** Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence*
>
> *toward God. **22** And whatever we ask we receive from Him, <u>**because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight**</u>. **23** <u>**And this is**</u>*

His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

We learn from this Scripture that if we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight, we receive whatever we ask. Whatever. This should cause us to ask, what are His commandments and what is pleasing in His sight? The question is answered in verse 23. Believe in Jesus, and love one another. That's it. Believe and love each other. If you want a more effective prayer life, believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another.

We are commanded by Jesus to love each other, not in word only, but in deed and in truth. This means that we are to show our love to each other in practical ways. When we close up our hearts toward each other either by being indifferent or outright hateful; if we harbor unforgiveness and bitterness, our prayers will be hindered.

Peter pointed this out in reference to how a husband treats his wife in **1 Peter 3:7** we read, "Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered." In other words, if a husband does not honor his wife and treat her with understanding, and an equal heir of the grace of life, his prayer will go unanswered. I believe it is fair to conclude that the same would be true if the woman mistreated her husband.

Answered prayer should not be our motivation for loving each other. That is backwards. However, if your prayers seem to hit the floor, consider your relationships with those you are commanded to love.

Hand-in-hand with a lack of love is unforgiveness because unforgiveness has its roots in a lack of love. If you have unforgiveness or its grandchild bitterness in your life, your prayers will be hindered.

Matthew 6:14-15
*For if you **forgive** men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also **forgive** you.*
***15** But if you do not **forgive** men their trespasses, neither will your Father **forgive** your trespasses.*
Matthew 18:35
*So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not **forgive** his brother his trespasses.*
Mark 11:24-26
*Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. **25** And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. **26** But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.*

Unbelief

Over the years, I have observed that this topic can make Christians really emotional. The response ranges from feeling condemned to getting angry. So, if you "can't handle the truth", don't read this section. If you are willing to learn something that might help you be more fruitful when you pray, bravely read on.

In the society of the United States, we work diligently with our children so that they will have a good self-esteem. However, we go too far when we stop short of being honest.

I know of no greater illustration than the popular television series "American Idol". Perhaps you have watched the early episodes in which the potential participants try out for a ticket to Hollywood. Everyone watching knows when someone has a horrible voice, but often the person has no clue he needs to consider a different goal in life. We ask ourselves, "Didn't anyone ever tell him can't sing?" The participant exits and outside awaits the culprits…his parents.

What do the parents often say? "It's ok! They don't know talent when they hear it. You keep on pursuing your dream. You have so much talent." All the while the contestant is throwing a fit of anger or tears. The parents are either tone deaf themselves or just never had the courage to tell their child he should take up acting.

So, I'm not going to be like those parents. I am going to tell you the truth. We believe that the main reason our prayers are not answered has to do with unbelief. Unbelief ties the hands of God.

Now, before you throw your own tizzy fit, let me explain.

When we read through the gospels, we can observe some very powerful truths. Truth #1 is that Jesus NEVER REFUSED TO HEAL ANYONE WHO CAME TO HIM IN FAITH. If you don't believe me, read the four gospels. Jesus was ALWAYS willing to heal. Now, we make up all sorts of "reasons" why people don't get healed immediately, but they have no basis in the word of God. He **never** once told anyone who came to Him any of the following:

- *It isn't my TIMING to heal you.*
- *I still have a work I'm doing in you through this sickness.*
- *It is my will for you to bear this sickness so I can show my strength in weakness.*
- *You will die of this sickness because you are needed in heaven.*
- *You are not living a good life so I can't heal you.*
- *Actually, you are a tough case. Come here. Let me lay my hands on you so that you will be sick. Don't worry, this sickness will teach you so much you'll thank me for it later.*

Jesus was always willing. He healed all who came to him believing.

When studying the gospels it can be very illuminating to combine the same accounts or parables as given in different gospels. It gives us a fuller perspective. Following are the accounts in Mark and Matthew in which we find one of the two recorded incidences in which the power of God was limited. Portions in gray are unique to the account in Matthew. The words in black bold-type are unique to Mark, and the regular type is common to both accounts. Read it carefully to see what it was that limited Jesus from doing mighty works in His own home town.

***Mark 6:1-5**/ Matthew 13:53-58*

Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed/ ***went out*** *from there* ***and came**/ when He had come to His own country**, and His disciples followed Him**. 2 **And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach/** taught them in the synagogue**. And many hearing Him were astonished/, saying,/** so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this Man get **these things? And what** wisdom **is this which is given to Him, that such** mighty*

*works **are performed by His hands! 3 Is this not the carpenter/** carpenter's son**, the Son of Mary/** Is not His mother called Mary?**, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon?** And are not His sisters all here with us?" So they were offended at Him.4 **But Jesus said to them,** "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, **among his own relatives,** and in his own house." 5 **Now He** did not do many **/could do no mighty works there** because of their unbelief**, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6 And He marveled because of their unbelief.***

JESUS COULD NOT DO MANY MIGHTY WORKS THERE BECAUSE OF THEIR UNBELIEF.

The other event in which the release of the power of God was prevented is recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Here is the story recorded in **Mark 9:14-29** as rendered by the New American Standard Bible (considered to be the most literal translation). I have put the commentary within the Scripture.

14*When they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them.* **15***Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and began running up to greet Him.*
***16**And He asked them, "What are you discussing with them?"*
***17**And one of the crowd answered Him, "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute;* ***18**and whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it."*

It is interesting to note here that the father places blame on the disciples.

***19**And He answered them and said, "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!"*

Jesus is addressing the crowd and the father.

***20**They brought the boy to Him. When he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he began rolling around and foaming at the mouth.*
***21**And He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood.* ***22**It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!"*
***23**And Jesus said to him, " 'If You can? All things are possible to him who believes."*

Punctuation marks such as the questions mark are not found in the original manuscripts of the Bible. They were added later for clarification. You will notice here that the NASB rightly makes vs. 23 into a question. Others say, "If you can believe." However, the earliest manuscripts omit the word "believe", which would make a question mark or explanation mark more appropriate. The man said, "If You can do anything…" Jesus

answers back, "If You can?" The man was looking to Jesus to do something, but Jesus turned the tables on him and said, "All things are possible to him who believes." In other words, "Of course I can heal him. If you believe, all things are possible." The man's response which follows clearly indicates that he understood that Jesus was putting it back in his lap.

> ***24****Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief."*

The man had a problem which many of us face. We believe, but we also have unbelief. The unbelief prevents the miracle from happening. The man seeing this prays/cries out for help, and the demon comes out. Once the unbelief was dealt with, the miracle came.

> ***25****When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again."*
> ***26****After crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, "He is dead!"*
> ***27****But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up.*
> ***28****When He came into the house, His disciples began questioning Him privately, "Why could we not drive it out?"*
> ***29****And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer."*

We are quick to assume that the demon is what Jesus was referring to when He said, "this kind", but let us take a closer look. Jesus never had trouble casting out demons. He handled worse than that. The disciples had cast out hundreds of demons as well. If prayer is the key, we must ask ourselves, if "this kind" needed prayer in order to go out, who prayed in this story? If prayer is what was needed for this miracle to happen, then someone prayed. Jesus didn't pray.

The only person who prayed in this story was the father. What did he pray? "Help my unbelief." It wasn't the demon that was the problem. It was the father's unbelief. When he cried out for the Lord to help his unbelief, it was the unbelief that left, which made the miracle possible. The demon went out and the boy was healed.[67]

So, do not fear. If you think unbelief is keeping you from receiving what God has provided for you, pray. Ask Him to help you rid yourself of unbelief. He will answer. Only believe and you will see miracles in your life.

> ***Luke 8:49-51***
> *While He was still speaking, someone came from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, "Your daughter is dead. Do not trouble the Teacher."*
> ***50*** *But when Jesus heard it, He answered him, saying, "Do not be afraid;* ***only believe****, and she will be made well."*

[67] Luke's version of this story does not include, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer." Matthew's account adds "and fasting". However the better translations such as NKJV and NASB have a footnote in Matthew's version that reads that the entire sentence in Matthew is not in the earlier manuscripts. Since no one fasted before the demon went out, it makes sense that this was not spoken.

OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S LOVE

We hope that this lesson has addressed many of the questions you have had about prayer in the past. In our next lesson on prayer, we discuss how to pray effective prayers. Following are some pointers (not a formula) from this lesson that will help you when it seems your prayers are unanswered.

1. Ask according to His will. **1John 5:14-15**
2. If you lack wisdom about what His will is, ask Him. **James 1:5**
3. Ask God to help you if you sense you have unbelief. **Mark 9:24**
4. If you have no results, consider what could be hindering your prayer.
    a. Believing in tradition or personal experiences that contradict the promises of God
    b. A lack of knowledge on the subject
    c. Self-righteousness
        i. God owes me because I'm so good.
        ii. God would never answer because I'm so bad.
    d. Satanic resistance **James 4:7**
    e. Wrong motives **James 4:2-4**
    f. Lack of love or unforgiveness **1 John 3:10-23**
    g. Unbelief **Mark 6:5-6**
5. If there is no reason why your prayer is not answered immediately, then patiently keep believing. God is faithful. He always does what He says He will do.

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence

to the full assurance of hope until the end,

that you do not become sluggish,

but imitate those

who through faith and patience

inherit the promises.

Hebrews 6:11-13

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REVIEW

1. What have been your thoughts as you have read through the last two lessons?

2. Have any of the questions you previously had about prayer been answered in this lesson? If so, what were they?

3. How do you think the information in this lesson will change the way you pray?

10

EFFECTIVE PRAYER

WE BELIEVE . . .

. . . that our prayers are effective if based on His promises and offered in faith.

Many Christians pray every single day. Some do it out of a sincere heart of love for God, others out of religious obligation. When I was in my twenties, and thirties I prayed on a regular basis as part of what I believed to be a required spiritual exercise. One day it came to me, "Why pray unless I believe it will bring results?" In other words, I sensed that I was sometimes simply "going through the motions" in order to fulfill my religious discipline for the day, watching my watch until the 60th minute completely passed, and not really believing much would happen. How little I understood about prayer in those days.

You've likely heard the expression, "Prayer changes things." Well, guess what? It DOES! When we pray in faith believing, things will happen. This is one feature about prayer that is very exciting. When you know the word of God which is the will of God, and you believe that what you are asking will come to pass, you can become an effective force in the area of prayer. Your prayers *will* bring results. "Things" WILL change.

The goal of this final lesson on prayer is to equip you with the knowledge about prayer that will make your prayers more effective. You will not likely be able to apply everything here in one day. Some of it, you might not even be too sure about. That's ok. Receive what you can and study up on the rest. My former elderly senior pastor, Lonnie Decker, used to say, "Eat the meat and spit out the bones," and my mother would remind me, "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water." In other words, if something in this lesson is helpful and produces results in your prayer life, hallelujah. If you disagree with parts or don't understand others, don't worry about it. Prove all things and hold fast to that which is good. We are all learning about prayer. It is an amazing journey. Enjoy it!

"Until now

you have asked nothing in My name.

Ask,

and you will receive,

that your joy may be full."

John 16:24

God Sees. God Hears. God Answers.

Have you ever wondered if God is really listening to you when you pray? I remember wondering the same thing, and this was quite disturbing to me. One day I came across this scripture in **Psalm 34:15**, "The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry[68]." When I read that, I was comforted beyond what I can express.

You may think, "Well, it says He's seeing and hearing the 'righteous'. I am far from that!" Actually, that is not true. If you are a born again Christian, you are just as righteous as Jesus. Let me offer some proof.

> ***Romans 3:21-22***
> *But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.*
> ***Romans 5:17***
> *For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.*
> ***Romans 10:10***
> *For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*
> ***Philippians 3:9***
> *and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.*

For He made Him who knew no sin

to be sin for us,

that we might become

the righteousness of God in Him.

2 Corinthians 5:21

Accept it! You are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus, not because you are perfect or have done something to attain it. You have the right to put "Saint" in front of your name! Righteousness has been *imputed* to you based on your faith in Jesus who gave Himself as a sacrifice for you. If you can grasp this truth, that righteousness is a gift to you, you will find it much easier to believe when you pray. Since you are righteous, His eyes are upon you and His ears are open to your prayers.

[68] Cries for help

When you realize that your righteousness is not based on your good works, but rather on His righteousness that He has given to you freely, your perspective on prayer will change. For one thing, you won't *expect* answers because you think you are living a good enough life and therefore DESERVE to have your prayers answered. Nor will you think your prayers couldn't possibly ever be answered because you *don't deserve* for them to be answered. God's answers to your prayers are NOT based on your personal goodness. If this were true, there would not be one prayer ever answered on earth ever because He has said, "There is none righteous, no not one," (**Romans 3:10**).

Not only does God see and hear our prayers, he answers them. In **James 5:16b** we read, "The effective[69] prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much," (NASB) In other words, when we pray an effective prayer, things will be accomplished. In the context of this verse, the "much" is divine healing.

These three pieces of information, that God sees us when we pray, that he hears us when we pray, and that our prayer produces results, should encourage us to get started.

Following are sample prayers. Your prayers do not need to be long or endlessly repeated to be answered. It's not as if you keep praying and praying until you finally have enough prayers stored up and your prayer cup is so full of prayers it finally tips over. No! God answers prayers asked according to His will that are asked by those who believe.

OUR RESPONSE TO GOD'S LOVE

All Prayer

Perhaps you are blessed enough to have never heard this horrible lie. It goes something like this: You can't expect God to answer your quick and short prayers unless you have been putting in your daily prayers (implying a certain amount of time each day). This is a horrible LIE. God hears and answers ALL prayers of His children. If you need help right this very minute, don't doubt for one minute that you are not worthy enough for God to help you. He will help you and right now.

Ü "Father, you see that I am having difficulty with this person. It seems like they want to get into a fight with me. Right now, I ask you to send your peace into this situation. Help this person to calm down and give me wisdom in dealing with him.

No Formula Necessary

I know we addressed this in a previous lesson, but you must always resist the temptation to use a formula when praying. It is NOT NECESSARY. Jesus has provided the right for you to enter the throne room of God through *His blood*. Just go straight in. You DO

[69] Some translations add "fervent".

NOT NEED TO CONFESS every known sin to Him before you can enter. The blood of Jesus has already cleansed you. Go in confidently, not because you have done something to deserve it, not because you have followed a formula that allows you to go in. Just go straight in and talk with your Father.

Ü "Father, I come before You now, not based on my own righteousness, but on the basis of the blood of Jesus that was shed for me. Thank-you for this privilege.

Confidence

Confidence is essential in prayer. Coming to God with confidence is coming to God boldly, openly, freely, and without fear, in faith that He will respond. Without inhibitions, we approach God, not because we deserve it; oh, no, but because He made it possible. As

we discussed in Lesson 8, Jesus Christ's death and resurrection have made a way for us to enter the throne room of God without additional works or holiness. Only by His holiness and righteousness that have been given to us can we approach Him.

> ***Hebrews 4:15-16***
> *For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.* ***16*** *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Coming to God with confidence and knowing that what we are asking is according to His will gives us assurance that we will see come to pass what we are requesting.

> ***1 John 5:14-15***
> *Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.* ***15*** *And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.*

Notice how the importance of God hearing us is mentioned in this scripture. This word can also mean "to give audience". He is listening intently. It can also be translated "to understand". So when God hears you, He is listening intently and understanding you perfectly.

It is interesting to note that the word "boldly" in **Hebrews 4:16** is the same word translated "confidence" in **1 John 5:14**. Again, confidence and boldness are not based on our own abilities or goodness nor by how well we are keeping the man-made list of do's and don'ts or by following a formula. It is based on knowing the will of God and what Jesus has done.

According to His Will

Also, not to be ignored is the importance of knowing the will of God. This topic was discussed extensively in Lesson 6. So, suffice it to say, that there are some things that are clearly stated in the Bible to be the will of God such as salvation and healing. Then there

are other things that are not clearly spelled out in the Bible such as whom you will marry, where you will live, or what job you will seek. These things require specific wisdom.

So, what are the things that are clearly God's will for which we can ask Him confidently? They are too many to mention in this one lesson. However, let me name a few.

- It is God's will that every person receive Him and be saved.

2 Peter 3:9
The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.
John 3:16
For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Ü "Father, my neighbor needs to know you. Based on your word, I am confident it is your will to save him. I ask you to work in his heart, and give me an opportunity to share the good news of your love with Him. Holy Spirit, convince him of his need for Jesus.

- It is God's will to heal the sick (more on this in the next lesson).

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John
Jesus denied healing to no one. He healed them all. Only unbelief prevented Him from doing mighty works. Jesus never laid hands on someone to make them sick. He never told anyone to wait because the healing would come in His time. He never told anyone the sickness was building character in them. He never told anyone they were going to die because He needed them in heaven. He healed them when they asked. There was no delay.
1 Peter 2:24
Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.
Luke 5:12-13
*And it happened when He was in a certain city, that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus; and he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." **13** Then He put out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately the leprosy left him.*

Ü "Father, You reveal in your word that you are my healer and Jesus demonstrated your will by healing all who came to Him in faith. Even beyond that, Jesus you were wounded for my healing. So, with confidence, Father, I ask and receive from you the healing you purchased for me.

- It is God's will to meet your needs.

Philippians 4:19
And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Matthew 6:31-34
31 "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Ü "Father, I believe you will meet my needs. I refuse to worry about them. Instead, I will seek your kingdom and your righteousness.

- It's God's will for you to have wisdom about the things that are not specifically revealed in His word.

James 1:5
If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

Ü "Father, I ask you for wisdom about marriage. I want to get married, but I don't know anyone I want to marry. Please give me wisdom to know how to deal with this area in my life.

- It is God' will for you to prosper (be successful) in all things and be healthy.

3 John 1:2
Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.

Ü "Father, this project I am working on at work is very difficult, but I believe that you are going to make me successful in completing it.

Ü "Father, I am sick and tired of being sick and tired. It is your will for me to be in health, so I ask You in Jesus name to bring divine health into my body.

- It is God's will for you to be debt free.

Romans 13:8
Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

Ü "God, I need help. I am burried in debts. I read in your word that we are not to owe anyone anything, and I owe just about everyone something. I ask You to show me how to be debt free. I believe your grace will abound to me, even though I don't deserve it and you will make me prosperous and wise in the area of my finances.

- It is God's will for you to live in the liberty He has provided.

Galatians 5:1
Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

Ü "Oh, Lord, how easily I come under the law. I know I am free from religious dooties and don'ties, but somehow, I end up under them and then feel worthless and condemned or oh, so proud of myself. In Jesus name I refuse to be under these laws. I stand fast in the liberties You have purchased for me!

