

# A GUIDE TO LIFE IN CHRIST:

From a Pastor to God's people



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My wife Anne has been the most important part of my life these past twenty years. Her willingness to love me, bear with me, pray for me, and walk together in Christ with me has been so important to me. I cannot thank her enough. I want to thank too my daughter Katie and my son Nathan. They have been such a source of joy and satisfaction to me. I am grateful to God for them. I also want to acknowledge the inestimable part my mother and father have had in my life. They raised me as a Christian, sought to model a Christian life for me, and have always encouraged me to seek God and to do my best.

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## Introduction

For years now, I have wanted to find a simple book or brochure that covered the basics of how one grows as a disciple of Jesus Christ. There are many excellent full treatments of this topic. Over the years though, I have come to realize that many folks in my congregations just don't like to read full-size books, especially non-fiction!

So, it has been in my heart to write something on my own. This "Guide to Life in Christ" is the fruit of that desire. In this guide, I have tried to cover all the basic topics that would be of interest to the sincere Christian who wants to grow in discipleship. There are a few "theological" topics, such as "What is the Bible?" and "What will the return of Jesus Christ be like?", but even those are discussed from the point of view of your growth in faith.

My intention is that you will read and ponder over one page a day. Please take careful note of the Scripture text at the top of each page. That text will "speak" clearly about each topic and in some sense, will be all that really needs to be said.

None of my thinking is particularly original, though I hope it will be useful. I am the product of many and varied Christian influences. In particular though, I do want to mention Dr. Dallas Willard, professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California. His writings and friendship have had a profound influence on my approach to Christian discipleship.

Finally, I want to say for any who don't know me personally, that Jesus Christ is the most important influence in my life. I take the Bible to be the Word of God and absolutely true and authoritative. My convictions expressed here are primarily for the sake of the people in my congregation and are intended for their help as they grow in Christ. May we all grow to be like Him!

*"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."*

—Romans 8:29

## Where is God?

*"In him we live and move and have our being."*—Acts 17:28

Where is God? If asked, most people would respond by saying, "God is in heaven." Well, where then is heaven? Heaven surrounds us like water surrounds a fish. Ask a flounder, "Where is the ocean?" The flounder might mention that the ocean is around Greenland, or off the coast of Africa or North America or China. But the flounder would also say that the ocean is also right next to his body as well. So too with heaven.

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, "Our father who art in heaven..." He did not mean that God is a long way away, as if we were to pray, "Our father who art in New Zealand!" Meaning, that it is nice to have a heavenly father, but for all practical purposes He is inaccessible. That is not what Jesus meant. Jesus meant that our Father is in heaven—in other words, right here, closer to us than our breath.

The Hebrews understood "heaven" (literally "the heavens") to be a consistent whole realm of three layers—the air around us which we breathe and in which the birds fly; the skies with the sun, moon, and stars; and then extending beyond that to an invisible realm for the throne room of God. We must understand though, that when Jesus proclaimed the availability of the Kingdom of Heaven, He meant that ordinary, everyday people could begin to experience the life of God's heaven right now—a life that already surrounded them, but which they were (until then) unable to interact with. As others have said, Jesus was not as much interested in getting people to heaven as He was getting heaven into people!

So where is God? God is over us, under us, in front, behind, to the side, and right next to us. He surrounds us with His presence. He is also willing to come and live right inside our bodies with us. The life of God Himself becomes our life and grows within us into eternity.

## What is Life?

*"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." --John 10:10*

Life for a lot of folks boils down to just "getting through the day." As long as nothing terrible happened, the day was OK. Life consists in struggling to squeeze whatever little satisfaction they can find. If they could just find a "decent" job, or a "decent" spouse, or a "decent" house—or car—or even cup of coffee—then life would be OK. The trouble is that just a "decent" (you fill in the blank) seems almost impossible to find.

I've watched cows in a pasture. Their daily routine seems to be that of getting up, then wandering from one patch of grass to another, some occasional trips to get water, then back to eating. For how many people is their life much the same way? All day at work, then home by way of the store, checking the mail, fixing supper, watching TV, then into bed—to begin it all again the next day and the next day and then the next.

That is not life. That is existence. Jesus came inviting people to Life—real life. His central message was that the life of the Kingdom of Heaven is available NOW to anyone who would be willing to receive it. This life, Jesus taught, was so much more wonderful, purposeful, joyous and grand than our present "life" that to find it would be like discovering buried treasure, then rushing home to sell everything one owned in order to gladly buy that property. Those who discover this "Kingdom life" gladly give whatever it takes to experience it fully, the loss of friends, position, possessions, reputation, family, even their own life, that they may embrace the rushing joy and overwhelming comfort of the acceptance, friendship, and personal presence of God, in and around them, forever.

So what is this Life? This real life, this life in God's Kingdom is life lived interactively with the God of the universe. His leadership, His protection, His provision, His forgiveness, His righteousness, His energy, His wisdom, His power, His perspective, given freely to all who will have it!

## How Do We Enter Life?

*"Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved"—John Newton*

To enter into Life, the life of the Kingdom of God, one must first be born again (John 3:3–8). God first begins to move in the heart of the unconverted one, whether adult or child, and creates this new life by His Spirit, right in the core of that person's being. In response, the one who is now born "from above" experiences a curious mixture of both fear of God and attraction to Him. But the attraction always wins out.