- It's God's will for you to live free of condemnation.

Romans 8:1
There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Ü "In Jesus name, I reject guilt and condemnation. My God has died for me and risen from the dead to provide me eternal salvation. My sins are continually cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. When He looks at me, He sees His Son. I am a beloved child of God and no one can separate me from God's love.

- It is God's will for you to live victoriously.

1 Corinthians 15:57
But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
1 John 5:4
For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

Ü "Father, I may not feel like an overcomer today. Actually, I feel and look completely defeated, but I declare in Jesus name, that I am an overcomer.

- It is God's will for you to live free from sin and sinning.

Romans 6:11-14
*Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. **12** Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. **13** And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. **14** For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.*

Ü "I refuse to succumb to this temptation in Jesus name. I am free from sin and it no longer has dominion over me. I also have the fruit of the Spirit which is self-control. I submit myself to God and resist the devil. He must flee from me in Jesus name.

- It is God's will for you to ask Him for whatever you want.

Matthew 7:7-11
*"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. **8** For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. **9** Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? **10** Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? **11** If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!*
John 14:12-14
*"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. **13** And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. **14** If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.*

Ü "Father, in the name of Jesus, I ask to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

- It is His pleasure to give you the Kingdom. That should just about cover it, don't you think?

Luke 12:32
"Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Ü "You want to give me the kingdom? Wow. Thank-you, Father. I receive it in Jesus name.

When we pray anything that we know to be the will of God, we should not begin or end our prayer with, "**IF** it be your will…" If we KNOW it is the will of God by what He has revealed in scripture, then we must boldly, confidently, and without hesitation, pride or false humility **ASK** expecting that HE **WILL** ANSWER.

You Already Have It

Another perspective on praying and believing to receive the will of God is to see the will of God as something that Christ has already accomplished for us by His death and resurrection. In Andrew Wommack's excellent book You've Already Got It, he points out that what we need from God, He has already provided. So, not only are these things

already His will, but He has already provided them for us. As he explains in his book, all we have to do is reach into the spiritual realm and receive what God has already given. Supernatural faith is the bridge from the natural to the supernatural. Notice that this verse is written in the past tense.

> ***Ephesians 1:3***
> *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.*

When we pray for things that God has already provided, we are praying according to His will. Since He has already given them to us, we can simply receive them when we pray. It isn't a matter of trying to convince God to give them to us. He is the One who provided. Instead we come with complete confidence that we will receive.

Ü "Jesus, I used to ask, 'If it be your will, please heal me,' but now I see from your word that healing is always your will, so I ask You now knowing that you are not only able but willing, and I receive from you what you have already provided for me on the cross."

In Jesus Name

"In Jesus name" is not a set of magic words nor is the phrase a mandatory tag for every prayer. When we pray in Jesus name, we are praying in His *authority*. Demons must flee when we tell them to do so not because we have been a good man or woman, but because of the authority of Jesus.

Ü "In Jesus name, I command evil spirits to leave this person immediately."

Power of Agreement

We do not need to pray with someone else to get results in prayer, but Jesus does emphasize the power of it. The early church met frequently to pray. They prayed together when members were in trouble, and they prayed together when a big decision needed to be made in the church. My husband have seen over the years how effective our prayers are when we agree together. We believe that as the heads of our household, we have special influence in prayer about our family and our life.

> ***Matthew 18:18-20***
> *"Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. **19** "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. **20** For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."*

Ü "Father, we thank You for being here with us. Your word says that if we agree concerning anything we ask, it will be done for us by our Father. So, we agree together that this problem will be resolved. We bind the enemy from doing damage, and we release your provision."

I believe there is a very special reason that God gives special power to agreement in prayer. God loves unity among brothers and sisters in Christ.

Psalm 133:1-3
1 *Behold, how good and how pleasant it is*
For brethren to dwell together in unity!
2 *It is like the precious oil upon the head,*
Running down on the beard,
The beard of Aaron,
Running down on the edge of his garments.

3 *It is like the dew of Hermon,*
Descending upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the LORD commanded the blessing—
Life forevermore.

Ephesians 4:1-3
I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ***5*** *one Lord, one faith, one baptism;* ***6*** *one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

Corporate Prayer

Corporate prayer is the term we use to refer to Christians praying together. It is the same as the above. We see that the early church met together frequently to pray. Many times this was to pray for a need in the church such as when Peter was in prison. Other times they met to seek the counsel of the Holy Spirit concerning how to proceed in ministry. I think it is safe to conclude that they also met to simply worship the Lord and to bring their requests before Him.

Acts 12:5
Peter was therefore kept in prison, but constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.
Acts 13:2
As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

Acts 15:28
For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things:

Ü "We are gathered together today, Lord, to seek Your wisdom about the upcoming year of ministry in our church. We open our hearts to what You would like to accomplish. Speak to each one of us Your desire and wisdom."

Prayer and Fasting

While it is clear that the early church fasted, there is no indication that they viewed fasting as a religious "discipline" or a mandated practice. There is also no instruction in the New Testament about fasting such as to how and why. To understand the topic, we must draw our conclusions based on the practices of the disciples. From these we can first deduct that just as New Covenant prayer is different than Old Covenant prayer, so New Testament fasting is different than Old Testament fasting.

One reason fasting in the Old Testament took place was because the people were afraid of an enemy and fasted together so that God would move on their behalf (**2 Chronicles 20:1-4**). Another reason they fasted was because they were horrified or disgusted with something that happened (**Nehemiah 1:1-4**). It was also common to fast in order to seek direction from the Lord (**Ezra 8:21**). Esther and her maids fasted so that God would give her mercy and favor with the king (**Esther 4:16**). In other instances, whole cities would fast because they knew they deserved judgment and they wanted to express to God their willingness to change and to ask for His mercy (**Joel, Jonah 3:4-6, Daniel 9**). Daniel fasted as a means of mourning (**Daniel 10**). In **Isaiah 58**, we see that the Children of Israel had adopted perverted reasons for fasting.

We know that Jesus fasted 40 days before he began His ministry. However, He did not instruct his disciples to do the same. In fact, no where did Jesus nor the apostles instruct believers to fast for any certain length of time, and although it is possible some of them fasted for 40 days, this is not recorded[70].

While Jesus was with His disciples, they did not fast. This was quite upsetting to the Pharisees (**Mark 2:18**) because they fasted regularly. Yet, even though His disciples did not fast when He was with them, Jesus gave clear and corrective instruction about fasting in **Matthew 6:16-18.**

[70] I deliberately point this out because there is a school of thought among Christians that if you are really spiritual or if you are "serious" about seeing God "move", you will at least once go on a 40 day fast with water only. This was not set forth as a spiritual ideal in the New Testament. Do not allow others to impose this view upon you. Neither should you be impressed with someone who has gone on a 40 day fast (they have a way of letting you know about it), nor should you feel inferior in your Christian walk if you don't.

"Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. [17] But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, [18] so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly".

Obviously, the Pharisees, referred to here as the "hypocrites" made a public display of fasting. They walked around with a sad and disfigured expression (perhaps a hungry look) so that others would know they were fasting. It was likely to give the impression that they were righteous. Jesus told the people to wash their faces and anoint their heads. They were to appear as if they weren't fasting. So, when we fast, we fast before the Lord, not to impress others.

This is not to say that we have to lie to someone to hide the fact that we are fasting. If someone invites you to dinner while you are fasting, it is ok to just tell them you are fasting. What Jesus is trying to correct is fasting for the *purpose* of impressing others with how spiritual you are.

The disciples did fast after Jesus was resurrected, but if you look carefully at the practice, it was nothing like we are commonly taught today. There is a reason for this. When Jesus died and rose again two things happened which forever altered the purposes for fasting.

1. Because of our belief in Jesus, we do not live under fear of judgment. We are not in danger of the wrath of God (as is so often taught). If we sin, our sin is immediately forgiven. We do not need to do some external ritual to receive forgiveness or to cleanse ourselves. We do not need to cover ourselves in sackcloth and ashes in order for God's mercy to come upon us. It is already abounding toward us due to Christ's sacrifice.

   John 5:24
   Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and <u>shall not come into judgment</u>, but has passed from death into life.

   1 Thessalonians 5:9-10
   For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.
   1 John 1:7
   But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

2. Secondly, Jesus death and resurrection overcame the power of the enemy. There is the concept in the church today that by fasting we can fight the works of Satan. This is not provable in the New Testament. Fasting is not even mentioned as a weapon of our spiritual warfare, and there is no record of anyone fasting to defeat the enemy. There are no evil forces that can

interfere when we pray because Jesus has defeated all enemies. Our prayers are heard and answered immediately. This is very good news.

We do not need to fast to try and make things happen in prayer. It is not as if we keep fasting until we finally have fasted enough and prayed enough until our prayers are finally answered. The New Testament way of receiving from God is to ask, believe, and receive. No amount of grunting and groaning on your part is going to accomplish more than Jesus did on the cross.

He has already done it all. We simply walk in the victory He has won by submitting ourselves to His Lordship, availing ourselves of the weapons He has given us, and resisting the devil. Praise God. Take a deep breath and thank God for His rest.

Colossians 2:15
Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.
Ephesians 6:11-13
Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.
Romans 8:38-39
For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Philippians 2:9-11
Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
James 4:7
Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

SO WHY FAST?

Fasting is not a requirement of the Christian walk. Jesus did not give instructions to his disciples to fast. He only said that they would fast after he rose from the dead[71]. Neither did Paul or any of the other New Testament writers advocate that we fast. You could go your whole life without fasting, and God is not going to love you less or be disappointed in you.

That being said, it is clear that the disciples fasted. To understand the purposes for fasting in the New Testament, it is important to observe the few incidents recorded in which the disciples fasted. These are recorded in the book of Acts.

[71] Some teach that Jesus only meant that they would be so sad after he died they would fast.

In the following records, we aren't given the purpose for fasting. In these records, it is as if we enter the story while they are fasting and praying. It is unclear whether fasting brought about the results or if these events simply happened *while* they were fasting.

However, we need to take note that in all of these incidences, a ministry decision was being made, specifically the sending out of certain persons for a ministry. On the other hand, there are other records of ministry decisions being made without fasting being involved (or without mentioning it). For this reason I believe that fasting is an option but not a requirement in the process of selecting leaders for ministries. What is more notable in these scriptures is that the leaders were in agreement about the decisions that were being made and that there was a belief that the Holy Spirit was directing them.

Acts 13:2
*As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the **Holy Spirit** said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.*
Acts 14:23
So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.
Acts 6:2-5
Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; 4 but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit.
Acts 15:27-28
*We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. 28 For it seemed good to the **Holy Spirit**, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things."*

We get another glimpse into the practice of fasting from a scripture in one of Paul's letters. He instructed husbands and wives not to deprive each other physically. However, with the consent of one's partner for a period of time agreed upon by both, one could give himself to fasting and prayer. From this one verse, we can see that believers did fast from time to time, but again, no purpose is given. However, this is not an instruction to fast, just an observation that it was common for people to fast[72]. What is more amazing is that

married couples were to consider each other in the area of physical intimacy. One could not abstain from the act of marriage to fast without the permission of his partner, and this had to be a "a time", with the express instruction to get back together afterwards.

1 Corinthians 7:5
Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

[72] Most fasts consisted of water only. Water only fasts can leave one with little energy to engage in such activities. Additionally, perhaps the abstinence was part of the fast.

Paul mentions another type of fasting. Christian writers differ in their points of view on this topic, but it appears that often in the ministry of Paul, he fasted involuntarily as part of suffering for Christ (notice the context in which fasting is listed).

> ***2 Corinthians 6:4-5***
> *But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, 5 in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings. (See also **2 Corinthians 11:25-28**).*

Please, if you do want to fast, talk to you doctor. There are certain health conditions which do not mix well with fasting. Especially if you plan on going on an extended fast, you need to make sure you are in good enough condition to do so. Your doctor can also give you information on how to do a fast, and more importantly, how to come off of a fast. People have died from coming off a fast too quickly. Remember, too, when you fast, to drink plenty of water. Without water, one can die after only a few days.

Ü "Father, I begin this fast today in faith. I believe everything You have promised is already mine in Jesus name. I trust that you have already defeated all of Satan's power so I am not afraid. I set myself apart from eating in order to hear your voice more clearly. Lord, I would like to confirm in my heart what I believe you have been speaking to me. It seems you are calling me to . . . I open my heart to You during this time of fasting.

It is important to note again, that fasting is **not required** to hear the voice of God. He speaks to us daily, and if we lack wisdom, He will reveal it to us apart from fasting.

What we have discovered in the area of fasting is that often the answer doesn't happen while the fasting is taking place, but some time afterward. So, don't be discouraged if you don't see results right away. Remember that God is always speaking. He will find a way to get the answer through to you in plenty of time.

Hearing from God

This leads us to the idea of hearing from God. Hearing from God can actually be a minute by minute experience. You don't have to sit still to hear His voice. In fact, some people hear better while on the go. Many of us have heard God whisper to us very clear instructions where noise is everywhere around us. God is not limited to our manufactured environment. Others hear better while reading the word. There is no set way for God to communicate with you. He knows you. He knows how to get through to you. He also knows how long it will take to get through to you and is perfectly capable and willing of beginning

months ahead of time to get you to the point where you can perceive His will and obey it in time to receive what He wants to do. Don't worry. Rest in His love and open your heart.

As New Covenant believers, we hear differently from God than the Old Covenant believers. It was common practice to cast lots to know God's will (**Joshua 18:6-10, Leviticus 16:8, 1 Chronicles 25:8**). We even have stories in which the supernatural occurred to reveal God's will, such as Gideon putting out a fleece. (**Judges 6:3-40**). God spoke as well to His children through the fathers and later by the prophets.

Today God speaks to us through His Son, not fleeces, casting lost, by Moses or the Prophets. We are led by the Spirit of God. To put God to the test by using Old Testament methods of hearing from God or to apply prophecies meant for one people as applying to New Covenant believers, is to open the door to being led by something or someone other than the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ lives inside of us, and if we need wisdom from God, all we need to do is ask. His Holy Spirit is now our guide, not circumstances.

> ***Hebrews 1:1-2***
> *God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, [2] has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;*
> ***Romans 8:14***
> *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*
> ***James 1:5***
> *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*
> ***John 16:13***
> *However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.*

Ü "Father, I need your wisdom. I believe You are speaking to me by your Son. I put my trust in You to lead me and guide me by your Holy Spirit for I am your child. Speak to me of things to come."

Power of Your Words in Prayer

We are created in the image of God. This means that we have characteristics of God, though we will NEVER be divine. When God created the things on the earth, He spoke and it was so. Jesus taught us to do the same in prayer. Obviously, we cannot speak things that are contrary to the will of God.

> ***Mark 11:22-24***
> *So Jesus answered and said to them, "Have faith in God. 23 For assuredly, I say to you, whoever **says** to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he **says** will be done, he will have whatever he **says**. 24 Therefore I say to you, whatever things you **ask** when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.*

Ü "Headache (or whatever is standing in your way), I speak to you in the name of Jesus, in His authority, and I command you to be removed and be cast into the sea, and the cause of it."

Believe, Confess, Receive

When we pray for anything, the same things that "come into play" when we are born again are at work. When we believe in our hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead, confess Him and receive Him as our Lord, we are born again. The process is very similar for receiving anything from the Lord.

First we have to know and believe in our hearts that the things we are praying for are God's will. Then we have to speak them in faith (ask/speak). Third, we have to receive them. It really is that simple. We then wait in confidence because He who promised is faithful.

"And whatever things you **ask** in prayer,

believing,

you will **receive**."

Matthew 21:22

Ü "Father, I have no food to feed my family today. Yet You promised that you would supply our needs. I believe what You promised, You will do. I ask You, in Jesus name, to give us this day our daily bread. I command food to come into our possession in the name of Jesus. I receive it right now in Your name.

Don't be proud. You are part of a family. We are not mind readers and most of us aren't so perfectly in tune with the Spirit as to know you have a need. It is not unscriptural to let a fellow believer know that you have a need, and hopefully with joy, someone will help you. There are also often agencies in the community that have food pantries to help those in need of basic necessities. These are also God's provision.

Pray without Ceasing

Do you still have a lingering doubt as to how often or for how long or in what manner you should pray? If so, it is well worth your time to take on the subject of prayer as you read through the New Testament. I have done my best to record my observations, but sometimes we just need to "know for ourselves". Like I said, I used to practice what is called the spiritual discipline of prayer. I saw it as a requirement and as a way for me to draw closer[73] to God. I accepted this concept because I was taught it, and I trusted those who taught me. However, nowhere in the New Testament are we taught to pray for a certain length of time at a certain time of day. This is quite stunning considering how we take it as fact that we need a "prayer time" or "time of devotions". Imagine all the guilt gendered by this lie that has been taught as truth far too long. It is one of the most twisted

knots that has been tied over the life of believers causing them to either feel justified by doing it or condemned for not.

Paul did not limit himself to a set amount of prayer. When you consider it, think how puny the idea is of only praying one hour each day when you have the honor and privilege of praying every waking minute. If you can remember anything from these three lessons on

[73] A newly born again believer is as close to God as a saint of sixty years. There are not levels of knowing God. He lives in us, and you cannot get any closer than that. All believers "know" God (Jeremiah 31:34). However, as you study the word of God, you will gain more knowledge about God's characteristics, and thus your appreciation for who He is and what He has done will grow.

prayer, remember this: God sees, He hears, and He answers all prayer offered in faith believing. He doesn't care about formula. He doesn't care about form. Let go of all that binds and pray away.

> ***Romans 1:9***
> *For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.*
> ***1 Thessalonians 5:16-18***
> *16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*
> ***2 Timothy 1:3***
> *I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day.*

How can we pray without ceasing? Isn't this even more demanding that the supposed "spiritual discipline" of praying one hour? How could anyone be on his knees all day long? Do we need to live in a monastery? Of course not!

"Praying without ceasing" means to be in constant communication with God. If you are used to praying, then doing your day, it will take some practice to switch to praying without ceasing. It begins from the minute we wake up and realize God has blessed us with another day. We begin to thank Him and ask for His guidance. We continue to pray and worship as we prepare for the day's activities, and as we live through our day, we are aware of His presence and pray for our friends and family as we go through our day. We go to bed with a heart of thanksgiving and praise.

Of course, there will be times when we are focusing more on our job or we are engaged in conversation, but deep down inside, we are dwelling with him. If a situation comes up and we need instant wisdom or immediately help, we pray. When we take a break, we worship Him. We can praise Him in our native language, or we can praise Him in the Spirit. This can be out loud or in our hearts.

Be encouraged. All prayers are heard by your loving Father. All prayers offered in faith are answered. So pray without ceasing and pray believing, and YOU WILL RECEIVE! Your prayers will be effective. "Things" WILL CHANGE. What a privilege and what a joy to be part of the marvelous works of God.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REVIEW

1. The title of this lesson is "Effective Prayers". What have you learned in this lesson that will help you to pray more effectively, in other words, to see more results in prayer?

2. Did you ever feel bound up in the area of prayer (tied up in knots)? What have you learned in the three lessons on prayer that has set you free?

11

HEALING CONFESSIONS

WE BELIEVE . . .

. . . that divine healing is part of the atonement and is available to all believers.

In this lesson, we will discuss the promise and provision of divine healing. Included are true testimonies of divine healings which we hope will encourage you to believe in and receive healing.[74] Although we briefly discuss gifts of healing and the prayer of faith, the focus here will be primarily how you can believe and receive healing by faith in God apart from the ministry gifts. This is not to diminish the gifts, but to rather emphasize that healing is provided for you as part of your life with Him.

We do not pretend to have 100% success in this area, but we are learning more everyday and continue to see the supernatural healing of God in our bodies. Being healed is really quite simple. Believe, confess, and receive. However, due to hundreds of years of false teachings on the topic, most Christians find it difficult. That is why Lesson 12 will follow giving considerable attention to the many traditions and unscriptural thinking that gender unbelief, and teaching will be offered to help you conquer the unbelief which even prevented Jesus from doing miracles (**Mark 6:5-6**). We will also discuss how to believe for your healing even when it "looks" like it will never happen.

Our desire is to set you free from that which binds and allow you to believe and receive healing in every area of your life. Although we will focus on physical healing, some of the same information can be applied to emotional healing. If you are ready to learn and ready to be healed, I believe these truths will encourage you to receive what you need from God.

Before beginning it is important to clarify that when saying, "It is God's will to heal you," it is *not* done in the sense that you are "out of God's will" if you are sick. There is no

[74] Each testimony is known personally to the author. If it is written in the first person and not in quotation marks, the author is giving a personal testimony.

record of Jesus upbraiding anyone for being sick. On the contrary, His compassion was always evident. Don't allow the thought that because you are sick, God is not pleased with you or that you have no faith. You would not be angry with your own child for being sick, and God is not mad with you either. This teaching is designed to encourage you to believe and receive the healing that Jesus Christ purchased for you on the cross, not condemn you for being sick. Being sick is burden enough.

Additionally, the author of this lesson is not opposed to medical care. In fact, without doctors many of us would not be alive today. Our family has regular check-ups and physicals and visits the doctor whenever we deem it necessary. We are similarly not opposed to medicines used appropriately. Finally, it would be unwise for you, in an attempt to take a step of faith, to do something silly to prove you have faith. If you need glasses to drive, please don't drive without them. If you are on prescrition medicine, consult a doctor before going off. If your healing has manifested itself, you will know it. So, sit back and relax. Ask God to open your eyes to something that will unlock your understanding so that you can receive healing.

God is Our Healer

Several books have been written detailing the different names of God in Scripture. It is most illuminating to read about what names God gives Himself.[75] These names reveal His very nature. They demonstrate His will and provision in our lives.

One of those names is Jehovah Rapha[76] revealed in Exodus 15:26. It means "The Lord Our Healer". Because He calls Himself Our Healer, then Our Healer He is. This seems so simple and straightforward to me that sometimes I cannot understand why people seriously believe that God is making them sick. God does not choose as one of His names, "The Lord Who Makes You Sick". Jesus never placed His hands on anyone to make them sick, only to heal.

Scripture clearly states that those who are led by the Spirit of God are His children (**Romans 8:13-15**). As New Covenant believers (not as those before the cross) He leads us by His *Spirit*, not by circumstances and certainly not by sickness. Yes, we will learn from whatever situation in which we find ourselves, and yes, God will turn everything we experience for good to those who love Him, but He is not the one causing sickness. He clearly states that He is Our Healer.

If you meant to teach your own child something, would you give him polio? Would you kill one child to teach another a lesson? Of course not. You would be sent to prison for doing something like that! Any sane human being would not make a child sick in order to prove a point. He will reason with the child and demonstrate the principle and teach and reteach, perhaps even discipline if necessary until the child learns. He won't give him cancer to teach him to be patient. God is even more merciful than we. He gives good gifts to His children. He is The Lord Our Healer.

Psalm 103:1-5

[75] See "The Names of God" which is Lesson Five of the first book in this series God's Love for You.
[76] Or Raphe

Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name!
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits:
Who forgives all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases,
Who redeems your life from destruction,
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,
Who satisfies your mouth with good things,
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The Faith of a Child

It is beautiful how pure the faith of children is. In their eyes, if God says it, it is true. They don't have the disadvantage of hearing for years that maybe God's Word isn't always true, or that it might not be true for everyone. Here is the story of our dear friend, Don Harris.

"In 1983, I was dealing with a constant cough. It had been going on for nearly two months. My chest was hurting, and breathing was getting difficult. Due to our financial situation at the time, seeing a physician was not an option.

"My daughter, Vicki, who was nearly four, was already tucked into bed, and had heard me coughing. When I came into her room to hug her and pray with her as we normally did, something unexpected happened. As I was leaning over to hug her,

she grabbed my shoulder with one hand, and placed her other on my chest just as I was about to start coughing again. Before I could get the cough out she said, "Be healed in Jesus name," and instantly the cough stopped. The pain in my chest also was gone.

"I was amazed. To Vicki it was just matter-of-fact. You pray. Jesus heals. Since then (for 20 years) I have not suffered from coughing or pain in my chest. I get a cold occasionally, but there is never any coughing with it."

Don and Michelle's daughter, Vicki, is now serving the Lord as a wife, mother, public school teacher, and is serving with her husband at their local church. Like she did, let us also simply believe that what God says, He will do.

God's Will Revealed in the Life of Jesus

In **Colossians 1:15**, speaking of Jesus, we read, "[Now] He is the exact likeness of the unseen God [the visible representation of the invisible]" (Amplified). This means that when we read the gospels, we are seeing God. Through Jesus actions and words we know the characteristics of God, the attitudes of God, and the will of God because Jesus himself said in **John 14:9**, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father."

As we observe the life of Christ, we are able to see what the will of God is in the area of healing. **Acts 10:38** says, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing <u>all</u> who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him." If you are unsure as to whether it is always God's will to heal, I encourage you to read through the gospels with the express purpose of answering any doubts you may have.

JESUS **DECLARED** THAT HE WAS WILLING

In **Matthew 8:1-3** we read about a man who believed Jesus was able to heal him, but was not sure He was willing. "When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. 2 And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.' 3 Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' Immediately his leprosy was cleansed."

JESUS **DEMONSTRATED** THAT HE WAS WILLING BY WHAT HE SAID AND DID

One might say, "Well, that only applied to that one person. Of course each of us should ask if it is his will." This is not true. In order to gather whether or not Jesus was willing, we need to observe every instance in which he healed or cast out demons. Nothing will convince us more than that.

There is a general impression that Jesus did only a few miracles while on earth, but nothing could be further from the truth. Below are only a "few" of the miracles He did…thousands upon thousands of people were healed.

Matthew 12:9-15
Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue. [10] And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—that they might accuse Him. [11] Then He said to them, "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? [12] Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." [13]

*Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." **And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other**. [14] Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him. [15] But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew from there. And **great multitudes** followed Him, and **He healed them all**.*
Matthew 14:13-14
*When Jesus heard it, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself. But when the **multitudes** heard it, they followed Him on foot from the cities. 14 And when Jesus went out He saw a **great multitude**; and He was moved with compassion for them, and **healed their sick**.*
Matthew 15:29-31
*Jesus departed from there, skirted the Sea of Galilee, and went up on the mountain and sat down there. 30 Then **great multitudes** came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; and they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and **He healed them**. 31 So the multitude marveled when they saw the mute speaking, the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel.*
Matthew 19:1-2
*Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings, that He departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. 2 And great multitudes followed Him, and **He healed them there**.*

JESUS DEMONSTRATED THAT HE WAS WILLING BY WHAT HE **DIDN'T** DO OR SAY

Can you imagine the joy in the crowds when EVERYONE was healed? This had to number in the thousands. **Jesus did not turn one person away.**

Sometimes we can learn by what did not happen. God gets accused of some pretty awful things these days. It usually happens when we don't understand why someone didn't

receive healing, and so instead of turning to the truth of the word, we make things up or adopt the ideas of others that are not based in the word. These traditions based on negative experiences nullify the word of God. Here are some things Jesus did not do.

1. Not once did Jesus ever lay hands on someone to make them sick. Yet people today honestly believe that God brings sickness upon them. If you honestly believe that it is God's will to make you sick, it would be silly to ask for healing or even go to a doctor. However, healing is His will.
2. Jesus never denied healing to anyone. He is willing.
3. He never told anyone that it was not His will to heal them. He healed all who came to Him in faith. Healing is God's will.
4. Jesus did not tell anyone, "I will heal you one day in the future, but right now, you need to learn patience through this suffering." He NEVER said anything like this to anyone.
5. He didn't refuse to heal in order to discipline someone. God does not use sickness to teach us lessons. This is illegal in all civilized parts of the world.
6. He didn't say, "In my time I will heal you." Jesus answer for a healing request was ALWAYS immediate.
7. Thankfully, He did not tell anyone, "I'm sorry I cannot heal you here on earth, but I will kill you now and take you with me to heaven where you will receive the ultimate healing." We make up things like this to comfort ourselves.
8. He did not say, "You've got a lot of nerve asking me to heal you when this sickness is a direct result of your lifestyle." He healed them all.

9. Jesus did not say, "I would love to heal you, but you have sin in your life. First repent, confess your sins, and live a holy life. Then I can heal you." Healing was not conditional.
10. Jesus did not say, "I think death is probably better than healing in your case, because I know that in the future you are going to turn from Me." God does not use death as a preventative against potential future sin.

When we see Jesus, we see the Father. So, when we see that Jesus was **always willing** to heal we understand that our Father is also willing to heal all who come to Him in faith. IT IS GOD'S WILL TO HEAL. Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God. If you see Jesus, then you see the Father.

ONLY UNBELIEF COULD STOP HIM

The only logical conclusion based on scriptural evidence given to us in studying the life of Christ was that Jesus was always able and willing to heal when someone came to him in faith. In fact, He often said, "Your faith has made you whole."

However, there is a force that stopped Jesus from doing mighty miracles. It was unbelief. We will discuss the causes and cures for unbelief in the area of healing in the next lesson.

Migraines, Good-bye Forever!

My son started having migraine headaches as a teenager. He writes, "When they came, they came in abundance. I had to shut out all light, and could barely

walk. Once I fell to my face and vomited but couldn't get up because the pain was so intense. Migraine headaches disrupted my speech and thinking. My thoughts were not complete. My sentences came out broken and incomprehensible. They would last 48 hours. The intensity would rise for eight hours then peak for 12 to 24 hours then die off as they started. I could not focus on anything. I just wanted to escape. It was so intense I sometimes fantasized about killing myself or taking something extreme for the pain."

After about four years of this and when they started happening several times a week, Tim became proactive. He researched nutrition and changed his diet. He began to exercise. He got a prescription for the pain. These seemed to ease the brunt of the migraines, but often the pain won out. The medication caused him to be uncoordinated, stifling his agility, sense of balance, and physical control. He read a book by a doctor that stated that one cannot get rid of migraines permanently. Even living a preventative lifestyle, they would still come at times. Tim writes that this was unacceptable to him, and he decided to turn to God for the answer.

He continues, "I refused to accept that these headaches would never leave. The very next migraine that attacked me was the last. Two hours into it, I prayed in the Spirit in my mind. I battled the lies of the enemy that tried to hinder my faith while praying. When the enemy said that God doesn't heal today, I said, 'God's promises are Yes and Amen. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever.' When the thoughts came that God was trying to teach me something through the suffering, I said, 'My God said that I can have whatever I say. I am open to His lessons and guidance any time of the day. He doesn't use painful bondage and oppression to teach me something I am willing to learn. He is my heavenly Father and I am His beloved child. He doesn't speak to me by afflicting me with disease.' I commanded

the enemy to shut up about my headaches. Immediately that negative, defeating voice became silent.

"I then focused my thoughts and prayer of faith to the Father. I spoke to Him, 'Your Word is true. You cannot lie. You told me I have healing. You said it. I didn't make this up. Your Word has to work. You must heal me. I am healed right now because You have to do what You said You would do. I believe that You love me and care about me. You don't want me to suffer. You want me to be anointed with your burden-removing, yoke-destroying power. You want the bondage of this pain to leave me.'"

Of course, God is for us, and He is the One who promised, so we aren't fighting Him. Yet, speaking through intense pain, and a determination to see God's Word realized in his body, he spoke from his heart. I believe that God is more interested in what comes from our hearts than in us getting each word perfect. God saw that Tim was reaching out to believe that He would do what He promised. He wasn't meaning to be disrespectful, rather to insist that God's Word is truth, not just fancy words that mean nothing.

He writes, "Getting up from praying in my mind in the Spirit, I went to the restroom. As I was there, I realized that the pain was suspiciously gone. I moved my neck around and my shoulders to try to initiate the pain again. Surely I was just having a moment of peace before the storm of the migraine hit. No! It was gone, a headache that was destined to last two days was gone. 'That's the way it should always be,' I said out loud. 'These migraines will never return in the name of Jesus.'"

Since that day twelve years ago until now, Tim has been free of migraines. Even though he was a little surprised, he believes God's Word to be true. "It was all to be expected," he writes. "I thanked God and still thank God when I am able to function to my highest potential."

Recently, someone said about Tim, "If he has so much faith, why is he wearing glasses?" Tim said to me, "Yes, why AM I?" Thus began a new quest of healing through increasing faith in God's Word.

Accomplishments of His Suffering

Who
Himself
bore our
sins
on the
tree,
that we, having died to sins
might live for righteousness-
by
whose
stripes
you
were
healed.

1 Peter 2:24

When Christ suffered and died for us, He did more that give us eternal life, He also provided for our physical healing.[77] Though salvation is certainly the more important of the two miracles; God, in His infinite wisdom saw fit to set us free from sickness as well. We are set free from sickness because we are no longer children of Satan, but of God. As we saw in the life of Christ, God's will is to provide health and healing for His children. Shall we then diminish divine healing because it is not essential to salvation? God forbid! God has provided many things for us, everything we need for this life. We should enjoy each one.

2 Peter 1:2-4
*Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, [3] as His divine power has <u>given</u> to us **<u>all</u>** things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, [4] by which have been given to us <u>exceedingly great and precious promises</u>, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

Jesus Christ suffered immensely to provide healing for us. You may not think that *you* are worthy of healing, but please consider this: He <u>is</u> worthy. He is worthy to see you

[77] See Appendix A for a study of the work accomplished by Christ on the cross. You will be amazed at all He has done for us.

receive what He purchased for you with His own blood. Whenever we walk in less than He provided for us, we ignore the worth of His sacrifice.

We work hard to provide for those we love. We prepare meals for them to eat as a fruit of our labor. What if no one wanted to eat? What if your child said he was unworthy to live in the house you provided but preferred to live on the grass out back? What if he insisted in wearing discard newspaper as a proof of his love for you instead of the clothing you provide? Would your spouse refuse to get in the car you bought for him because he is unworthy to ride in it since you bought it? Would he instead walk to work leaving the gift you worked for to provide for him to show you his love? Goodness no! We receive from those who provide for us because we know the sacrifice it took to have the things they have given and we understand the love behind it. We didn't do the work, but we benefit from it. How insulting it would be for a child to refuse the blessings a father or mother want to give. Most parents would take their child to a psychiatrist if he behaved like that.

So, why are we so timid about receiving what God has provided for us through His Son? Is it because we think that we are not worthy? Or are we so self-righteous and proud that we cannot receive from the Almighty God the gifts He has purchased with His Son's blood? It is true; we absolutely do not deserve one thing He has done, but He certainly deserves to give it to us, and we insult His grace when we refuse to receive. He is worthy for us to receive. Instead of unworthiness or false humility, less us joyfully receive from our Father the gifts He has provided.

Isaiah 53
Who has believed our report?
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant,
And as a root out of dry ground.
He has no form or comeliness;
And when we see Him,
There is no beauty that we should desire Him.

3 He is despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.
4 Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.
5 But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.
6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.
7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth.
8 He was taken from prison and from judgment,

And who will declare His generation?
For He was cut off from the land of the living;
For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.
9 And they made His grave with the wicked—
But with the rich at His death,
Because He had done no violence,
Nor was any deceit in His mouth.
10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him;
He has put Him to grief.
When You make His soul an offering for sin,
He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days,
And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand.
11 He shall see the labor of His soul,and be satisfied.
By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,
For He shall bear their iniquities.
12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great,
And He shall divide the spoil with the strong,
Because He poured out His soul unto death,
And He was numbered with the transgressors,
And He bore the sin of many,
And made intercession for the transgressors.

Matthew 7:11
*If you then, being evil, know how to give **good gifts** to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give **good** things to those who ask Him!*
Romans 8:32
*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us **all** things?*

He Gave Authority to His Disicples to Heal

Even before Jesus died and rose again, He was healing people. This is proof that He is the God who heals us. He also gave authority to His disciples to do miracles in His name and they went out and healed the sick, raised the dead and cast out demons.

As Jesus approached His death He expanded this authority all who would believe in Him. Then again, after He had risen from the grave and before He ascended to heaven, He promised this authority again to those who believe.

Matthew 10:1, 5-8
And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease. 5 These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. 6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' 8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give."
Matthew 14:12-14

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. 13 And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.
Mark 16:17-18
And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; 18 they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover."

The Apostles Were Used to Heal

As we have noted before, the book of Acts demonstrates to us the life of the early believers. We observe in Acts that divine healing and miracles continued on as Jesus had promised. Following is an encouraging summary of the miracles done by the early church.

Acts 3:6-8
Peter and John healed a man begging for alms who had been lame from birth. Instead of givng him money, they took him by the hand and lifted him up. He was instantly healed and went into the temple walking and leaping and praising God.
Acts 5:12-17
Many signs and wonders were done among the people, so much so that they brought the sick in the streets and put them on beds and couches so that Peter's shadow would pass over them. Multitudes gathered from surrounding cities bringing there sick and tormented, and they were ***all*** *healed. Sound familiar?*
Acts 8:6-7
Philip did miracles which involved unclean spirits coming out, and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed.