The one who is now born again may not be aware exactly of what has happened, when it happened, or how. They will know though that the most compelling thing in their life now is to relate their entire life around Jesus Christ. This "compulsion" may create an agony of indecision for hours, days, weeks, or even months, but eventually the goodness, sweetness, need, and simply the "rightness" of giving over their lives to Jesus Christ becomes abundantly clear. This new child of God takes the decided step of committing themselves in allegiance first and last to Jesus Christ! At this point, the converted one begins to experience the life of the Kingdom—this life of the companionship and care of God.

From the point of view of the one receiving this life, his or her decisions about Jesus deal with His willingness and capability to rule over them and save them, but most especially with their willingness to let go of life as they know it. The one being converted approaches God out of a great sense of need either for His help or forgiveness (or both) and struggles with the cost of laying down their own will. But eventually the grace of God lovingly persuades them to let go of "that which they cannot keep, to gain that which they can never lose." (Martyred missionary, Jim Elliott.)

The Bible word for this entering into life is the word "faith." "Faith" is best understood as one's trust and reliance upon Jesus. This trust always involves a willingness to yield authority over one's life to God.

## What is Faith?

*“Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”—Heb 11:6*

When the Bible uses the word “faith” it almost always refers to trust. The idea of “blind faith” is not found in the Bible. Trust in God is always presented in Scripture as something we do that just makes good sense, something that is according to reason. Faith is set opposite the idea of “seeing.” In other words, to have faith is to trust something that you cannot see or even prove but that you know is there nonetheless.

For example, I am typing these words using a computer. I know which buttons to push, but I really have no idea how the electronic impulses do what they do in a computer. I cannot “prove” any of it, nor is it something I can “see.” But that doesn’t keep me from my computer!

To have faith is to act as if something is so. When one has faith in God, one acts in certain ways just assuming that God is there, that He is “for” you, that He is guiding, energizing, protecting, and working in tandem with you. One of the biggest mistakes new believers make is to equate faith with the “feeling” of faith. It is true that there are many wonderful times when we feel full of faith. But the feeling of faith is not faith itself. Faith is acting as if something is so. We cannot delay obedience to God in large or small issues depending upon whether or not we have the feeling of faith. We must act in confidence that God is in us and with us.

Faith grows. We start with small acts of faith. Through the transforming of our minds and bodies with spiritual disciplines and through the training process of life’s difficulties (with the subsequent victories and failures—which in themselves are tremendous learning opportunities) our faith grows strong—to the point where we don’t even think about having faith or not. We just know we belong to God, that we are in covenant with Him, that He is in charge, that He will never fail us, and that in everything, He is working to our ultimate good and Christ’s glory!

## How Does Faith Grow?

*“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.”—James 1:2–3*

Our faith in God, our confidence and trust in Him, grows as a gift of grace. But grace does not “zap” faith into us. It uses means to do so. These means are first, the experience we gain through difficulty and suffering; and second, our purposeful practice of spiritual disciplines.

Experience teaches us what to depend on. The first few times I drove through a toll booth as a young driver I felt very insecure. Would I miss the change bin? Would the gate lift? But sure enough, the quarter would drop successfully, the barricade would raise, and after doing so a half dozen times I developed “faith” in toll booths!

Our faith in God also grows by the experience of His help in trouble. We learn to face our daily difficulties (an argument with someone at work, a flat tire, a home emergency) with the confidence that our God has allowed these to pass our way and that literally nothing will happen to us that God is not going to enable us to get through. Seeing the evidence of that divine help, our faith is encouraged to face the next such situation. Even when we “fail” these tests of faith, we can learn for next time!

God also strengthens our faith by our practice of spiritual disciplines. We all live distracted lives. Unless we purposefully make time for God to be fully present to our minds it is unlikely that we will have the faith needed to face our daily troubles. Faith is not something we “work up,” but rather something that is there when we need it—or not!

The primary spiritual disciplines God uses to create faith in us are the practice of solitude, the meditative reading of Scripture, praying over our activities as we go, and deliberately praising and thanking God through our day. These activities will bring God before our minds and will be used by God to instill that confidence which the Bible calls faith.

## What is the Relationship between Faith and Obedience?

*"We received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith." --Romans 1:5*

If you trust your doctor, I strongly suspect that you do what he directs you to do. Whether his instructions involve a change in diet, or in exercise, or to buy a prescription for medication, assuming you have confidence in your doctor, you will "obey" him. This kind of connection between confidence and actual reliance in deed is so normal, we hardly think about it. The confidence that my car will start leads me to depend on it to get me to work. My assumption that the eggs I bought are fresh enables me to use them in a recipe without a second thought. The reliability of my wife has taught me that when she has agreed to meet at a certain time and place that she will be there—so I plan accordingly.

It is not possible to have faith in Jesus Christ without an intention to obey Him. Remember, faith is not just an agreement with facts one believes to be true. It is a preparedness to act as if something is so—in other words faith is trust that leads to obedience. At the same time though, Scripture does separate the idea of faith (trust, dependence) from the action of obedience. James's famous statement, "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26), shows the distinction between the two notions and at the same time their inseparable connection.