Acts 9:17-18
Ananias laid hands on Saul (Paul) so that he would regain his sight, and he was completely healed.
Acts 9:32-35
Paul heals Aeneas who had been bedridden eight years and was paralyzed.
Acts 9:36-43
In Joppa a woman named Dorcas was sick and died. The disciples sent for Peter who came. He put out all the mourners, and knelt down and prayed. Turning to her body, he commanded her to get up. She opened her eyes and sat up. Many believed on the Lord through this.
Acts 14:3
In Iconium great multitudes believed due to the teaching of Paul and Barnabas. Even though there was great persecution, they stayed there a long time. The Lord bore witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.
Acts 14:7-10

In Lystra, a man who had no strength in his feet was sitting. He was crippled since birth. Paul perceived that he had faith to be healed and said with a loud voice, "Stand up straight on your feet!" And he leaped and walked.

Acts 14:19-20

Paul was stoned possibly to death. As the disciples gathered around his body, he rose up and went back into the city where he had been stoned, then departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

Acts 16:16-18

A demon possessed slave girl was set free when Paul commanded the spirit to come our of her in Jesus name.

Acts 19:11-12

God worked unusual miracles through Paul. Even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick and diseases left them and evil sprits went out of them.

Acts 20: 9-12

Paul had been preaching a long time when a young man fell into a deep sleep and then fell out of a three story building which appeared to kill him. Paul embraced him and the man lived.[78]

Acts 28:3-6

Paul and those with him had narrowly escaped a shipwreck. As they put stick on a fire a viper fastened on to his hand. He simply shook it off. The natives thought for sure he would swell up and die, but no harm came to him.

Acts 28:7-8

In the same region the father of the man who had received Paul and taken care of him for three days was sick with a fever and dysentery. Paul prayed, laid his hands on him and healed him.

Acts 28:9

After the healing of Publius' father, the rest of those on the island came and were healed.

Gifts of Healings vs Healing

In I Cor. 12:27-31 Paul teaches that not everyone has every spiritual gift. One of the gifts he lists is "gifts of healings". I witnessed this gift as a child in the life of my grandfather while attending a healing service held by him. Then, as a young adult, I was visiting my grandparents on a day I had an awful headache. I took some aspirin, but my pain only got worse. My grandmother asked me if I wanted my grandfather to pray for me, and I said yes. I don't remember having faith that anything would happen, just that my head was hurting so much, I would have tried just about anything. He put his hands on my head and prayed. I don't remember what he said because the very second he touched me,

[78] The moral of this story, my fellow ministers, unless you are prepared to raise someone from the dead, keep your sermons to a reasonable length. ☺

my headache disappeared. I squinted my eyes thinking it was just momentary or imagined, but I was healed.

However, healing is not limited to gifts of healings. Healing is most often received in Scripture by faith. There are multiple examples of people receiving healing from Jesus simply because they believed He could heal them, and that He wanted to heal them. There are many Scriptures that point to the fact that healing belongs to us, that God has already healed us. In fact, it clearly states that Jesus purchased healing for us by the wounds He endured.

Furthermore, Jesus said, "These signs will follow those who believe...they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." **Mark 16:17a, 18b**. If we believe, we can lay our hands on the sick and they will recover (this includes on yourself). That is so amazing.

If you know someone who has a gift of healing, have them pray for you, but you are not limited to this gift. Healing and the ability to see others healed are your inheritance purchased for you by the suffering of Jesus Christ, just as surely as He purchased your salvation by His blood.

Who
Himself
bore our
sins
on the
tree,
that we, having died to sins
might live for righteousness-
by
whose
stripes
you
were
healed.

1 Peter 2:24

The Prayer of Faith

About nine years ago, my husband was taking our son, his two friends, and I to school one morning when the person in the van behind us failed to notice there was a stop sign and barreled into the back of our car. I have never felt such a jolt in my life! I just sat there stunned unable to do anything but cry and tremble.

Thankfully, everyone was alright, and no bones were broken, but I needed to see a chiropractor for months for my neck, shoulders, back, and hip. Over time the pain in each area diminished, except for my hip. My chiropractor was excellent, but for some reason the treatments for my hip seemed to help only for an hour or so, and then I was worse off. I didn't want any more treatments.

I wasn't in constant pain, and I could walk well enough, but when I would try standing in one place for very long my hips would hurt significantly. This was inconvenient being a teacher who had to stand. During worship services at church, I would have to sit down while people twice my age would still be standing.

One Sunday, the pastor asked if anyone wanted prayer to come up front. Several people also came up for prayer when I did. Eventually, one of the ministers came over to pray for me. I was hoping she wouldn't just ask God to "help me deal with it" because I was tired of dealing with it and wanted a miracle. To my delight, she prayed that I would be completely healed.

From that moment on, I had no trouble standing. The pain and discomfort that was present minutes before was permanently gone. Praise His holy name. Thank-you, Pastor Sandy, for offering the prayer of faith.

James 5:13-16
Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Oh, Our Achin' Backs!

I hate to admit it, but my husband and I are getting older everyday. Naturally, we have had our shares of common aches and pains. Let me share with you both of our stories of how God permanently healed our backs.

For many years I had a pain that would occur quite frequently in between my shoulder blades. It was not a sharp pain, but it was very uncomfortable…enough to make me take some medicine and lie down until it improved. I believe I had this pain because I worked for so many years as a mother and teacher which required me to bend over to help children.

One weekend in 2006, we attended a conference held by Andrew Wommack in Ontario, California. Andrew had a word of knowledge that someone had pain in between the shoulder blades. I had been hurting that afternoon and was happy to hear him mention this. So I stood up, and he told me and the others standing to receive it. I did. No more pain. I continue to walk in victory in this area of my back. A couple times the pain has attempted to return, but I remind my back that it is healed in Jesus name.

My husband's back troubles were worse than mine. He was in so much pain that he finally went to a chiropractor who took x-rays and showed them to David. They showed that his spine was squished and out of alignment. He continued getting treatments, even to the point of acupuncture, but any relief was only temporary. I remember he would often wear a back support brace whenever he did anything that required his back…sometimes he wore it just to support his back while walking around.

We attended a conference in Santa Clara, California…again by Andrew Wommack. He asked people with back pain to come forward for prayer. My husband

wasn't feeling pain at the time, so I encouraged him to go forward[79]*. When he came back, he said, "I wasn't hurting before I went up, but I believe I'm healed." Amazingly, the pain did not return and we were both so happy.*

Several months later, David strained his back while exercising, and went it to see a different chiropractor. Since the new doctor didn't have a set of x-rays, he had David take new ones.

The chiropractor was amazed by what he saw and showed my husband the x-ray. "You have the back of a healthy 30 year old man. Your spine is perfectly normal." My husband was amazed. Here was visual proof of the miracle God had done. His back pain this time was just a muscle strain which went away, and his back remains 100% healed.

Christina's Faith

Our daughter, Christina, began showing allergies to food at a very young age. She was allergic to eggs, milk products, red apples, mandarin oranges, and especially to corn. Even though we made sure she didn't eat these things, sometimes we'd forget or someone wouldn't know and feed one of these foods to her. She would get horrible stomach aches followed by a rash. I figured this was just how it would be for her, but I started to notice that it was affecting her personality by making her irritable. Her little three-year-old eyes would look at me as if to say, "Help me, Mommy." When I began to see how miserable she was and that it was altering her personality, I got mad. Why was I allowing this to go on?

Around that time (in 1980), during a prayer service, I went into the nursery and got her to have the elders anoint her with oil and pray for her. I told her that Jesus was going to heal her of her allergies. The man who prayed for her did just as I asked. He prayed that she would be completely healed. He prayed the prayer of faith.

A day or two later, we were having dinner at a friend's house. As they passed around the whole kernel corn, the worst possible food for her, she put some on her plate. I looked at her and was going to remind her of her allergy to corn, but before I had a chance, she said, "It's OK, Mommy. Jesus healed me." I was not about to get in the way of her faith, and I said, "OK." From that moment on, Christina had no food allergies of any kind. One day, she was allergic to almost everything. The next day, after prayer and her confession of faith, she was allergic to nothing.

I know that sometimes children grow out of food allergies, but not overnight. God honored His Word and her faith. The most wonderful part was that this made a tremendous difference in her personality. She was finally free from pain and able to enjoy life and all the good foods God created.

We told my mom about this miracle by asking her to make us some popcorn. When we explained that Tina had been healed, she sat down on her kitchen floor and cried like a baby. How full of joy we all were at God's faithfulness.

What is Faith

[79] Actually, I nearly pushed him out of his chair into the isle. Hey, if God could use Mary to encourage Jesus to turn water into wine, He can use me, too.

The next section of this lesson deals with faith. The Bible definition of faith is found in Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Let's read that in a few more translations in order to get the full meaning of the verse.

Amplified	[1]NOW FAITH is the assurance (the confirmation, the title deed) of the things [we] hope for, being the proof of things [we] do not see and the conviction of their reality [faith perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses].
NLT	Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.
NASB	Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
NIV	Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

In other words, faith gives us confidence to hope for something we cannot see. Without faith, the Christian life is impossible because everything that God promises His children is received by faith.

Many Christians are tied up in knots about faith. Yet before we came to Christ without knowing God or the wonders of His word, somehow we managed to receive the biggest miracle known to the universe: we were born again. To help you understand faith, we need to consider that moment. What did it take to enter the kingdom of God? It took the grace of God reaching out to you and you responding by faith. Where did we get that faith?

In **Romans 10:17** we read, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." In context, this is speaking about how the gospel is spread by preaching. Your faith came because you heard the word of God somewhere along the line. Maybe it was when you were a child. Maybe it was the day you believed. Saving faith comes to us by hearing the word of God about salvation…through hearing the Good News, the Gospel of our salvation.

However, you had a choice whether to use this faith or not. You believed that God raised Jesus from the dead, but you had to open your own mouth and confess Him as your Lord because faith involves moving forward, or you might say, faith isn't worth anything without taking action. We have to also confess and receive…all of this is done by faith. Faith is trusting that as you confess Him, you will receive Him. So, that is why I say faith involves making a choice or one might say, faith enables us to make a choice. True faith results in a response.

If faith is so powerful then we should get as much of it as we can, right? The disciples asked Jesus to increase their faith when confronted with something they thought was impossible. Seems like a reasonable request, right? We think certainly Jesus would have been pleased that they wanted more faith, and yet His response is stunning.

Luke 17:5-6
And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." 6 So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

What Jesus is saying is that it doesn't take a large amount of faith to do the impossible. It only takes a little bit of faith to pull an entire tree out of the ground and make it walk to the ocean and put its roots in the sand and grow there! This means that EVERYONE has enough faith to receive miracles from God.

We had the faith to be born again. Faith came when we heard the word. So, how will we get faith to be healed? It comes in the same way. Faith for healing comes by hearing the word of God about healing…through hearing the Good News, "by His wounds you were healed," (1 Peter 2:24).[80]

For whatever is born of God

overcomes the world.

And this is the victory

that has overcome the world-

our faith.

1 John 5:4

For we walk by faith,

not by sight.

2 Corinthians 5:7

The Power of Agreement

Often when we are in pain, it is difficult to have faith because we are overwhelmed by what we can see, hear, feel, touch, and taste. In other words, all of our senses are screaming that we are sick! At times like these, contact someone who will agree with you in prayer.

> ***Matthew 18:18-20***
> *18 "Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for*
>
> *them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."*

[80] Let me say here that if you are reading this with your "I don't believe healing is for today" glasses, I pray that you will take them off. Could it be that you believe what you believe because you were always taught to believe it? Then you studied the topic wearing those biased glasses which only reinforced your belief…which is actually unbelief. As the Bible scholar you profess to be or as someone just raised to not believe, would it be dangerous to just open your heart to the possibility that you have been wrong? You believe in objective thinking, then listen to other points of view. I encourage you to hear. If what I am writing is true; if healing really is for any blood-purchased Christian, everything could change in your life.

The Twenty Minute Flu

I haven't heard of a flu that lasted for less than 24 hours. About seven years ago, my son, Tim, had this experience. What follows is his story of the shortest case of the flu ever.

"Everyone in the pharmacy where I worked was so sick they seemed drunk. They kept describing their symptoms to each other saying they could barely see what they were doing. Under my breath, I kept declaring that I was free from sickness.

"Suddenly, I turned around and the drunken, heavy spirit of the flu came on me. I almost fell to the ground. I became instantly nauseous and nearly vomited right there in the middle of the pharmacy. My vision became distorted, and I stumbled to the counter and leaned up against it. I realized that these were the exact symptoms I'd been hearing about ALL DAY LONG.

"I didn't accept it at that moment. I refused to receive the flu. I walked out of the pharmacy. I felt physically weak as I walked. My muscles felt as if they were quickly losing energy. My jaw was clenching and everything inside my body was screaming for me to just lie down and give in. I was determined not give in. I bought some food and went into the break room. I told the flu that it must flee from my body. God purchased my healing and I would receive it from Him.

"I decided to have my parents pray for me over the phone. After some orange juice and Echinacea tea I called them. They prayed for me immediately. My dad cursed the flu and commanded it to stop attacking my body. Then we agreed together that it had to obey us in Jesus Name. We thanked God for the healing He provided through His suffering.

"Within ten minutes of getting off the phone, the symptoms were completely reversed. I had more energy for the rest of the day than I did at the beginning of the day. It was clear, sober potent energy that seemed to be the exact opposite of the symptoms I experienced. The flu had lasted only twenty minutes."

Curse the Fig Tree

There is a very interesting story in chapter eleven in the book of Mark. While Jesus and his disciples were on their way to Jerusalem, Jesus became hungry. He saw a fig tree in the distance with leaves. Now what many people don't know is that at this time of year a fig tree has an edible blossom, but when Jesus got to the tree, it had no blossoms on it, which meant it would not eventually produce figs. So, Jesus cursed the fig tree, and His disciples heard Him.[81]

So the next day as they passed by the fig tree, they saw that it was withered and they pointed it out to Jesus in amazement. Then Jesus said something so amazing that even today we struggle to understand its significance. As you read these words, you will see that faith is connected to our confession. When we believe God for a miracle, we need to speak it forth. This is not to imply in any way that we are God. Certainly not. Yet, Jesus Christ who is God is the one who proclaimed it. When we put our faith in what He has promised, we see miracles take place that we never imagined.

[81] The fig tree is a type of the Jews. So, the story takes on added significance. The people of Israel had no fruit to repentance and would soon crucify their Messiah.

Have faith in God.
For assuredly, I say to you,
WHOEVER says to this mountain,
"Be removed and be cast into the sea,"
and does not doubt in his heart,
but believes that those things he says will be done,
he will have WHATEVER he says.
Therefore, I say unto you,
WHATEVER you ask when you pray,
believe that you receive them,
and you will have them.
And whenever you stand praying,
if you have anything against anyone
forgive him,
that your Father in heaven,
may also forgive you your trespasses.
Mark 11:22-25

Healed of Pleurisy

One day our son complained of intense pain in his chest and difficulty in breathing. Of course, I took him to the doctor. It turned out he had pleurisy. It was described to me as an inflammation of the lining of the lungs. This sickness repeated itself over the years. This is what happened one of those times. Here's the story in his words.

"The level of pain was a ten for each breath. The doctor said it would recur and last from one to two weeks each time. There was no permanent treatment only pain medication. I decided this answer wasn't suitable to my idea about what life should be, so I sought God's Word concerning healing.

"I knew very little at this point, only a little about Mark 11. I was prayed for by four people at the same time (my sister, Joey, my mom, my dad, and Pastor Jonathan). I felt a moment of painlessness, but then the pain increased beyond measure over the next hour. I didn't say anything, but the thoughts in my mind were all about how this stupid 'healing' doesn't work, because I was in worse pain then than before they prayed. If it really works, then I should have been immediately healed.

"I voiced my concern to my dad and he further explained Mark 11 to me. He shared about the story when Jesus cursed the fig tree and it died instantly, but the disciples didn't see the results of that until the next morning. The tree died from the roots up. I realized that if the pleurisy was killed from the roots, it would never come back.

"After I learned about it dying from the roots up, I just kept thanking God,

even though the pain level had shot through the roof. I knew the battle was already over, even though I couldn't yet see it. The pain lasted for one and one-half days after I received prayer. That was the last time I had pleurisy."

Besides it being a relief to know that our son will never suffer from this again, it brings such joy to my heart to see him as young adult beginning to believe in God for himself. What a blessing to see all of our children loving and following Jesus not only because they see us believing but because they know Him themselves and desire to grow in their trust and faith in God.

Speak to the Mountain

Since I was a young teenager, I suffered from headaches. Sinus headaches, tension headaches, female cycle headaches, neck pain headaches, and who knows what else. Usually, some Excedrin or Advil would save the day. Once in awhile, my headache would get so bad, I would need to lie down, but I can't say I ever suffered from migraines

It was just a fact of life for me. A very wise woman of God had told me once, that if her headache didn't go away when she prayed, she just took aspirin, no sense in getting all freaked out about it. So, I adopted her point of view.

One morning I woke with a typical very painful headache. Something inside of me, and I believe it was the Spirit of God, said, "Speak to your headache." I remember thinking, "Well, duh!" Then I realized something. I had authority over headaches in Jesus name. I put my hands on my head and said, "In the name of Jesus, I command this pain to be removed and cast into the sea, and the cause of it." To my amazement, the headache went away. After that, each time I got a headache, I would repeat what I said the first time. For me, it was like a replacement for the medication I'd been taking. Most of those headaches would go away. Sometimes, I was just too lazy, and would go ahead and take something, but more and more I got into the habit of speaking to the headache and the cause of it until I wasn't even thinking about it anymore.

Weeks went by. I was busy helping plan my daughter's wedding. Things got very stressful right before Christmas and the subsequent wedding. It dawned on me, that even during this stressful time, I was not getting headaches AT ALL. It was so noticeable, that I had to figure it out. I believed if I got a headache, I could speak to it and it would go away, but why was I not getting any at all?

I believe the Lord showed me that as I was adding to my prayer, "and the cause of it", I was speaking to the root causes of the headaches to also be removed and cast into the sea, and even though that was beyond what I had asked or thought, God had done that for me.

I cannot tell you the joy of being free from headaches. I might get one now and then, but I just command it and its cause to be removed and cast into the sea. They obey me. It is completely amazing every single time. I praise God for this incredible freedom from headaches.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think,

according to the power that works in us,

to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus

to all generations, forever and ever.

Amen

Ephesians 3:20-21

Things We Accept

As a teacher it was quite normal for me to get two or three respiratory illnesses each year ranging from colds, to sinus infections, to bronchitis. It made sense as I was around kids who were sick. Besides the daily germs in class, there was the workroom where teachers who had come to school sick would sneeze and cough and handle the same machines I did.

So, it was no surprise to feel a cold or something coming on. If I felt it was going to be difficult, I'd start making my lesson plans for the sub, make sure I had all the medicine I'd need, and be sure someone could drive the kids to school. In some odd way, being sick represented getting some time off the demanding lifestyle of teaching, so I almost didn't mind being sick as it would mean a day or two of "rest".

One night I was re-reading a booklet about just what was accomplished by Jesus' death and resurrection. I wasn't really paying attention, and my mind began to wander. I can only describe what happened next as a light going on inside me. Did I just sit back and accept sickness instead of fighting against it? I had faith that after getting a cold or whatever, I would be healed, but why not have faith beforehand? I had never thought about it that way. I lay there pondering it for a considerable time. I made a decision that I wasn't going to accept that I would automatically get sick anymore. I didn't have to just lie down and take it.

When I was near a sick colleague or student, I would say under my breath, "In Jesus name, I reject that sickness." When I felt a symptom coming on I would say out loud what I believed. "Jesus I believe You purchased my healing by your suffering. I am healed by your stripes. In your name, I refuse to receive this sickness." You know what? I stopped getting sick. For two years straight, I was never sick. That was twelve years ago.

I can honestly say that colds are very rare for me now. I am becoming aware of other things I just accept, like a stiff neck or my need for glasses. God's power is without measure, and His promises are true. God help us to not just sit back and accept sickness, but to fight it in His name.

Asking for the Impossible

I realized just a little while back that I often ask God to do what I rationally could do with a little extra effort or what could logically happen. I see nothing wrong with this. Yet, God is able to do the impossible. We set goals we know that we can reach, and then ask God to help us reach those goals. One day, I realized I was asking God for what I already knew I could do, but maybe I should ask Him for a real miracle, something that was impossible to me.

This thought started to penetrate my whole life. It's not that I never asked God for the impossible, but that my tendency was to think and ask in a safe zone. I became encouraged to think about areas in my life where I could ask for true miracles.

There is always a new way to use our faith. Just when we think we are believing God to heal every part of our body, soul, and spirit, we notice that we just casually accept a weakness or situation. When we see the light on a certain aspect

of our lives, we realize the power to confront that situation was there all along, and we are then able to ask for something we never before considered possible

Putting Your Foot Down

Over the years, I've noticed a pattern. It seems that just prior to seeing a healing come to pass, the person who received it put their spiritual foot down. Now, the Scripture doesn't tell us to put our spiritual foot down, doesn't even mention such a thing. Yet, we are told "to stand", and to do this, we do need feet. What I'm trying to say is there comes a point to where we are convinced that God has promised a certain thing, in the case of this book, physical healing. We believe not only that He is able, but that He is willing. We see that the sickness is caused by the enemy, not by God. We don't believe we have to be under Satan's power, but that our lives are in God's hands, and He wants to heal. He tells us to have faith and to ask.

Whether it be for our child or ourselves, something rises up inside of our hearts that says, "I don't have to take this, and I won't." We gain the courage to put our total faith in God's promises. So, we put our foot down, or dig in our heels, as they say, and refuse to accept anything less than what God has provided. We do not fight against God or people, but against spiritual forces that work against us and contrary to God's Word.

You might say, my foot is down, now what? All you have to do is take any scripture that promises the things for which you are asking…like some in this book. You might say, "I was already healed by the wounds of Jesus Christ. I refuse to get sick in His name." "Sickness and disease, I command you in Jesus name to be gone from my body right now. You have no right in my body." "No weapon formed against me will prosper." "I receive the healing already provided for me."

Then, just praise Him often for what He has already done. Think of the joy you will know when the manifestation is present with you, and worship Him that way. Rest in His love and His promises. Don't trust in what you see or feel, trust in His faithfulness.

More Encouraging Scriptures on Faith

Luke 11:9-10
"So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 10 For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.
Ephesians 6:16
Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.
Romans 4:19-21
And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. 20 He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.
John 15:7

7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

2 Thessalonians 1:3

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other.

Hebrews 11:6

6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Hebrews 6:11-12

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Healing Confession and Praise

Following is a composition which combines praise with the confession of scripture which encourages us to believe for complete healing and health. I hope you will find it encouraging.

HEALING CONFESSIONS

I will praise You, Lord, with my whole heart. ***(Psalm 9:1)***
I bless your holy name.
You are the Lord that Heals Me. ***(Exodus 15:26)***
It is your very nature to heal me.
It is who You are.
Your Name is above every name. ***(Philippians 2:8-11)***
At your name every knee must bow.
Sickness must submit to your holy name.
Jesus, You are My Healer.
Nothing is impossible for You. ***(Luke 1:37)***
You are both able and willing to heal me.
You demonstrated this while You were on earth
By healing all those who came to you believing. ***(Matt.-John)***
You did not and You do not show preferences. ***(Acts 10:34)***
You have not and will not change. ***(Hebrews 13:8)***
All of Your promises are "Yes" and "Amen". ***(2 Corinthians 1:20)***
Your word is truth. ***(John 17:17)***
I choose to believe in your word and
not the circumstances nor the experience of others.
How I will bless your holy name!
I will remember all of your benefits. ***(Psalm 103:2)***
You bore my sins in your own body on the cross
I have died to sins,
I live for righteousness—
I was healed by your wounds.
It is already done. ***(1 Peter 2:24)***

You have already provided both salvation and healing
By your atoning suffering and death.
The same Spirit of Him that raised You from the dead
Lives in me and
Therefore I will live. ***(Romans 8:11)***
Your resurrection proves that
You are victorious over death.
Your sacrifices merit my belief in You.

Oh, Lord, You are worthy to be praised
and I believe in You and praise You with my whole heart.
You are My Lord Who Heals Me.
I believe in Your word.
I receive from You what You have already provided.
You forgive all my sin.
You heal all my diseases.
You redeem my life from destruction. ***(Psalm 103:3-4)***
Your have plans for my life.
You give me a future and hope. ***(Jeremiah 29:11)***
You will satisfy me with a long life. ***(Psalm 91:16)***
You do not steal, kill and destroy.
You give me abundant life. ***(John 10:10)***
You have delivered me from the fear of death.
You have rendered the enemy powerless. ***(Hebrew 2:14-15)***
I submit to You.
I resist him steadfast in the faith.
He must flee from me in Jesus name. ***(James 4:7)***
In Jesus name I reject an evil heart of unbelief. ***(Hebrews 3:12)***
I choose to believe in You and your word.
No weapon formed against me will prosper. ***(Isaiah 54:17)***
I have this confidence in You that
When I pray anything according to Your will,
You Hear me.
Since I know that You hear me
I know that I have what I have requested of You. ***(1 John 5:14)***
Healing is who You are.
Healing is what You demonstrated on earth. ***(Acts 5:16)***
Healing is what You provided on the cross.
Healing is already provided.
Healing is Your will. ***(1 Peter 2:24)***
You have given to me the faith I need to receive from you. ***(Romans 12:3)***
Therefore, in your name
I speak to this mountain of sickness in my life.
I command you in the name of Jesus
To be removed and cast into the sea
never to return,
and every cause of it.
I do not doubt in my heart.
I believe that what I am saying is God's will
That it is granted to me already,
And therefore, I shall have it. ***(Mark 11:23-24)***
Sickness you are bound in Jesus name.

Healing you are released in my body. ***(Matthew 18:18)***
I believe, therefore I speak. ***(2 Corinthians 4:13)***
I am healed in Jesus name.
Whatever I ask in prayer believing
I will receive. ***(Matthew 21:22)***
I am fully convinced that what God has promised
He will do. ***(Romans 4:20-22)***
I have been forgiven
Therefore, I forgive. ***(Ephesians 4:32)***

God did not spare His own Son.
Now He will freely give me all things. ***(Romans 8:32)***
It is not based on my goodness but Your grace. ***(Galatians 3:5)***
You have made me
the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. ***(2 Corinthians 5:21)***
I am free from condemnation. ***(Romans 8:1)***
I refuse to worry. ***(Philippians 4:6-7)***
I bring my request to You with thanksgviving.
You crown me with lovingkindness and tender mercies
So that my youth is renewed like the eagle's. ***(Psalm 103:4-5)***
It is your will for me to be in health. ***(3 John 2)***
I will grow healthier and stronger day by day.
I will run and not be weary.
I will walk and not faint. ***(Isaiah 40:31)***
I am strong. ***(Joel 3:10)***
You are able
To do exceedingly abundantly above
all that I ask or think,
According to Your power that works in me ***(Ephesians 3:20)***
To You, Oh Lord, be glory and majesty
Dominion and power
Both now and forever. ***(Jude 25)***
Amen, so be it!

From Healing Verses
Compiled by
C. D. Hildebrand © 2007

12A

CAUSES OF UNBELIEF

WE BELIEVE . . .

. . . that unbelief keeps us from receiving what God has already provided.

Many years ago, I realized how nice it would be to find a booklet that I could give people who were sick that would contain many of the verses that had always inspired us to receive divine healing from the Lord. Since I couldn't find what I was looking for, I decided I would compile them myself. This idea led to the writing of Healing Verses.[82] As I began to collect these verses, I realized that I had many things to write on the topic. That led to the idea of including testimonies of divine healing among the teachings and verses. The content of that work is contained in this lesson and the previous one.

Having been around Christianity all of my life, I have heard just about every tradition about why people don't get healed. Over the years, I have proven to myself that these have little to do with the word of God and certainly almost zero to do with the promises made to New Covenant believers. In this lesson, we deal with the causes of unbelief, especially the traditions that constantly reinforce doubt. Next, we will give you some powerful tools to weed out the traditions that might be lurking in your mind, and set you free to believe.

When people are sick, thoughts begin to swirl. Hopefully, these lessons will help you focus on what is true instead of your pain and "things" you've heard over the years. Nothing written here is meant to discourage you, but rather to encourage you. This might mean that we step on the toes of your favorite traditions. However, it will likely be your favorite tradition that is holding you back from receiving your inheritance as a healed saint of God. My hope is that after we step on your favorite traditions toes, you will take over from there and slay them yourself entirely!

The Power of Unbelief

[82] Healing Verses will be published in 2010.

Unbelief is a topic that can cause believers to take offense[83]. If you have been asking God for healing, and feel you have faith, and yet, you are still sick, you don't want to hear someone tell you that unbelief might be the cause. Indeed, it might NOT be the problem…but what if it is? Wouldn't it be better to consider the possibility and in doing so, be set free from its grip?

The Bible has much to say about unbelief, but it makes us uncomfortable because we know that if God is able AND willing to heal us, and we aren't healed, we cannot blame Him. This sometimes causes us to blame ourselves, or simply make up excuses.

Often someone whom we love deeply has a physical handicap, or we might know a child with a serious illness for which there is no medical hope in sight. No one wants to heap on those who are suffering, any additional grief of any kind. So we avoid the topic. Yet Jesus did say, "According to your faith, be it unto you." (**Mt. 9:29**)

The topic needs to be studied, no matter how uneasy it make us, because unbelief is a very powerful force that even prevented Jesus from doing mighty works. If we don't believe, He cannot heal us. This is shocking, but how can we ignore this truth? On the

other hand, Jesus said that all things are possible to Him who believes (**Mk. 9:23**). He said whatever we ask in prayer believing, we will receive (**Mt. 21:22**). Believing releases the power of God. Unbelief blocks it.

As uneasy as this topic of unbelief may be, we are better off facing the truth. The truth sets us free. Being ultra sensitive about the topic is of no value to us or to the one we may know who is suffering. Accepting that we have unbelief is the first step to conquering it. Let us realize that through His Word that He not only is able to heal us, but He wants to heal us, and has actually has already provided healing. Then let us ask Him believing and receive what He has promised.

UNBELIEF RESTRAINS THE POWER OF GOD

The most stunning example of the power of unbelief lies within the pages of the gospels. Jesus healed thousands who came to him and did not refuse to heal or delay healing to anyone who came to Him believing, but a very interesting thing happened when he was visiting his home town.

> ***Matthew 13:53-58***
> *Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these parables, that He departed from there.*
> *54 When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they*
> *were astonished and said, "Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works?* *55*
> *Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James,*
> *Joses, Simon, and Judas?* *56 And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this*
> *Man get all these things?"* *57 So they were offended at Him.*
> *But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in*
> *his own house."* *58 Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.*

The people of His home country refused to see Jesus for who He was and chose instead to view Him as Joseph and Mary's son. It was as if they were saying, "Who does He think He is? We watched Him grow up. He's the same as any other man. They refused to believe in Him and thereby did not receive from him. Apparently, there were a few in the

[83] Some of this is due to certain believers who manage to turn believing in God into a work.

crowd who did believe because in Mark's account of this same incident, we see that a few sick people were healed. Their unbelief prevented miracles. Jesus wanted to heal everyone and do mighty works there because it was His nature to heal and work miracles. Everywhere else He healed ALL who came to Him in faith, but in this place He could heal only a few.

> ***Mark 6:5-6***
> *Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6 And He marveled because of their unbelief.*

UNBELIEF KEEPS PEOPLE FROM BEING BORN AGAIN

Jesus came to His own, and they didn't receive Him. They didn't receive what God always promised them. Why not? **Romans 11:20** says they were cut off "because of unbelief". Didn't God want to save His beloved people? Yes, He did. Why didn't He? He couldn't because of their unbelief. God gave the life of His only Son to save them, but most of those for whom He died did not believe.

If someone says, "If God wants to save me, He can save me," will he be saved? No, of course not. He has to *believe* God wants to and is able to save him and receive God's free gift by faith. The same is true with healing. If we say, "If God wants to heal me, He'll heal me," we aren't going to be healed.

HELP MY UNBELIEF

There is an interesting, but sometimes confusing passage of Scripture recorded in Mark 9:14-29. Jesus had given authority to His disciples to heal and cast out demons. As Jesus was coming to his disciples, he saw a huge crowd around them and the scribes were arguing with them. The people, when they saw Jesus, immediately ran to greet Him. So, Jesus asked the Scribes what they had been talking about. One of the men in the crowd answered that he had brought his son who was demon possessed to have the disciples cast him out, but they couldn't.

Then Jesus asked the father how long the son had this problem, and he said, "Since childhood…but if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

It is important to understand at this point, that in the original manuscripts, there is no punctuation. Translators do their best to put question marks, etc. where they seem most logical. The New King James Version puts verse 23 this way: "Jesus said to him, 'If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.'" Then in the footnote writes: "'If you can! All things are possible to him who believes.'" The New American Standard expresses verse 23 this way: "'If You can?' All things are possible to him who believes."

It seems that Jesus was stating amazement at the unbelieving statement of the man who said, "IF You can do anything…" You might remember that many people who came to Jesus in faith didn't question Jesus' ability, rather His willingness, "IF you are willing, you can make me whole," they would say, and Jesus would always reply, "I am willing." They knew He was able. This man doubted Jesus' *ability*, but Jesus turned the responsibility back to the father by saying (my summation), "Of course I am able. That's not the point. The question is, 'Will you believe?' If <u>you</u> believe nothing is impossible to <u>you</u>. The key isn't

if I am willing or able. I am both able and willing. The important thing to know is if you believe."

Later, the disciples were curious as to why they could not cast the demon out, and this is where things get a little confusing. Jesus said to them (as recorded in Matt. 17:20), "because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting,"

You might ask, "Why is this confusing?" I'm glad you asked. The demon later came out, but no one prayed and no one fasted! So, if this kind only goes out by prayer and fasting, where is the prayer and fasting?

There were instances in the past where Jesus could not do any mighty work because of the unbelief of those involved (Matt. 13:58). Clearly, unbelief was in play here since in the Matthew record of this incident Jesus tells the disciples that the demon was not cast out because of *their* unbelief. The disciples did not believe and neither did the father. No one was believing. Add to that a crowd of Scribes who were also likely doubters, and it is clear, no belief was available to heal the man's son. The power was there, but not the belief.

There was no belief available in this story, so how was this child healed? It is clear that it was not because Jesus had superior faith or power than the father, the crowds, and the disciples that the demon came out. Of course he did. However, if previously he had been limited by unbelief, then He was also limited here the same way He was limited in His home town. There is no record of Jesus overriding someone's unbelief. Those who did not believe were not healed. It was not that Jesus refused to heal because of unbelief, but as we have observed, He was UNABLE to do might works due to unbelief.

There was a problem, and Jesus not only knew what it was, but would see that it was solved. No one fasted and no one prayed…or did they? Let's see, it is clear no one fasted, so let's deal with that first! This is quite interesting. The following excellent translations actually do not use the words "and fasting" as they are not found in the earliest manuscripts: New American Standard, New International Version, The New Living Translation, and the Amplified. This is to say that Bible scholars with amazing credentials agree that the words "and fasting" were not part of the original text in Mark. What about Matthew? In the Matthew account, the earliest manuscripts don't include the whole sentence, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting." This helps us solve mystery number one. Since the earliest manuscripts do not include the words "and fasting", most likely, Jesus did not say, "and fasting". This would explain how the demon came out without anyone fasting.

The earliest manuscripts of Mark <u>do</u> include this line, "This kind cannot come out by anything but *prayer*." So, the second question still remains, "Who in this story prayed and what did he pray so that the demon came out?" If you look closely, you will see that only one person prayed in this story, and it is the man whose child was demon possessed. What does He pray? In Mark 9:24 we read that the father cried out and with tears prays, "Lord I believe; help my unbelief!" What happens next? The demon comes out! The proximity is too clear. Jesus had said that this kind did not come out but by prayer, and the man was the only one to pray before the boy was healed. The man <u>prays</u> that Jesus will help his <u>unbelief</u>. After he *prays* this, Jesus is able to cast out the demon.

Now, if we believe that Jesus meant that in order to cast out this particular type of *demon*, one has to pray, then we must explain why Jesus did not pray before casting him out. However, if Jesus meant that this type of *unbelief* does not go out but by prayer, then this makes sense. The man *prays* that Jesus would help him with his unbelief. Jesus answered this prayer. Once the man no longer had unbelief, the boy was healed. So, since Jesus does not say, "This type of *demon* goes out only by prayer", but rather says, "This *type* only goes out by prayer," it is entirely possible and much more logical that Jesus was referring to *unbelief* when he said "type".

This is good news for us. Unbelief is evil (**Hebrews 3:12**) because it gets in our way from receiving from God. Unbelief can change the whole course of our lives for the worse.