Our obedience is something that comes along with our growth in faith. The more we grow in faith, the more we grow in obedience. The more closely we follow Jesus, the more our faith will grow. There is a glorious connection between the two. Our obedience is to Jesus Himself, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Our privilege is to trust Jesus with everything. The more fully we yield our will to obey Him, the more trust we develop. The more trust we develop, the more closely we obey!

## What is it to Obey God?

*"We serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code." --*

Romans 7:6

The Ten Commandments and various other laws God gave His people were designed to train us in righteousness. This strategy failed. Not that there is anything wrong with God's Law. The Law is good and ought to produce righteousness. But Sin has so twisted human nature that ultimately we do not choose to obey God—unless it seems to suit us.

The salvation that Jesus brought us bestows much more than just the forgiveness of sin. Jesus is alive and His Spirit enters our spirit when we are born again and begins to transform our hearts so that more and more we choose to obey God because we desire to do so. Obeying God by yielding our will to the leadership of the Holy Spirit moves us into a higher level of obedience than the Law ever could have. Law-keeping is a matter of obedience due to threat of punishment or hope of reward. Obeying God through the Spirit becomes a matter of willing, free choice springing from a nature that is increasingly conformed to that of Jesus—thus obedience becomes a "natural" outcome of our relationship to God.

In the Old Testament, God's disappointment and anger with the sin of His covenant people is often expressed in terms of their failure to "listen" (see Lev 26:14). The New Testament amplifies this idea: *"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"* (Matt 17:5)

The Bible makes clear that the follower of Jesus obeys God by surrendering to, listening to, and following the guidance of Jesus by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit not only makes known to us the will of God but also inspires our thoughts, feelings and will so that we want to do God's will. The Scriptures are primarily used by the Holy Spirit in this process. But in addition, learning to recognize the living voice of Jesus and to discern God's direction through circumstances and the counsel of other people is also a vital part of "listening."

## What is the Bible?

*"He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."—Luke 24:25–27*

Many Christian folks have never given much thought to the question, "What is the Bible?" They have grown up revering it, believing the Bible to be from God, and understanding that they ought to live by it. I also have found that actual first-hand knowledge of the Bible through consistent reading is rare among church-going people. This should not be.

What is the Bible? It is a library. The amazing thing about this library is that while it contains 66 volumes, written over a period of some 1500 years, by many different authors, separated from each other not only by time, but by distance and culture—this library of books read together tells a unified story! That story is the story of how God displays the greatness of His goodness in saving a people for Himself out of sin, death, and the dominion of evil; forming them into the image of His own Son, Jesus Christ; and using them as His willing co-workers on earth and eventually throughout the universe, such that everything in all creation will be focused on the glory of God and His Son, Jesus Christ!

Jesus Christ is the central figure of the Bible. Everything in the Scriptures ultimately has to do with Jesus. Jesus' own attitude towards the Bible is the attitude we ourselves should adopt. He considered it the very word of God and that no part of it could be disregarded (John 10:35). He considered it unquestionably true, utterly dependable, and that which human life must be based upon. More than likely he had memorized the entire Old Testament from His days as a young boy.

We believe that the Bible was written by human beings, but also simultaneously inspired by God. In other words, the ideas, sentiments, thoughts and words written were completely supervised by God. As such, the Bible is absolutely true and worthy of our trust and obedience.

## What is the Best Way to Read the Bible?

*From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...”—2 Timothy 3:15-16*

The Bible is probably the biggest-selling, yet scarcely read book on the market today! That is a shame. I find the Bible to be a wonderful book, one upon which my daily strength derives. Like Samson with his hair, my life really does depend on my morning routine of reading in the Bible. When I read in the Bible, God speaks to me. Not so much in “remarkable” ways, but in a flow of gentle insight, deep comfort, and emotional encouragement. I leave my time of reading the Scriptures refreshed and ready for my day.

Dr. David Dean, a Southern Baptist pastor in New England, was my mentor when I first made an adult commitment of my life to Jesus. He showed me a pattern of reading the Bible that has worked well for me for over twenty years now. He taught me to use three book-marks: one for the Psalms and Proverbs, one for the Old Testament, and one for the New Testament. Each day I would read one chapter of each, then move the bookmark. For the rest of my life, I plan to continue meditatively reading a continuous cycle through the Old Testament, through Psalms and Proverbs, and through the New Testament. This plan works well because I can go at my own pace. I do not recommend that a person just start at Genesis and try to read through the Bible. Most people come to some difficult and boring parts, get bogged-down, and quit. What’s more, the reader misses out on a steady diet of the New Testament and Psalms which are usually more useful to the Christian in our daily life.

Find a pattern that works for you and plan to make it your life-time goal to master the contents and meaning of the Scriptures. The Bible is not an easy “read.” A good study Bible, such as the NIV study Bible, is a very important tool in my opinion. But the most important thing is simply to read, prayerfully and thoughtfully, often and consistently!