When this man asked Jesus IF He could help him, Jesus pointed out to him that He was not the problem. Jesus was perfectly capable of healing the boy, and so were his disciples. He had dealt with worse cases of demon possession than this. The problem was that neither the man nor the disciples believed! What needed to come out was the unbelief. How did the unbelief come out? It was through the man's understanding of his need, and his prayer, "Lord, help my unbelief."

This is good news for us. If something doesn't seem to be "working", we can take an honest look at our own unbelief. The problem is not with Jesus or His promises to us. If we believe and have unbelief at the same time, we need to ask God to help us with our unbelief, because certain types of unbelief do not go out but by prayer. As soon as we deal with the unbelief, we will get our answer.[84]

OUR PROMISED LAND

Previously we studied how the Children of Israel were delivered from Egypt after the first Passover, and that this is a type of our salvation. Their journey through the Red Sea and the cloud that followed them represented our baptism (1 Corinthians 10:2). God promised to bring them to a land "flowing with milk and honey" which we call The Promised Land. However, when they spied out the land, they were afraid to enter the land because there were giants in the land.

The consequence of not believing that God was able to bring them into this land was that they roamed in the desert for forty years, and those who originally refused to enter the land provided for them, grew old and eventually died in the wilderness. Only Joshua and Caleb, who did believed that they could be victorious in the land were allowed to enter.

This promised land, I believe, is not as some suggest, a type of heaven. Rather, it is a type of all the promises God has made and all the provisions he has already provided through His death and resurrection. These precious promises and provisions are already available to us in our own promised land (Hebrews 3 & 4).

[84] Andrew Wommack shares a similar line of thought in A Better Way to Pray, but includes the fasting aspect. I do not believe fasting is part of this story since it is clear that no one fasted before the child was healed. Additionally, the word "fasting" is not found in earliest manuscripts and thought by most Bible translators to not be part of the original text.

It is important to realize that unbelief prevents God from doing what He longs to do. Out of the hundreds of thousands of adults who God delivered out of the land of Egypt, only two entered the land God promised. Just two. Why? Hebrews 3:19 says, "So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief." God promised them the land, but they didn't believe God could give it into their hands.

The Main Culprits of Unbelief

TRUSTING IN OUR SENSES AND EXPERIENCES

Before finding the cure for unbelief, we must first discover its causes. One of the main reasons for unbelief is that we are accustomed to walking by sight instead of by faith. We live each day by what we can see, touch, smell, hear, and feel…by our natural senses. Is this food still fresh? Smell it. Is this bench wet or shiny? Touch it. Is there someone in the office? Listen. Is the restaurant open? Look inside. Our common way of looking at it is, "Seeing is believing."

We also base many of our choices on past experiences. We sit in a chair because it has always held us up before. We switch on a light because we have no reason to doubt it will turn on. We trust a secret to a friend because he has previously proven himself to be faithful.

These are all examples of using our senses or our past experiences to make decisions, and we do this hundreds of times each day. There is NOTHING wrong with this type of guidance, for it is God who gave us both our senses, and a mind which can accumulate experiences on which we base decisions. However, as much as we need our five senses and what we call common sense (accumulated experiences), these are not enough to enable us to live a life of faith. As Christians, we do not live believing only what we can see, for we are those who "walk by faith, and not by sight," (**2 Corinthians 5:7**). In other words, for Christians in spiritual matters, "Believing is seeing," and not the other way around.

In **Ephesians 1:3,** we read that God "has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." In **1 Peter 1:3** we read that "His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue". So, these blessings are not only what are unseen, but they are also the things we need which pertain to this life: health and prosperity (**3 John 1:2**). Not only has He provided us every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus, but he has given to us, "exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, (**1 Peter 1:4**). God the Father, through Jesus the Son, has provided everything we need in the spirit realm.

> ***John 20:29***
> *Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."*

LACK OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROMISES OF GOD

As we discussed in the lessons on prayer, "What you don't know can't hurt you," is a saying without substantiation. In other words, no one honestly believes it because there is no proof. Of course there are things we need to know to avoid danger.

Not only is this true, but there are things we don't know that can bless us. In the natural, it might be something as extreme as your lottery ticket just won ten million dollars and you didn't check the numbers, and there it sits on your dresser of no value to you until you cash it in.

If we do not know that we have already been given everything we need for life and godliness and that we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus, we will likely live below our inheritance in Christ. Many Christians do no know that physical healing was purchased for them over 2,000 years ago. It belongs to them. It is their inheritance, but they continue sick and in pain simply because they don't know.

Common Traditions Contributing to Unbelief

It is useless to put on pretense when coming to the Lord. He knows our every thought. This should bring us great peace because being honest is easier than pretending. We come to God in faith, and yet we sometimes sense our unbelief. One of the most damaging things we do as Christians is not take the time to line up what we read and what others say with the truths in God's Word.

In this section, I present some traditional beliefs which serve as roadblocks to believing. If you haven't heard these ideas before, you will eventually. In sharing my viewpoint about these concepts, I seek to put in perspective ways of thinking which can keep us from believing in God's provision and promise of healing.

It is necessary to admit we need help believing. Honesty is an important key to growth. By admitting we don't know everything or that we could be wrong about something, we make room for change. Let us ask knowing He will answer. He will help us to belief, to believe for the impossible, to overcome the obstacles of tradition, wrong teaching, and previous experiences. God is on our side. He wants us to believe, and He will help us grow and receive what we need to overcome any unbelief.

Think of these traditions as dragons that need slaying. They stand in your way of obtaining your inheritance. Take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and fight!

ABOUT JOB

Over the years, I have heard several theories about why Job suffered so horribly. These range from blaming God to blaming Job. Whatever one's opinion, I see two most amazing truths in the book of Job, namely, that God had faith in Job, and Job had faith in God.

God knew Job would continue to serve Him no matter what. I find this touching. As for Job, even though after much hardship, he did question God unfairly; he held on tightly to his faith in Him despite terrible loss, sickness, unkind "friends", and a faithless wife.

Life gets hard sometimes, even to the point of being unfair. The enemy seeks to steal, kill, and destroy. However, we can fight him with God's Word. From Job we learn that God can be trusted and that He is worthy of our praise no matter what we experience. We can also rest knowing that we have better promises than Job based on Christ's death and resurrection. If you think you are "just like Job", that God is "allowing" sickness or calamity in your life, you are facing a dragon. Sickness and Satan have been defeated for you at the cross. This was not true in Job's life.

So much time is spent discussing Job's situation, that we often fail to acknowledge that even though he was not a New Covenant believer, there was an end to his suffering. Besides realizing that Job got back what he lost and more, we should always keep this in mind: Job was healed.

> ***Hebrews 8:6***
> *But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.*

EXPERIENCE VS. THE WORD OF GOD

Let it be established that God cannot lie. He has made certain declarations of truth, and through His Son's sacrifice has provided for our salvation and healing. When we hear someone say, "I tried that Jesus stuff, and it didn't work for me," what do we conclude? Most Christians know from **2 Peter 3:9** that God is not willing that any should perish but that ALL should come to repentance. The Scripture also states in **Acts 2:21** that WHOEVER calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. So, when someone says it didn't "work" for him, thus implying God's Word is not true in his case, we are more inclined to believe the person lacks something—either information or faith—and NOT that God rejected them. In other words, we believe God's Word is true over the person's experience.

Similarly, God clearly reveals Himself as our Healer. It is His nature to heal. We can see His will displayed in the life of Christ in that Jesus was willing to heal everyone, and in fact did heal ALL who asked Him believing. He told us we would do the works He did, even greater works because He was going to the Father (John 14:12). The Word of God clearly declares that by the wounds of Jesus we were healed. He purchased our healing by His suffering.

Let me say it again. God is our Healer. He wants to heal us. He provided for our healing. So, if someone says, "I tried that healing stuff, and it didn't work for me," what shall we conclude? I believe we should respond in a like manner as we do to someone who says, "that salvation stuff doesn't work for me". What is more true, someone's experience or what God's Word reveals?

While we need to be compassionate toward anyone who is suffering, we cannot allow our beliefs to be based on what others experience and overturn in our hearts what God's Word declares. It seems there are teachers everywhere determined to explain away this provision of healing and the promise of miracles. Most of this, I believe, is due to tradition. Other times, when someone loved or respected isn't healed, we try explaining using our own ideas or those of others.

We cannot afford to let experience or opinion, ours or that of someone else, supersede the truth of God's Word. This is true everyday because we have an enemy who seeks to steal from us, kill us, and destroy us (**John 10:10**), and who is wandering around

seeking whom he may devour (**1 Pet. 5:8**). We must put on the shield of faith and take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and be ready to do battle.

Even more so, if we are sick and possibly fighting for our lives we need to have faith in God's Word not man's. We need to settle in our hearts that God is not the one making us sick. (If He is, then we have no business trying to get well.) He is both able and willing to heal us. We must put His Word above all other words. "Let God be true but every man a liar," says **Romans 3:4**. Especially when we need healing, let us put our trust in HIM, and not allow our past experiences or those of others to keep us from receiving what He has provided. Let us both ask and receive remembering that God is true to His character. He is both our Savior and our Healer.

SAYINGS THAT LEAD US ASTRAY

Most people have heard the expression, "Into each life, a little rain must fall." This is usually used to mean that each person faces difficulties. While this is true, it isn't a Scripture. In fact, rain in the Bible often refers to a blessing from God rather than hard times.

When Jesus told His disciples to love their enemies, and to pray for those who persecuted them, He said that in doing this, His disciples would be like their Father in heaven, because, "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust," (**Matthew 5:45**).

In other words, the sun and the rain God gives as a BLESSING to those who deserve it and to those who don't. He didn't say he sends trouble to the just and unjust, but blessings.

> ***John 10:10***
> *The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.*
>
> ***Romans 8:31-32***
> *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*
> ***Proverbs 10:22***
> *The blessing of the LORD makes one rich, And He adds no sorrow with it.*

TWISTING SCRIPTURES

Sometimes, with the best of intentions we take a verse that means one thing and over time turn it into something else. This is true with Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." So often Christians get this verse turned upside down.

Because God promises that good will come out of any situation for those who love Him, and because, amazingly, it does, we wrongly conclude that He sent the situation in the first place in order that good would come out of it.

God doesn't send evil to His children. Rather, no matter what we encounter; whether it be mistakes we make, wrong done to us by others, attacks on us by the enemy, or just circumstances, He turns it to good.

The truth is we live in a dangerous world with evil people, a world full of diseases. We also have an enemy who seeks to destroy us. Not everything that happens to us in this

life is God's doing or His will. If we live believing this, we will never learn to stand against the enemy and most likely suffer needlessly.

God has provided many Scriptures in which we can believe for our safety and healing. We can have faith in Him to protect us and heal us. We can also do what the Scriptures teach us to fight our enemy. In the meantime, no matter what, God will make each situation work together for good.

So, if good seems to be coming out of your sickness, it doesn't mean that God wants you sick, or that he is "allowing" you to be sick for some higher purpose. The peace of this verse is that His blessing is not limited to your situation. He is going to bless us no matter what. Even sickness can't stop God's blessing.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

If you've never heard that term before, don't let it intimidate you. Basically, when we say God is sovereign it means that He can do whatever He wants. No one can tell Him what to do. We are told to pray, "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." In the garden before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed, "Not my will, but thine be done."

These very same Scriptures are used by some to imply that if we are sick, we should just accept it. Just lie down and die. Why even bother fighting the "will" of God?

However, the sovereign God has chosen to set certain things in motion. One very important thing is that He reveals Himself as the Lord Our Healer. Also, Jesus healed all who believed and asked. Furthermore, God the Father allowed His Son to suffer to provide us with healing. It couldn't be clearer that healing is what He wants. In other words, healing is His will. So, there is no need to waste energy wondering if it is His will for us to be sick. It isn't.

This same sovereign God in His infinite sovereignty tells us to ask, to seek, to knock (**Luke 11:9**). He tells us we will receive from Him whatever we ask in prayer believing (**Matthew 21:22**). He says that whatever we ask the Father in Jesus name, He will do it (**John. 16:23**). He tells us we can have whatever we say (**Mk. 11:23**). He has made it so that if we believe, all things are possible to us (**Mark 9:23**). In His sovereignty He has decided that if we abide in Him and His words in us, we can ask what we will or desire and it will be done (**Jn. 15:7**).

There is a pervasive false way of thinking, especially in religious circles, that everything that happens in this life happens for a divine purpose. Just because something happens doesn't mean it is God's will or even His doing. This way of looking at life will only make us punching bags for the enemy. We cannot afford to live by tradition or opinion. God's will is revealed in His Word.

Ephesians 5:17
Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

PAUL'S THORN IN THE FLESH

When Scripture does not clearly explain the meaning of something written, one should interpret it based on the whole of Scripture and not read into the passage ideas that

contradict God's Word. When trying to demonstrate a point, it is very tempting to twist non-specific Scripture to suit one's preconceptions. In analyzing Paul's thorn in the flesh, let us avoid this temptation.

In **2 Corinthians 12:7** Paul writes, "And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'"

The Nelson Study Bible presents three suggested interpretations. In brief, one is that it was a physical ailment. Another is that is was a temptation. The third is that it was the continual persecution he suffered.

If one is inclined to want to prove that divine healing is not for always for all believers, that person will incline toward the interpretation that Paul suffered a physical ailment, and usually it is said that he had an eye disease. Since all of His promises, including divine healing are "yes and amen", I cannot fathom God refusing to heal Paul.

I also totally reject the thought that it was an ongoing temptation to sin. The Word says if we resist the devil, he will flee from us (**James 4:7**). It also declares that we are free from sin...it has no power over us (**Romans 6**). So, it is logical to rule out both sickness and temptation based on revealed truth in Scripture.

The persecution theory is the only acceptable explanation. We are told that all who live Godly in Christ will suffer persecution. In fact, one only need only read the above scripture in context to discover that indeed, this is exactly what he meant.

> ***2 Corinthians 12:7-10***
> *And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made*
>
> *perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10* ***Therefore*** *I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Paul is clearly not talking about having an ongoing sickness. He is talking about a messenger of Satan who persecuted him wherever he went. He was weak, reproached, in need, persecuted, in distress, all as a result of preaching the gospel.

Earlier in the same letter, Paul listed some of the evil that had befallen him for preaching the gospel of grace.

> ***2 Corinthians 11: 22-32***
> *Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So am I. 23 Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more:*
>
> - *in labors more abundant,*
> - *in stripes above measure,*
> - *in prisons more frequently,*
> - *in deaths often.*
> - *24 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.*

- *25 Three times I was beaten with rods;*
- *once I was stoned;*
- *three times I was shipwrecked;*
- *a night and a day I have been in the deep;*
- *26 in journeys often,*
- *in perils of waters,*
- *in perils of robbers,*
- *in perils of my own countrymen,*
- *in perils of the Gentiles,*
- *in perils in the city,*
- *in perils in the wilderness,*
- *in perils in the sea,*
- *in perils among false brethren;*
- *27 in weariness*
- *and toil,*
- *in sleeplessness often,*
- *in hunger*
- *and thirst, (not emotional, but physical)*
- *in fastings often,*
- *in cold*
- *and nakedness—*
- *28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.*
- *29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? 30 If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. 31 The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.*
- *32 In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; 33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.*

There is no doubt that Paul was sick at times due to the extreme persecutions he endured. Who would not suffer injury from the abuses listed above? Who would not be weak? Several Christians are mentioned as being sick in the New Testament. Almost every

Christian in the world has been sick. That isn't the point. Being sick isn't unscriptural, but saying that God refuses to heal those who ask in faith is. We are clearly taught that "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution," **(2 Timothy 3:12**). We have to admit that the persecution Paul suffered was more than the majority of Christians ever have or will suffer. This was Paul's thorn in the flesh. Don't let someone convince you that your sickness is God's way of making you suffer to keep you humble. He promises healing to all…all of His promises are yes…He cannot lie.

What was Paul's view and experience in light of this? Amazing.

2 Timothy 3:10-11
But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, 11 persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me.
2 Timothy 4: 17
*But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. **Also I was delivered out of the***

> ***mouth of the lion***. *18 And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!*

Will you suffer persecution? Defnitely. Will you be sick? Perhaps. Will God's grace be with you when you are sick? Yes, it will. However, never believe for one minute that you are sick by the hand of God. By His stripes, you are healed.

MORE SCRIPTURE TWISTING: The Unjust Judge

In Luke 18:1-7 Jesus gives a parable about a widow who needed help with an adversary. She came to a certain judge who "did not fear God nor regard man." He ignored her request at first but later realized that she wasn't going to stop coming to him for help. He decided that he might as well take care of the matter before she drove him crazy. Even though he could have cared less about God or her, just because she kept asking, he gave her the request she brought before him. Jesus then explained the parable.

> ***Luke 18:6***
> *Then the Lord said, "Hear what the unjust judge said. 7 And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? 8 I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?"*

This woman had faith that this unjust judge would give her what she wanted if she would just not give up. How much more will the just judge give His children what they request? God is on our side. He is not to be compared with an unjust judge as He is just. When we come to Him, He is ready and willing to hear and answer. He won't ignore us as did this judge.

We demonstrate our faith by our persistence. Do we have enough faith to ask and keep asking knowing that our heavenly Father is just and does care about us and will answer us? Let us boldly ask knowing He will answer. May Jesus find faith in us now and when He returns.

HEALED AND SAVED BY FAITH

When a person comes to Christ for salvation, he doesn't need to be a Biblical scholar. He isn't required to understand the four spiritual laws. He doesn't need to get his act together first. In other words, he can't learn or earn salvation. He can't do anything to save himself. He won't be saved reciting a prayer or creed or by going through ceremonies or attending a certain church. The only way a person can be born again/saved is to believe in his heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and confess Him as the Lord of his life. This is done by faith. Simply by believing a person's destiny is changed forever.

Healing is the same. One doesn't need to be a Biblical scholar to be healed. It isn't necessary to read all the books and listen to all the tapes on healing. He doesn't need to do all the religious do's and don't do. In other words, he can't learn or earn healing. He can't heal himself. He won't be healed reciting prayers or creeds or joining a church or by giving offerings. Believing is the only way a person can be healed. We humans tend to complicate

things. We come up with methods, rules, and requirements. Yet consider those healed through Jesus' ministry. Were these people scholars? Did Jesus heal them because they had memorized Scripture, been good church members, and listened to certain tapes or because they reached out to Him in faith?

Each of us has been given the measure of faith (**Romans 12:3**). We all have faith enough to receive healing. Jesus said that even faith the size of a mustard seed could move a mountain and that nothing will be impossible for us (**Matthew 17:20**). You have that much faith. Furthermore, inside of us we have the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead (**Romans 8:11**). Let us not complicate things. Jesus is our Healer. We have the power we need. We have the faith we need. Let us believe, ask, and receive with total confidence what He has already provided.