## What About All the Translations of the Bible?

*“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”—Mark 16:15*

It can be upsetting to new believers to discover the differences among English translations of the Bible. Certainty of truth is often what new believers are most interested in and it can be confusing as to what the Bible “says,” given all the minor differences in the English translations.

God intends His Word to be translated in all the languages of the world. Translation is required because the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek. If you have ever tried to translate from one language to another, you will know that there are often a number of different ways you can “say the same thing.” That is why there are differences even among our English translations.

Some fear that using a modern translation instead of the King James Version is irreverent. Keep in mind that the King James Version itself was a “modern” translation back in 1611! Though majestic in its flow, the KJV is not as useful now for two reasons. First, the English used then is different from the English used now. People reading the Bible should not have to struggle over the meaning of the English! Second, Greek and Hebrew manuscripts more ancient than those used by the KJV translators have been discovered since 1611. These older texts have not changed any doctrinal positions, but have changed the text in some places.

Modern translations such as the New International Version combine both readability and accuracy. The New American Standard Version and the New English Version are both excellent, and very literal as to the original word. The Living Bible is a paraphrase and has blessed many Christians, myself included. Roman Catholic versions of the Bible, such as the New Jerusalem Bible, include additional books, called the Apocrypha, which Protestant editions do not. These books are ancient Jewish religious texts, helpful in many ways to Christians, but not (Protestants believe) inspired by God.

## How Do We Reconcile Geological Time with the Creation Account?

*“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”—Genesis 1:1*

Christians passing through our high schools and colleges must have an answer to this question, not only to have credibility with educated inquirers of the gospel, but also to strengthen their own convictions about the faith. I believe that we are living in a time similar to that of Galileo, who insisted, based on the telescope, that contrary to the teaching of the Church, the earth revolves around the sun.

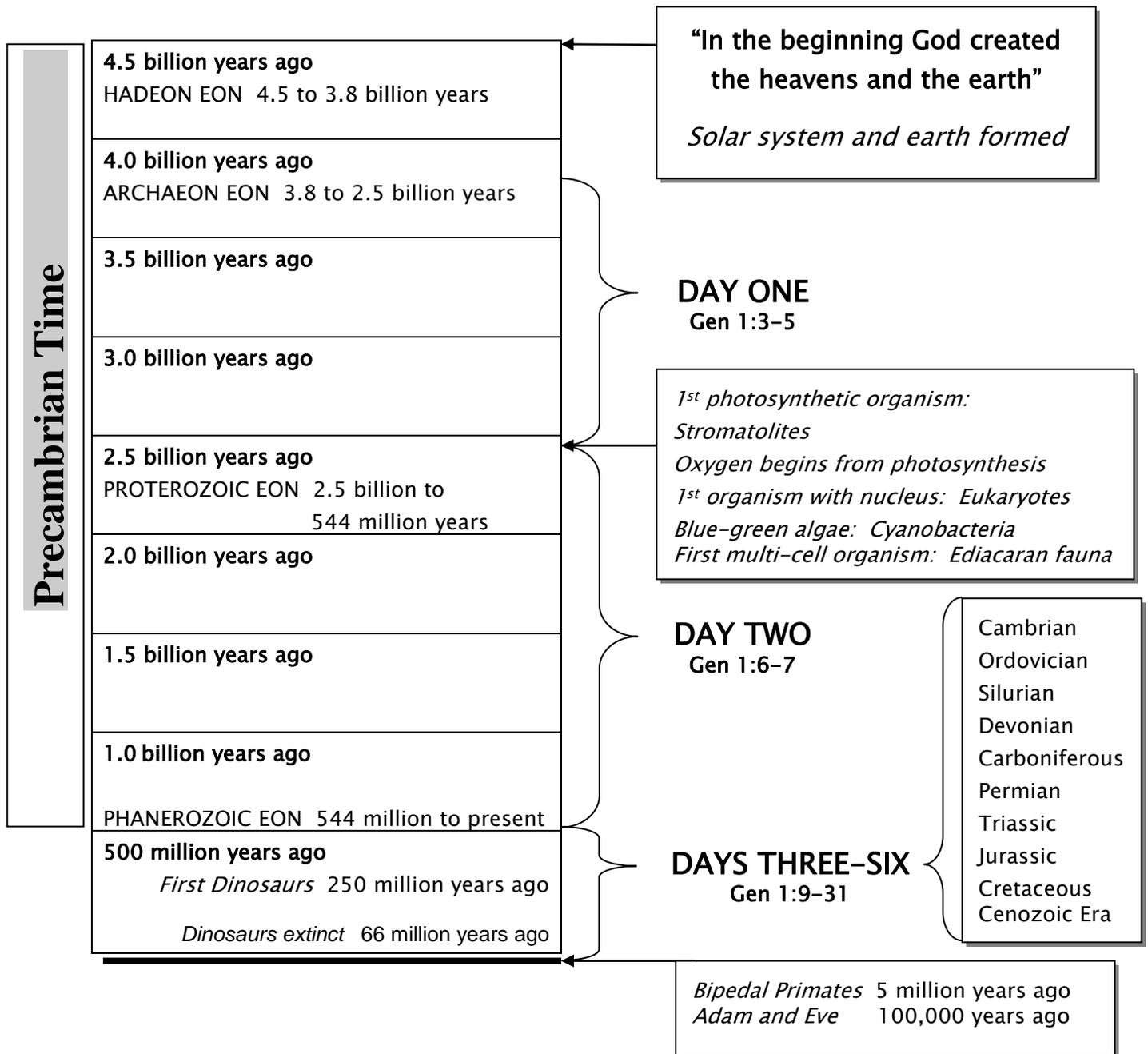
Science has uniformly concluded that the universe is approximately 15 billion years old and that the earth and solar system about 4.5 billion years old. The evidence for this comes from astronomy, cosmology, biology, chemistry, physics, and geology. The Bible teaches that nature is one way God reveals Himself (Romans 1:19–20). Science is the effort to understand nature. To the extent that Science discovers truth it will complement the greater revelation of truth found in Scripture. Where there is apparent inconsistency, either the science is incomplete, or our understanding of Scripture is incomplete.

I believe the “Days” of Creation in Genesis stand for very long periods of time. The point of view of the Creation story is earth, not outer space. This is why “in the beginning” could include 15 billion years ago for the universe (“heavens”) and 4.5 billion years ago for the earth. This is also why microscopic types of blue–green algae, which existed before visible “plants,” are not mentioned in the Genesis account—the algae simply would not have been seen. Similarly, though the sun and moon and stars do not appear until Day Four, it could very well be that was the time they were seen, because the dense cloud cover that constantly hung over the earth began to dissipate at that time.

On the next page, I have attempted to coordinate the Days of Creation with geological time as science understands it at this point.

## An Attempt to Reconcile Geological Time with the Days of Creation

NOTE: The skeletal remains of bipedal primates (Australopithecus, Homo habilis, and others) are often taken to be “early humans.” I do not believe they were early humans, but rather just another type of now extinct primate. Scripture teaches clearly, I believe, that Adam and Eve were modern humans, a new species created by God, made in His own image.



## What Should We Do When We Have Sinned?

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." --1 John 1:9*

There is a matter of identity we need to clear up before proceeding to deal with our acts of sin. Though meant sincerely, it is not true that Christians are "just sinners saved by grace." The Bible uses the term "sinner" to refer to the unconverted. We instead are children of God who struggle with sin. Do you see the difference? Sin is not who we are in Christ. This matter of identity is very important for us to "own."

God accepts us because He wants to, not because we are "worthy." The sincere Christian knows this to be true. God is moved primarily by His nature of love. He is eager to put our sins out of His sight. Unlike many people who will only grudgingly forgive (if at all), God is quick to forgive. One of the most often repeated refrains in the Old Testament describing God is found in Psalm 86:15: *"But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."*

When we sin, we are to keep short accounts with God and others. When we have sinned against someone else, we apologize, seek their forgiveness and do what we can to make restitution. We also confess our sin to God, being very careful not to minimize, excuse, or justify our sin. We ask God to forgive us. Then we thank God that He does forgive us. We do so, not presumptuously, but because of what God says He will do for all who trust Jesus. Jesus died in our place, taking upon Himself the punishment that all our sins deserved—so that we can justly be forgiven! We trust that our sins have been forgiven by the shed blood of Jesus.

God also chooses to forget our sins! How is this possible? God has the ability to choose not to remember. Praise God!

*"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."—  
Jer 31:34*

## Once We Are Saved, Will We Always Be Saved?

*"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them from my hand."—John 10:28*

When most people ask the question "Once saved, always saved?" they are thinking about eternal destiny. If a person accepts Christ, is that person "guaranteed" heaven or does that issue depend in large part on their continued faithfulness? After all, Jesus himself said *"He who stands firm to the end will be saved"* (Matt 24:13), implying that there may be some who do not stand firm and will be lost. Paul also made similar comments: *"If you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel"* (Col 1:23), implying that there could be some who do not continue in their faith. On the other hand we have other Scripture passages like this one also from Paul: *"Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance"* (Eph 1:13–14); as well as this wonderful statement from Peter: *"...an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you"* (1 Pet 1:4). Many similar texts could also be quoted, but my favorite is the one above by Jesus: *"I give them eternal life and they shall never perish."*

How do we put this all together? Clearly some who "claim" to follow Christ do so only for a season and then turn away. Jesus himself acknowledged this would be the case in His parable of the Sower (Matthew 13). It is also the case that all followers of Jesus are to remain "faithful to the end," and in fact must! But how will we remain faithful, given our weakness, the allure and persecution of the world, and the power of Satan? God will keep us faithful! We who have entrusted ourselves to God will find God to be faithful to us. Believers can take heart and trust that Jesus will in fact keep us in His grace until the end.

"Eternal life" is not just life in heaven after we die. It is our on-going interaction in life with God through Jesus now. We who surrender ourselves to Jesus, to trust and follow Jesus, will be kept safe by Jesus!