NOT BY WORKS

Continuing on the above thought, I have read in prominent Christian books from those who believe in divine healing that if someone has sin in his life, healing will be delayed. I even read in one work that if someone is not tithing and giving offerings, his health will not be what it can be. These do not understand the grace of God. They see it as only valuable for salvation and do not understand that we are born again by grace through faith, live the Christian life by grace through faith, receive what God have given by his grace through faith, see miracles done by faith, and are healed by grace through faith.

The problem with not understanding this is what happens in the battlefield in our minds. Let's say we are presented with a need: we are sick, or someone's life is threatened. If we have it in our minds that we must have no sin in our lives to receive from God, who on earth could receive from God? Did you get angry for no reason? Did you not give enough, pray enough, fast enough, read the Bible enough, attend church enough, or not witness enough? Did you eat too much, drink too much, or inhale second hand smoke? Please! Give yourself a break.

Another common enemy attack that has to do with works is that of telling you that you *deserve* to be sick. I know of those who were alcoholics for many years of their lives and severely damaged their livers. I'm sure the enemy told them it was their fault they were sick, and indeed it was. However, He who has graciously forgiven all sin by grace through faith, had also chosen to heal the same way. My friend, Carol, is an example of someone who was healed of liver disease after a life lived with alcohol.

If you are overweight, the enemy will daily tell you that you will soon die. Actually, he doesn't have to. Just turn on the television, especially Christian television. In one day, you will hear that if you don't have a heart attack, then you will have a stroke, or perhaps you will get diabetes. Of course, if that isn't enough, why don't you roll over and die of other problems that *might* be caused by obesity. Is your blood pressure slightly elevated? It might be YOUR fault! Is your back hurting? It's YOUR fault. Are your feet or knees in pain…YOUR fault, too, of course. Can't sleep at night? Well, what do you expect? You are fat. NEVER MIND THAT YOU KNOW DOZENS OF PEOPLE WITH THE EXACT SAME SYMPTOMS WHO LOOK LIKE FASHION MODELS.

My point is, if you give into all of this, you will think you *deserve* to have whatever symptom you have when actually, it might be an attack of the enemy.

And what if your problem is caused by being overweight? If God heals by grace through faith, will He not also heal you, just as He heals one who is recovering from alcoholism, or one who has HIV? Yes, He will. Do we deserve this grace? Absolutely not.

Healing is provided by grace through faith. It isn't by our works of righteousness, but by His sacrifice at the cross that we are healed. When you are faced with a need, the enemy will tell you that your prayers will not be answered because you don't deserve to receive what you need. If you believe this, he has defeated you. Only by understanding that salvation and healing and whatever you need from God is provided for you already by his GRACE through faith (not by works) will you be able to receive from God.

Some think this way of thinking will make people run out and get drunk or eat a Big Mac, or contract HIV. No, it won't. Knowing that you are forgiven and healed by grace through faith will send you running straight into the arms of your loving Father.

> ***Galatians 3:2-5***
> *This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? 4 Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? 5 Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?— 6 just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."*
> ***Hebrews 4:14-16***
> *Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

YOUR DAYS ARE NOT NUMBERED

Let us now tackle a very evil lying dragon. The lie speaks like this, "Each person is given a certain number of days before he is born. When those days are "numbered", tic tock, he is dead. No matter what the man does that day, he will either choke on his Starbucks muffin, get hit by a car, or die of a heart attack while sitting calmly in his home. If he is destined to die on March 3, 2009 at 8:06 a.m., then he will die on March 3, 2009 at 8:06 a.m. We hear of this most commonly when someone dies suddenly or too young. It is said, "Well, it must have been *his time* to go." Perhaps we believe that this will make

sense out of the nonsensical or give answers to the question, "Why?" The trouble is, this lie is repeated with such confidence and frequency, that people readily accept it as a biblical truth. What an awful way to live thinking any moment could be your last. How widely we open ourselves to satan's intent to steal, KILL, and destroy, for he will whisper to you, "This sickness is going to kill you," or "Today is your day to die." If you think that such a lie is truth, you could become a victim.

Following are the main two verses I have heard used to "prove" that each individual has a set number of days. Then I will show you many more that indicate that we are promised a long life.

> ***Psalm 139:15-16***
> *My frame was not hidden from You,*
> *When I was made in secret,*

And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.
Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.
And in Your book they all were written,
The days fashioned for me,
When as yet there were none of them.

It appears without any study of this verse that God has a book and inside of his book is a number written that says how many days you will live, but it is not saying this. First of all, there is no punctuation in the original text. Very easily it could mean that everything about us, all of our parts, were written in his book. In some translations, it says that our days are "ordained" instead of "fashioned". Actually, "fashioned" is the more accurate translation as the word in Hebrew has to do with fashioning and giving purpose. In other words, before we were even born, God had a purpose for our days. Each of us has reasons for living even before we live one day.

Another commonly misunderstood verse is **Psalm 90:12**, "So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." People stretch this to mean that we have a certain number of days, so we need to spend them carefully, but if you read the entire Psalm written by Moses, he is talking about how our lives are relatively short compared to God's concept of time. For this reason we should realize that we won't live forever and make the most of our time here on earth. (Moses himself lived to be 120 years old.)

The truth is that there are many more verses that indicate that the length of life can actually be extended beyond the normal lifespan (which is generally understood in scripture to be 70 years).

Psalm 91:14-16 *(Read the whole Psalm. It will encourage you!)*
14Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name.
15He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him.
16With long life will I satisfy him, and shew him my salvation.)
Proverbs 3:1-2
My son, do not forget my law,
But let your heart keep my commands;
2 For length of days and long life
And peace they will add to you.

Ephesians 6:1-3
Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: 3 "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."
Proverbs 3:13-16
13 Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding.
14 For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.
15 She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her.
16 Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour.
Psalm 103

1 Bless the LORD, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His holy name!
2 Bless the LORD, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits:
3 Who forgives all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases,
4 Who redeems your life from destruction,
Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,
5 Who satisfies your mouth with good things,
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

There are many more verses to indicate that God will bless those who believe in Him with a long life. So let us not give into the temptation that it's our time or someone else's time to die. Let us also stop spreading this tradition when horrible things happen.

To me, the saddest application of this dragon is often heard after the death of a child. The stupidest things I've ever heard have been at the funerals of children. Let's face it, there is no sense to be made out of a child's death, but we go ahead and try anyway without giving one thought to what the Bible might have to say about it. In my mind, people should be silent and admit they do not know why rather than make up lies.

I say the following to counteract some of the lies I've heard. God does not "need" babies in heaven. He does not kill them young because He knows they will make a choice later that will damn them to hell. He does not turn them into little cherubs and let them fly free in heaven. And he certainly does not assign someone ten days, ten months, or ten years to live. I think everyone who says stupid things like that needs to be quiet in Jesus name.

If you have lost a child, my heart breaks for you. My mother lost her first baby, Thomas Dale Buxton. He is as real to me as my other brother. We also nearly lost our second daughter at birth. Few things are more tragic and painful. May God comfort you.

If you have the possibility of having another child, or if that time has passed for you and you have loved ones who could get pregnant, I pray that God will remove from you all the lies you surely heard at your child's funeral, those I've written above, and some that are even more dreadful. Listen to me. I don't know your story, but God did not kill your baby. He does not kill the babies of those for whom He has died. In fact, the fruit of your womb is blessed, and your child is considered holy.

Deuteronomy 28:1-4
Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. 2 And all these blessings shall come upon you

and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God[85]*:*
3 "Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country.
4 "Blessed shall be the fruit of your body,"
1 Corinthians 7:14
For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.

[85] "Obedience" in the New Testament in believing in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and loving one another.

Believe this with all of your heart, and every time the enemy tells you that the next baby isn't going to make it either, quote these scriptures to him and let him know he CANNOT TAKE YOUR BABY. If your baby has troubles when it is born, don't give up and don't give in to the thought that your baby will die. Believe that he is blessed and fight for him in Jesus name.

Baby Joey

When our second daughter was born, we knew something was wrong when they didn't bring her in to see me. She was in an incubator gasping for each breath. Before they took her to a bigger hospital for evaluation, they rolled her into my room so I could see her. She was beautiful, and my arms ached to hold her. The next hospital decided to fly her to U.C. Davis Medical Center because she needed 100% oxygen.

*I knew our church was praying for a miracle. This was so comforting as I was very weak right after my C-section. I only had just enough strength to say out loud, "Satan, you can't have my baby." A short while later, my husband called me and he said, "Satan can't have our baby." I told him I had just said the same thing. We didn't know much about the Bible at that time, being only 23 years old, be we did believe God's Word that the fruit of my womb was blessed (**Deut. 28:4**).*

I could feel the support of the prayers from our church. I knew she would be fine, but it was serious. The valve between her lungs and heart that closes at birth had remained open (or had been reopened by resuscitation). We waited days to see if it would close, but it didn't. We consented to experimental medicine to close it, but it didn't work. The next step would be surgery.

One day, as we were driving to see her, it seemed God spoke to my heart, "Cathy, Satan cannot have your baby, but what if I take her?" I thought about this and replied. "Lord, I don't believe that You take babies, but You know that I will serve You no matter what." Perhaps God was testing my faith or it was just a thought I had. I did not know for sure. What I do know, is that shortly after this, the valve closed.

We asked the doctor about what happened. He told us plainly that the valve did not close because of the medicine because there were only a limited number of hours it could be effective, and they had long past. He said there was no explanation for it closing by itself. We said, "Then it was a miracle." He said that it would seem so.

Joella is an adult now, perfectly healthy, and pregnant with her second son. She is a long-distance runner, too. She loves God with all her heart and knows He saved her life. The enemy tried to kill her, but God was faithful to His Word, and now she lives to serve Him.

My soul

magnifies the Lord,

and my spirit

has rejoiced

in God my Savior.
For He who is mighty
has done great things for me,
and holy is His name.

Luke 1:46b-47, 49

12B

CURES FOR UNBELIEF

WE BELIEVE . . .

> . . . that unbelief keeps us from receiving what God has already provided, and that by prayer and study of God's word, we can overcome it and receive the healing God has provided for us.

Unbelief is not always the reason we have not yet seen the manifestation of God's promises. We will discuss how to deal with this situation in the second half of this lesson. However, if unbelief is the problem, there are cures. God doesn't abandon us and say, "Too bad for you! You have unbelief." No, He wants to help us. One of the first steps we already took in the last lesson by examining some of the many traditions and scripture twisting that discourages us from believing. Now we will continue to slay the evil dragon of unbelief.

Cures for Unbelief

PRAYER

Whether you agree with my evaluation of the man with the demon possessed son or not, it is clear that the man with unbelief did pray, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief." So, in my opinion, we must first recognize *if* we have unbelief. Then we ask the Lord to help us. It really is possible to have both belief and unbelief at the same time. The unbelief cancels out the belief and nothing happens. So, simply ask God to help you. If this doesn't "work" consider digging deeply into the word of God

OUR RE-EDUCATION

We know that God gives teachers to the body of Christ; however, when it comes to divine healing, many have been taught healing isn't for today. Others form opinions about healing based primarily on experience instead of the Word.

Teachers are in the body to equip us, but each believer is able to understand the Word because the Spirit teaches us. It isn't rebellious to challenge what is taught. In fact, Luke commended the Bereans as being more noble than the Thessalonians because they received Paul's teaching gladly, but then searched the Scriptures daily to see if what he taught was true. Imagine challenging the teaching of the great Apostle Paul! Would you be so bold as to take a second look at your own pastor's or teacher's sermon? You should!

We have also read and heard the testimonies of those who have not been healed, yet God is still using their lives. Some assume this means God wants them sick. Perhaps we have been sick, not healed, and God has used us, seemingly because of it. It isn't cold-hearted to put these testimonies aside (even our own) and evaluate the Word of God only. We must find out what is true according to His Word and *not base our beliefs on human experience*.

Just what did God say about divine healing? If we are sick or weak or if we are fighting for our lives or the life of our child, it will be worth every minute we spend seeking out the truth about healing. The truth sets us free, free to believe.

We know that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God, so we must go back to the Word. Begin in Matthew. Read carefully. Take time to think about what you read, especially when divine healing or miracles take place. Lay aside what you've been

taught, and let the Holy Spirit teach you. Take notes. Observe. Read the study notes keeping in mind they are not Scripture. Ask yourself, "Did Jesus ever deny healing to anyone who came to Him in faith? Did He lay hands on anyone to make them sick? Did he randomly come up to someone and kill them? Is Jesus the same today as He was then?" Ask God to open your mind and increase your faith while you honestly study the subject.

While healing is received by faith, false ideas and the experience of others can keep us from believing. In these cases, re-education will encourage us to find the faith needed to believe and receive a miracle from God.

> ***1 Thessalonians 5:21***
> *Test all things; hold fast what is good.*
> ***Acts 17:11***
> *These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.*

PRAYING GOD'S WORD

There is much power and comfort to be found in taking the written words of Christ or other Scripture and making a prayer. While reading the Bible, it is such a blessing to just stop and turn a Scripture into prayer by thanking God for a truth, applying a truth to our hearts, or taking a prayer that someone prayed in Scripture and personalizing it for ourselves or someone else.

Here are some examples. "Father, I thank You that you have made me the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus," (**2 Corinthians 5:21**). "Your Word tells me if I lack wisdom to ask for it and to do so without doubting, so I ask You to give me wisdom in this situation, and I believe you will answer," (**James 1:5**). "Father, as Paul prayed that the Ephesians would be strengthened, so I pray for my friend that he will be strengthened." (**Eph. 3:14-19**).

When it comes to believing for miracles and for divine healing, we can, of course, do the same: pray the Scriptures. "Father, I thank You that by Your Son's wounds, I am healed," (**1 Peter 2:24**). "Lord, You said that whatever I ask in prayer, believing, I will receive. I believe you will do a miracle in this situation I'm facing." (**Matthew 21:22**)

All Christians want to pray in agreement with the will of God, but we aren't always sure what that means. God's Word is His will, so if we pray according to His Word, we are praying according to His will. Praying His will brings results because we are told in **1 John 5:14-15** that when we ask according to His will He hears us and gives us the petitions we ask of Him. What a joy and privilege to pray the will and word of God.

> ***Hebrews 4:12***
> *12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*
> ***John 17:17***
> *Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.*

> ***Psalm 119:130***

The entrance of Your words gives light;
It gives understanding to the simple.
Psalm 119:105
Your word is a lamp to my feet
And a light to my path.
1 John 5:14-15
Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

When Unbelief is Not the Cause

Unbelief is not always the problem. Sometimes we need faith and patience to inherit our promise. Here are some strategies for what you can do while you wait to see God's power manifested in your life.

STANDING WHILE WE WAIT

Sometimes there is a period of time between the point we believe we receive the promise and when it is actually manifested. I like the way The Amplified Bible puts **Mark 11:24,** "Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe (trust and be confident) that it is granted to you, and you will (get it)."

If a just king granted your petition, you would leave the throne room thrilled that your petition was granted. Why? Having something granted by the king, who is both able to give you what you request, but who will also not go back on his word, means what you have been granted is yours, and it's just a matter of time before you have it in your hands.

We come to the King of Kings, and we ask for healing to be given to us. The King says, "I already purchased this healing for you and it is yours." Perhaps we leave the King's throne room limping or coughing or in pain, but since we believe the King because know He is able to give it to us and that He will do what He has promised, we can rejoice and leave in confidence.

Of course, we prefer for healings or miracles to take place immediately, and often they do. Actually, this was the norm when Jesus was on earth. Other times, with faith in our hearts, knowing our request is already granted, we keep on believing. This section is about what we can do while we "stand" in faith patiently waiting.

Hebrews 6:11-12
11 And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, 12 that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.
Mark 11:24
24 Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

EXPECT RESISTANCE WHILE YOU STAND

We often avoid discussing it, but we have an enemy in this life that hates us and wants to destroy us and works daily to do it. He wants to steal what God has promised, steal our health, our sanity, our peace, our hope, our joy, and even our life. Everyday he

works against us, but especially when we are waiting for a promise to be manifested, we will encounter resistance.

This is to be expected. The enemy will whisper lies such as, "God wants you sick." He'll say, "Yes, he healed her, but He doesn't want to heal you." "Healing gradually decreased over the centuries." "Medicine is God's way of healing people now." "If you were completely surrendered to God, you would accept this sickness." "God is trying to teach you something through this."

The Bible clearly instructs us to resist the devil (**James 4:7**), stand against him, take up armor to combat him, wrestle with him, bind him, and quench his fiery darts. Not everything is God's will, or why are we told to fight?

We aren't fighting against people, but sometimes we have to lovingly oppose their wrong ideas. In an effort to comfort us, some will say some very unscriptural things. Saying something is so doesn't make it true. Just because someone writes in a book that you should submit yourself to whatever happens in your life as being God's will[86], does not mean that you should submit yourself to everything that happens to you in this life is God's will BECAUSE not everything that happens is God's will. Only God's Word is true. If someone teaches you something that contradicts the Word of God, even if that person is and angel, Paul the Apostle, your own pastor, or your very best friend, don't receive it.

God provided our healing through Christ's suffering. The enemy wants us sick, and if possible, he wants to kill us. He can't steal our salvation, but he will try to make it so our light can no longer shine. Clearly we are to submit to God completely, but also we are to resist the devil steadfastly.

1 Peter 5:8-10
8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. 10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you
Ephesians 6:10-13
10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.
1 John 4:4
4 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.
Isaiah 54:17
17 No weapon formed against you shall prosper,
And every tongue which rises against you in judgment
You shall condemn.
This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD,
And their righteousness is from Me,"
Says the LORD.

[86] This is stated in an extremely popular book. Be careful what you believe. Challenge everything, even if it is written by a supposedly respected theologian. Always match up what you read and hear with the word of God.

James 4:7
Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.
John 10:10-11
The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.
11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.

PRAY AND FORGIVE

Listed with the armor of God is prayer. We are to continually bring our petitions to God and to pray for others. It is so easy when we are waiting for our healing to be manifested, for the world to seemingly start revolving around us. Our needs, our pain, and our frustrations, while valid, can consume us if we let them. How can this be avoided? By praying for others. We might not have the strength to get out there and do, do, do as we used to, but nothing can stop us from praying. By praying for others, the focus is immediately shifted off our own situation. It is a way of battling the enemy, a weapon which is no secret, and is powerful. When we pray for others, we are trusting that our own needs are being met. However awful our situation may be, there is always some saint somewhere else in the world who is going through something just as bad or worse.

After making such an incredible statement in **Mark 11:22-24** about mountain moving faith, Jesus adds that when we stand praying, to forgive. It is interesting how easily unforgiveness can creep into our hearts, but we cannot afford to be bitter. We must forgive people from our hearts, even those who haven't apologized or who don't deserve it! None of us deserves the forgiveness of God. We are to be like Jesus and forgive others just as we have been forgiven by Christ. Unforgiveness can get in the way of God's best in our lives. So, while we wait, let us pray for the needs of others and forgive completely.

Ephesians 6:10-11, 18
10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.
Mark 11:24-25
24 Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. 25 "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.
James 5:13-16
13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.
Psalm 34:15
The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,
And His ears are open to their cry.

STANDING WITHOUT FEAR

Through His death Jesus destroyed the one who had the power of death. The New American Standard Bible says it this way, "...that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death,..." (**Hebrews 2:14**). Satan may roar like a lion, but he cannot devour us if we put our trust in Jesus.

Paul wrote in **Philippians 1:21**, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." What surrender and peace to be able to say this! Life is about living for Christ. Dying is about being with Him. "For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's," says **Romans 14:8**. Jesus is our Lord whether we are alive or not. The enemy cannot take this away from us ever, so we don't have to fear.

There are plenty of Scriptures (some which I've already used in these lessons) which indicate we will be blessed with a long life. Apart from being killed for our faith, we can anticipate living an abundant long life. If sickness threatens to take our life, we can expect to be healed because Jesus provided for our healing through His suffering.

God isn't planning our death; He has plans for our future. So, while we stand waiting for the miracle that has been granted to us to be manifested, we can do so without fear. In Jesus we have freedom from a lifetime of slavery to fear. We know our life is in the hands of God, and we can trust Him to give us a long healthy life.

Hebrews 2:14-15
Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.
Psalm 27:1
1 The LORD is my light and my salvation;
Whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the strength of my life;
Of whom shall I be afraid?
2 Timothy 1:7
For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.
1 John 4:18
There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.
Jeremiah 29:11
For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

The Power of Our Words

Our words are powerful. Throughout Scripture we see that our words are a force for good or evil. We are taught that our words should not be used for both blessing and cursing

(**James 3**). This is because we have been created in the image of God. In **Romans 4:17** it says that God gives life to the dead, and "calls those things which do not exist as though

they do." Consider creation. By His words He brought into existence what never was. We aren't God, of course, but our words do have creative power.

By our words we can lift the countenance of a friend or bring discouragement. Each of us understands this because we know how the words of others affect us. Our words have power to help or hinder, to hurt or to heal, of life and of death. Consider the effect of confessing with our mouths the Lord Jesus. With our words we become a new creation (**Romans 10:10**).

Our words matter, but Jesus goes even deeper...into the heart. For example, it isn't enough to confess Him as Lord, but we must also believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead. Belief and words are a powerful force.

Mark 11:23
*"Whoever SAYS to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but **believes** that those things he SAYS will be done, he will have whatever he SAYS."*
Proverbs 18:21
Death and life are in the power of the tongue,
And those who love it will eat its fruit.
Psalm 19:14
Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight,
O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.
Matthew 9:20-22
*And suddenly, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of His garment. 21 For she SAID to herself, "If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well." 22 But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, "Be of good cheer, daughter; your **faith** has made you well." And the woman was made well from that hour.*
Joel 3:10
Let the weak say, 'I am strong.'

SPEAKING THE HIGHER TRUTH

While we wait to see God's promises manifested, we realize that two opposite truths exist in our lives. We believe that by the wounds of Jesus we are healed, yet we are sick. So, what do we say about this? Do we pretend to not be sick? No. We speak the higher truth.

We have a choice what to believe and what to say, and there is power in believing and speaking God's word instead of what we see and feel. In confessing with our mouths our belief in God's word, in His authority, in His faithfulness, we declare that God's word is more true and powerful than what we see.

We can speak God's word even when it does not yet appear to be true. This is not lying to ourselves, rather demonstrating our faith in God's character and promises. We can speak this higher truth in prayer. "Father, I thank you that your word says that I was healed by the suffering of Christ. I receive this, and declare that by His wounds I am healed." We can take key scriptures and frame them on our walls where we will likely read them

repeatedly. We can speak God's greater truth to friends and family. We can sing God's promises and praise His faithfulness.

When we are weak or someone we love is suffering, it is easier to worry and complain than believe and proclaim. Our bodies remind us we are sick, and it is natural to want to talk about it. As believers, we can chose to believe God's word is more true than sickness, and we also can chose to speak the higher truth, "By His wounds, I am healed."

Joel 3:10
Let the weak say, 'I am strong.'
Hebrews 4:14-16
Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
Hebrews 10:22-23
Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

PRAISE HIM WHILE WE WAIT

There are a multitude of scriptures about praising God, but Psalm 149 gives insight into its power. Not only does praise bring God pleasure, but it is a weapon against our enemies. In praising God, we declare that we trust Him. We focus on our love for Him; on His greatness; on His unlimited power. We actually bind our enemy. We rob him of power. This is an "honor" only given to God's children.

While we wait we don't need to feel helpless. We know that God is not a liar, that He keeps His promises, that He is the Lord Our Healer. So, we lift our voices in praise and confidence. What an honor it is to praise Him.

In everything, but not for everything, we are to give thanks. We don't thank God we are sick because He didn't make us sick in the first place. We thank God even though we are sick. How can we do this? We know that He is our Healer. By giving thanks for a thousand other wonderful things He has done and is doing, and for continuing to praise Him for the eventual manifestation of His truth in us, we express our deepest trust and faith that He is the Lord of our lives and can be trusted. Through trials and tears, through hardship and pain, He is worthy of our praise.

Psalm 149:5-9
5 Let the saints be joyful in glory;
Let them sing aloud on their beds.
6 Let the high praises of God be in their mouth,
And a two-edged sword in their hand,
7 To execute vengeance on the nations,
And punishments on the peoples;
8 To bind their kings with chains,

And their nobles with fetters of iron;
9 To execute on them the written judgment—
This honor have all His saints.
Praise the LORD!

Psalm 34:1
1 I will bless the LORD at all times;
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
2 My soul shall make its boast in the LORD;
The humble shall hear of it and be glad.
3 Oh, magnify the LORD with me,
And let us exalt His name together.
4 I sought the LORD, and He heard me,
And delivered me from all my fears.

Finding Strength

Even the smallest cold can make us sluggish. Other problems such as aching joints or recurring headaches can become overwhelming. A life-threatening illness along with treatments can make living normally impossible. It is so tempting to just give up on life, just close the front door and tell everyone to stay away, but there are things we need to do and people who still need us.

We don't always immediately see the results of our prayers. Whether we are deal with doubt or waiting in faith, we can find strength in the Lord. If our bodies are exhausted, our spirits can still soar.

Psalm 37:39-40
But the salvation of the righteous is from the LORD;
He is their strength in the time of trouble.
40 And the LORD shall help them and deliver them;
He shall deliver them from the wicked,
And save them,
Because they trust in Him.
Isaiah 40:29-31
He gives power to the weak,
And to those who have no might He increases strength.
30 Even the youths shall faint and be weary,
And the young men shall utterly fall,
31 But those who wait on the LORD
Shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.
2 Corinthians 1:3-4
Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Reasons to Live

Giving in and giving up seems like the easiest path sometimes, especially when we have been beaten down for a long time. Knowing that death will bring us directly into the arms of Christ makes it appear to be a better alternative than fighting an illness. We might look at this awful world or our own undesirable circumstances and be tempted to think heaven would be so much better. Of course, it would, but there are many important reasons for us to live. David wrote in **Psalm 6:4-5**:

"Return, O Lord, deliver me!

Oh, save me for Your mercies' sake!

For in death there is no remembrance of You;

In the grave who will give You thanks?"

The number one reason why we should live is so that our lives can go on giving praise to God. Alive we can be a light to a lost world and proclaim His greatness. There are still people to whom we can minister, people who need us. Our families need us. Our friends need us. Our future family and friends need us. These lives will never be the same without us as part of them.

Secondly, our victory in Christ over illness will give reason for others to reach out in faith to God for the same. Our victory will be their victory. Just the fact that we are healed will give God glory. It will shout His praises clearly that He is the Lord Our Healer, that nothing is impossible with our God, and that by His wounds we truly are healed. All of these are very good reasons to go on living.

Philippians 1:21-26
For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. 24 Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. 25 And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, 26 that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18
Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Not to Worry

Philippians 4:6-7
Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Nothing means nothing, not sickness, not trials, and not circumstances over which we feel we have no control. Everything means in every situation. We are to let God know our requests sincerely and humbly with thanksgiving.

In other words: Don't worry. Instead, tell God what you want. Yes, God WANTS us to tell Him specifically what we want. When we do this, He gives us indescribable peace in our minds and hearts.

If you don't know what you want, God has a solution for that also. Pray in the spirit. You will be praying the perfect will of God while your pour your heart out to Him.

Romans 8:26-27
26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Never Give Up Hope

We've all said it or at least heard it, "I hope so." Yet, usually this is used in a negative sense as if to say, "Well, that's what I'd like, but I'm not sure it will happen. In fact, I kinda doubt it." I love the true definition[87] of the word "hope": "to cherish a desire with anticipation, to desire with expectation of obtainment, to expect with confidence of obtainment". How different this is from how the word is commonly used today. When we truly hope, we actually have confidence we will obtain.

Your situation might *look* desperate, but "desperate" means "without hope". As born again Christians, we are NEVER without hope. We hope because He is faithful. We hope because He cannot lie. We hope because He is the Lord Our Healer.

Why are you cast down, O my soul?

Psalm 42:11
Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God;
For I shall yet praise Him,
The help of my countenance and my God.

[87] Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary

Romans 12:10-13
Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; 11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 ***rejoicing in hope****, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; 13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.*
Romans 15:4
For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we ***through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope****.*
Romans 15:13
Now may the ***God of hope fill you with all joy and peace*** *in believing, that you may* ***abound in hope*** *by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

1 Corinthians 13:7
(Love) bears all things, believes all things, ***hopes all things****, endures all things.*
Colossians 1:27
To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the ***hope of glory****.*
1 Timothy 1:1
Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the ***Lord Jesus Christ, our hope****,*
Hebrews 10:23
Let us hold fast the ***confession of our hope*** *without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.*

No Condemnation

Some conclude that if we don't get healed it must mean we don't have enough faith. So, on top of feeling sick, we feel guilty for being sick. Being sick is miserable enough without packing on the guilt. Yet, some of us feel this way. So what if we do lack faith? Will God abandon us and send us to hell for it? Of course not! If we find ourselves to be in unbelief, we simply admit it, then dig deeper into the Scriptures so that our faith will grow.

Being sick inconveniences others, and this can fill our hearts with grief. Usually, those who truly love you care more about your health than the difficulties it causes them. Don't allow condemnation to overtake you. Don't waste energy feeling guilty. God is not condemning you. He is on your side. He is working in your heat to encourage you and strengthen your faith.

Romans 8:31-39
What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written:
" For Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."
37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor

powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
1 Peter 5:6-7
Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, 7 casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.
Ephesians 3:20-21
Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR REVIEW

1. Were there one or two dragons of unbelief (traditions that contradict God's word) that especially stood out to you in Lesson 12A?

2. Are there steps you will take to overcome unbelief?

3. If unbelief is not the problem, what will you do to stand in God's promises while you wait for them to be realized in your life?

APPENDIX A

The Accomplishments of the Cross[88]

✞ **The message of the cross is foolishness to some, but to us, it is the power of God.**
"For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the **cross of Christ should be made of no effect**. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:

" *I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,*
And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent."

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

✞ **The cross demonstrates the love of God for us…for me.**
John 3:16—For God so **loved** the world that He gave His only begotten Son
Ephesians 5:2—And walk in love, as Christ also **has loved us and given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice** to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.
Romans 5:8—But God demonstrates **His own love toward us**, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
Galatians 2:20—I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, **who loved me and gave Himself for me**.
1 John 4:10—In this is love, not that we loved God, but that **He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins**.
Ephesians 5:25—Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also **loved the church** and gave Himself for her.

✞ **Through the cross we are crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to us.**

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[88] Compiled by C.D. Hildebrand
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Galatians 6:14—But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the **world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.**

✞ **His cross removed the wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles and man and God.**
Ephesians 2: 14-18 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both (*Jew and Gentile)* one, and has **broken down the middle wall of separation**, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might **reconcile them both to God** in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. 18 **For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.**

✞ **Because Jesus submitted to the cross, He has been given a name above every name.**
Phil. 2:8-11—And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. 9 Therefore God also has **highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,** 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

✞ **Through the cross of Christ we who were once separated from God and were His enemies are reconciled to God, brought near to God, we have peace with God, and boldness to enter the presence of God (the Holiest)**
Colossians 1:19-22—For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to **reconcile all things to Himself**, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, **having made peace through the blood of His cross.** 21 And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now **He has reconciled** 22 in the body of His flesh through death, **to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—**
Ephesians 2:13—But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off **have been brought near by** the blood of Christ,
Hebrews 10:19—Therefore brethren, **having boldness to enter the Holiest** by the blood of Jesus . . .
1 Peter 3:18—For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that **He might bring us to God**, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,
Romans 5:10—For if when we were enemies we were **reconciled to God through the death of His Son,** much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.
Colossians 1:21-22—And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, **yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death**, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.
1 Peter 3:18—For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, **that He might bring us to God**, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.

✞ **Gentile believers never were under the law, but He has set all believers free from the**

requirements of the law and the curse of not obeying the law. The Old Covenant is no longer in effect, and the New Covenant has been established.
Colossians 1:13-14—And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has **made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,** 14 having **wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us,** which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having **nailed it to the cross**.
Galatians 3:13—Christ has **redeemed us from the curse of the law,** having **become a curse for us** (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree")
Matthew 26:28—For this is My **blood of the new covenant**, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.
Hebrews 13:20—Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through **the blood of the everlasting covenant.**

✞ **Through His cross we have been set free from sin and forgiven of all trespasses. We now have a clear conscience, are continually cleansed from sin because He bore our sins on the cross.**
Matthew 26:28—For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the **remission of sins**.
Colossians 1:13—And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, **having forgiven you all trespasses,**
Colossians 1:14—in whom we have redemption through His blood, **the forgiveness of sins**
Ephesians 1:7—In Him we have redemption through His blood, **the forgiveness of sins,** according the riches of His grace.
1 John 1:7—But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, **and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.**
Revelation 1:5—and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and **washed us from our sins in His own blood**,
Hebrews 7:27—who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did **once for all when He offered up Himself**.
Hebrews 9:26—He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world, but now, once at the end of the ages, **He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself**.
Hebrews 10:11-12—And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had **offered one sacrifice for sins forever**, sat down at the right hand of God,
1 Peter 2:24—Who Himself **bore our sins in His own body on the tree**, that we, having **died to sins**, might live for righteousness—
1 Peter 3:18—For Christ also **suffered once for sins**, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,
Romans 6:1, 6—Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, **that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.**

✞ **We have been given eternal life and an eternal inheritance.**
John 6:54—Whoever eats My **flesh** and drinks My **blood** has **eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.**
Hebrews 9:15—And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, **by means of death**, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called **may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.**

✞ **With His blood, we have been purchased/redeemed by God.**
Acts 20:28—Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God **which He purchased with His own blood**.
Ephesians 1:7—In Him we have **redemption through His blood**, the forgiveness of sins, according the riches of His grace.
Colossians 1:14—in whom we have **redemption** through His blood, the forgiveness of sins
Hebrews 9:12—Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained **eternal redemption.**
1 Peter 1:18-19—Knowing that you were not **redeemed** with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the **precious blood of Christ**, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.
Revelation 5:9—And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worth to take the scroll, And to open its seals, For You were slain, And **have redeemed us to God by Your blood** out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
1 Corinthians 1:30—But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and **redemption**—
Titus 2:14—Who gave Himself for us, that He might **redeem us from every lawless deed** and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

✞ **By His Cross, we have been made, holy, blameless, are beyond reproach, justified, sanctified, made righteous, have a clean conscience, and have newness of life.**
Galatians 2:21—I do not set aside the grace of God; for if **righteousness** comes through the law, then **Christ died in vain**.
Colossians 1:21—And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled 22 in the body of His flesh through death, **to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight**—
Romans 3:24—being **justified freely** by His grace through the **redemption** that is in Christ Jesus,
Romans 5:9—Much more then, having now been **justified by His blood**, we shall be saved from

wrath through Him.
2 Corinthians 5:21—He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that **we might become the righteousness of God** in Him.
Hebrews 13:12—Therefore Jesus also, that He might **sanctify the people with His own blood**, suffered outside the gate.
Hebrews 9:14—How much more shall the **blood** of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, **cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?**
1 Corinthians 1:30—But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us **wisdom from God**—and **righteousness** and **sanctification** and **redemption**—
Titus 2:14—Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and **purify** for Himself His own **special** people, **zealous for good works.**
2 Corinthians 5:17—Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**; old things have passed away; behold, **all things have become new**.

✞ **Satan was destroyed, the power of death in our lives was destroyed, fear was destroyed, bondage due to the fear of death was destroyed, we overcome, and we are delivered from this present age by the work of the cross.**
Romans 5:17—For if by the one man's (*Adam's)* offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness **will reign in life** through the One, Jesus Christ.
Hebrews 2:14-15—Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might **destroy him who** had the **power of death,** that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.
Revelation 12:11—And **they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb** and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.
Galatians 1:4—Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might **deliver us from this present evil age**, according to the will of our God and Father,
Colossians 1:15—Having **disarmed principalities and powers,** He made a public spectacle of them, **triumphing over them** in it (*the cross*).

✞ **By Jesus' suffering and his wounds we are healed. He purchased it for us. It is ours.**
1 Peter 2:24—Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—**by whose stripes you were healed.**

✞ JESUS' HORRIBLE SACRIFICE MERITS OUR MOST SINCERE RESPONSE. WHATEVER HE PURCHASED, WE SHOULD POSSESS. HE IS WORTHY OF THIS. WE MUST NEVER DOWNPLAY WHAT HE HAS ACCOMPLISHED FOR US BY LIVING BELOW WHAT HE HAS PROVIDED FOR US. If He says we are holy, sanctified, righteous or new creations then we are. If He says we are forgiven for all sin, then we are forgiven. If He says we are redeemed from the curse of the law, then we are redeemed from the curse of the law. If He says that by His wounds we are healed, then by His wounds we are healed. If He says we have access to the Holiest place, let us enter. We need to treasure and receive all that for which He has paid such a dear price.