## What is Heaven Like?

*“They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.”—Rev 22:4–5*

The wonderfulness of life in Heaven is clearly described, but in “broad brush strokes” in the Bible. Yet there are things we do know for sure. Heaven is a place that is full of Jesus Christ. Heaven is a place full of people and angelic beings who love Jesus. None other are found there. Dr. Dallas Willard, Christian author, and professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California, encourages people to imagine Heaven as a place where we will be surrounded by the most beautiful, good, kind, wonderful people we know—multiplied 10,000 times! Heaven is a place that is full of love. The dying sacrifice of the Son of God is the pattern of heavenly love given and received there forever. Heaven is a place of goodness. There will not be even the possibility of sin, evil, or death! *“There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”* (Rev 21:4) Heaven will be a place of glory. The bright–shining glory of God will permeate the air, the land, the water, and the resurrected bodies of believers. We will see each other and worship God seeing the light and the beauty of Christ in each other’s faces!

We have every reason to believe that we will instantly recognize and be recognized by our loved ones and friends who are believers. Jesus’ own resurrection appearances give us assurance about this. I personally believe our loved pets will also be there with us. The writings of C.S. Lewis helped me see the biblical picture of the “new heavens and new earth” as really quite literal. In other words, Heaven is going to look a lot like the glory of nature we see now—only in pristine beauty.

Heaven is also a place of restful responsibility and creative purpose. *“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.”* (Matt 25:21) Our life now is preparing us for this “reigning” with Jesus. Our faithfulness in serving Him now will be rewarded with opportunity for greater, more glorious service then!

## What is Hell Like?

*“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” Matthew 25:41*

Like Heaven, Hell too is described in broad brush strokes. The metaphors describing pain, bitterness, darkness, fire, and eternal torment are very descriptive. Hell is a place full of people who hate God. This hatred comes about in this life through their purposeful, stubborn refusal to acknowledge God or give Him glory. Instead these people become steadfast worshipers of themselves. For these lost souls, their great goal is to have perfect liberty to do what they wish, when they wish, as they wish. Everything in the universe, including all other people and God, should serve their desires, pleasures, and goals!

Taking Dr. Dallas Willard’s analogy of heaven, Hell can be imagined as a place filled with the most selfish, uncaring, ugly, depraved, and wicked people we have ever known—10,000 times multiplied. Hell is a place inhabited by evil people and evil spirits, continually raging against each other and against God.

Hell is a place of gnawing despair with no possibility of relief. It is a place of endless regret (but no repentance). It a place of pain, a place of fire and darkness. There are no “interesting people” in hell—only grotesque, fearful, malevolent, demon-like people, and demons.

The worst thing about Hell is that it is a place without God. Even for the most wicked people, God is now a sustaining presence. They cannot imagine what it will be like to experience the vacuum of the absence of God. Because those in Hell ultimately choose their own fate by their purposeful ignoring and resisting of God, they become creatures for whom repentance is not possible. Day after day, they harden their souls against the knowledge of God to such an extent that the thought of turning to God is not even considered. Hell becomes the only place left for them to exist. So they “exist” in unending torment—forever.

## Who Will Be in Heaven?

*"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."—John 5:24*

By rights, no one except Jesus should be in heaven. The Bible is clear about the matter of "deserving:" *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23)*. The good news is that God is merciful and desires to give grace to sinful human beings. He is willing to accept any and all who will come to Him. The Bible teaches that all who cry out to God from a sincere, repentant heart will be heard and saved (Rom 10: 9–13). Jesus shows us what God is like. In the same way that Jesus received sinners, lepers, tax collectors, and prostitutes, Jesus will receive us.

My friend Dr. Dallas Willard told me that he believes God will look for any possible excuse to save a person. If there is anything in that person's heart that is reaching out to God, God will respond. This makes great sense to me. If God went to the effort to send His only begotten Son and to use His torture and crucifixion to atone for the sins of the world, will he rest content watching multitudes go to Hell? Will He not search and seek out the lost like a shepherd seeking lost sheep, urging, encouraging, and enticing us to come to Him to be saved? Of course He will! This is exactly the Biblical story. Yet, I would not want anyone reading this to assume they can put off their own commitment to Christ, and presume upon the grace of God. The Bible is very clear. Eternal life is found in relationship with Jesus Christ. Becoming his disciple, choosing to trust and obey Him fully is the sure and certain way to enter into this life that leads to heaven!

There are people who will not be in heaven. These people, some quite religious, others quite depraved, continue to resist God, hardening themselves against Him, day after day. They will not be in heaven, not because God would not accept them, but because they will not accept God! They desire to exist alone, out of His presence. Unfortunately, they will get their wish.

## Why is Jesus Christ the Only Way to God?

*"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."—John 14:6*

Nothing annoys non-Christians more than our insistence that Jesus is the only way to God. I can understand their annoyance. They believe we are excluding all other legitimate religions and (especially) their own religion or lack of religion. And they are right.

There are fine and great things associated with many of the other major religions. Christians do not believe that leaders of other world religions are necessarily flawed or "bad." Nor are we saying that somehow we Christians are smarter or "better" than others. But we are saying that the one to whom we own supreme allegiance, Jesus Christ, said of Himself that He is the only "way and truth and life" of God. We believe Jesus!

The Bible teaches that the essence of the "good news of God" is not that there is only ONE way to heaven—but that there is a way! No matter the religion, educational and cultural level, moral strictness, virtue and vice, primitive society or advanced, all people everywhere have sinned against God and are liable to judgment. All human beings are in need of the forgiveness of sin. Only Jesus Christ claims to be able to atone for sin.

What is more, all people not only stand in need of forgiveness, but incredibly enough, stand in need of grace to humble themselves to receive forgiveness! While it is true that almost all people in all cultures and in all times have sought out a god or gods, the motivation has always been to secure the favor or to appease the wrath of these deities. All other religions seek to achieve the attention of the deity—never a religion of dependence in trust to simply receive grace. Only Jesus Christ has atoned for sin and only Jesus Christ seeks and searches out lost souls to bestow upon them the grace of God. For God so loved the world:

*"that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)*

## What About Those Who Have Never Heard of Jesus?

*“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”—Acts 4:12*

This question is probably the one that most troubles Christians of tender heart. We can understand why some will be lost because they deliberately reject Jesus Christ, but we are often uncomfortable with the thought that those who have never even heard the name “Jesus” (about one billion people on the planet today) will also be eternally lost.

Let us begin by being crystal clear. God will do what is right by human beings. He cannot do otherwise. God is tender-hearted, compassionate, patient, and just. He will do more than we could imagine to save human beings. God does not want *“anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”* (2 Pe 3:9) But let us also take the final charge of Jesus Christ seriously when he said: *“Go and make disciples of all nations”* (Matt 28:18)

Christianity is a missionary religion. Policies of governments and school boards that allow a place for the Christian religion as long as no attempt is made by Christians to “proselytize” miss the point. To reach out to others with the gospel that they might be saved is of the essence of the Christian religion! We cannot do otherwise.

We must understand why people are lost. People are not lost because they have never heard of Jesus. People are lost because they have deliberately rejected the knowledge of the true God they had in their conscience (see Romans 1:18–32) and have exalted themselves as their object of worship. People everywhere have chosen to reject the true God.

Jesus Christ saves people who are lost. That is why we tell others. What about the retarded, or young children, or others who by grace do seek the true God, yet to whom no news of Jesus has yet come? God has many ways to bring people to Himself through Jesus. He will do what is right. Our job is to preach Jesus as God’s way for all people to be saved!

## How Shall We Regard Jesus?

*“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”—Colossians 1:15–20*

I know of no more beautiful description of Jesus than this one written by the Apostle Paul—unless it is the very simple statement by Jesus Himself recorded in John 14:9, *“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”*

Sometimes people ask if they should pray to God or to Jesus. Their question is good, even if it is a little confused. Jesus is God (Romans 9:5). Jesus is the Son of God, and He is God. Jesus is not the Father, though. He is the image and “fullness” of the Father—so alike in character and purpose that Jesus could also say of Himself: *“I and the Father are One.”* (John 10:30). Admittedly, the idea of God as One Being in three persons (the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is difficult. I don’t claim to fully understand. But I am quick to pray to God as my heavenly Father; I am quick to pray to Jesus as my Savior, and my God; and I am quick to pray to the Holy Spirit, as God who lives within me.

For our daily purposes, we want to “see” Jesus as in charge of everything. He Himself said, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”* (Matthew 28:18). We take joy in the thought that everything in the universe will one day be gathered together and “placed under His feet” to bring Him glory (Ephesians 1:10). We take comfort that the one before whom we will all stand in judgment is none other than our Savior, Jesus! (Romans 2:16). And even in our persecutions, troubles, and heartaches we triumphantly know that Jesus will allow nothing to ever separate us from Him (Romans 8:35–39)

## What Is The Goal Of Our Life?

*“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” (Romans 8:29)*

The Westminster Shorter Catechism, an ancient confessional document of the Presbyterian Church, poses this question: “What is the chief end of man?” Answer: “The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever!” It would be hard to improve on that statement. But I would like to clarify it somewhat. The purpose of all creation, including our own lives, is to bring honor and glory to Jesus Christ (see Eph 1:9–12). This purpose will be realized. God will see that it happens, with or without our cooperation. Clearly, we want God to use our cooperation!

As individual believers, what is God’s purpose in all the many, varied plans and workings and trials and “providences” He allows to come our way? The focus of God’s mind towards us is to shape our characters to be like that of Jesus Christ. To the extent that our characters, our inner selves, are transformed in Christlikeness, then our outward behavior will “naturally” bear witness to our risen Lord. The life and power and working of the Kingdom of God will become increasingly more robust and visible, not only to ourselves, but to others. In Jesus’ own words, we will “bear much fruit” showing ourselves to be His disciples (John 15:8). This is our primary way of bringing glory to Jesus.

Again from Dr. Dallas Willard: “The only thing we will take from this life is the kind of person we have become.” Think about that. Not achievements, not honors, not relationships, certainly not possessions—we will take into the next life only the inner character we have formed. When young, our inner character was formed in part by our family. By the time we have reached middle age though, we have determined the kind of person we have become. In dependence upon God, His leading, and our practice of spiritual disciplines, we can place ourselves on a path that will result in transformation of our character. No one can do this for us, but we ourselves. And no one can keep us from this but we ourselves!

## How Do We Grow To Become Like Jesus?

*“Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things”—Colossians 3:1–2*

This question ought to be foremost in our conscience. The instructions many Christians today are exposed to unfortunately boils down to one of three emphases—none of which alone are very helpful: 1) Be more committed (try harder to obey) or 2) Have more faith (try harder to have faith) or 3) Be more filled with the Spirit (try harder to be open to the Spirit)!

We must try, for sure. But just “trying harder” will not do the job. Our inner nature must become transformed to the point so that almost without thinking, we find ourselves living in trustful obedience to Jesus. This transformation can only be accomplished by God. Yet, without our intention and full cooperation, it will not take place. Do we intend to become like Jesus? We must come to grips honestly with this question. If you find yourself uncertain at that point, I suggest you begin to pray that God will help you become single-minded about this. We must intend to become like Jesus or it certainly will not happen!

Inner transformation is a three-part process. God the Holy Spirit does the actual changing, and takes the first part. The second part involves the daily trials of our life. God allows them purposely to come our way. Our role in them is to “keep our eyes on Jesus” and look to Him for help. When we “succeed” we praise God. When we “fail” we admit it, thank God for forgiveness, and continue on with our attention on Jesus. The third part of this process is our planned, purposeful practice of spiritual disciplines. It is the spiritual practices of Jesus himself, such as solitude, study, prayer, fasting, service, and worship that we must imitate.

Through this three-part process, our bodies, thoughts, feelings, attitudes, heart, and soul will be gently, deeply changed over time. Christlikeness will then have become not a grinding effort, but the natural outcome of our life.

## What is it to Live in Love?

*“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”—John 15:12–13*

Love is the flow of the life of God Himself. As John says in 1 John 4:8 “God is love.” This quality of life is present in the one who has been born again. To live in the Spirit is to live in the flow of the love of God. The attributes of this love of God are faithfully recorded by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 13: *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres.”*

We must not sentimentalize love by assuming it is to always be “kind.” Always being “kind” may in fact cover-up cowardice on our part, avoiding the pain of conflict. The other side of the coin though is to assume that love is only “tough love.” Too much tough love and the one being “loved” will begin to see us as the enemy! As always, we must look to Jesus. He could be kind or tough or both as the situation required it.

To love is to sacrificially seek the well-being of others. But what will this look like? Dr. Gary Chapman, a Christian family and marriage counselor, has written a very helpful book on this subject, [The Five Languages of Love](#). He has come to realize that we all give and receive love in five distinct ways: “words of affirmation,” “quality time,” “acts of service,” “gifts,” and “physical touch.” He teaches that our family life will be helped greatly when we learn to speak each other’s “love language.”

The love of God living within us will persuade us to seek for and discover the most appropriate ways to show love to others—not only in ways that are meaningful to us, but most importantly, in ways that are meaningful to them! As we seek out ways to show love to others, God will be with us, supplementing our faltering efforts. We will begin to experience the very love of God flowing through us like “rivers of living water” (John 7:38).

## Why Do We Experience Pain?

*“Endure hardship as discipline...No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”—Hebrews 12:7, 11*

The “problem of pain” needs to be addressed. The Bible gives us insight into much about pain that perplexes us. Even so, we will still have to bear with many unanswered questions this side of Heaven. I believe that pain existed in creation to some extent even before the Fall. If Adam tripped and hurt himself, the pain of a wound would have “told” him that he needed to find healing from God. Pain today still serves that purpose. Pain alerts us to the fact that something is not well and needs healing. Most of the pain we experience is a result of the sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden. The pain of guilt, fear, anxiety, dread, despair, anger, unfulfilled desire, loneliness, insult, attack, rejection, self-condemnation and the condemnation of others—all these are a consequence of sin.

All suffering, including physical illness, is still used by God as a signal to come to Him for grace and healing. Doctors and hospitals are given us by God—yet we can also pray for divine healing. When we do wrong and experience guilt we come to God for forgiveness. When we experience shame, we come to God for assurance that we are beloved, precious children in His sight. When we experience anxiety and dread, we come to God for relief—not only from the situation we dread, but from the dread itself! All these can train us to find our sufficiency in God. This “training” will take place if we can trust God enough to cooperate with His purposes in our pain. God is using all things that happen to us for our eventual good (Rom 8:28).

Then there is the pain of consequence. The “law of sowing and reaping” is certain. What we “sow” determines what we “reap.” The truth is that most pain we experience in our life is a result of our own fault, at least to some extent. Pain then becomes our teacher (hopefully) to learn to do right!

## What is God's Purpose in Our Suffering?

*"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed...So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good."—1 Peter 4:12–13, 19*

As mentioned in the previous section, pain alerts us to the fact that something is wrong and should direct us to God for relief. Pain also teaches us (hopefully) not to do again that which has caused us such pain! Let us add other reasons for God's purposes in suffering.

God uses suffering in the lives of non-believers to bring them to a change of mind about God and about the futility of their self-directed lives (He also does this for believers who are "backslidden"). It is true that God does use suffering at times as the just punishment for sin, but even in His acts of judgment against sin, God still pleads with men to turn from their sins and be saved. There are very few acts of God's justice recorded in the Bible that are not also clearly revealed as a means to help people repent and be saved.

God uses suffering in the lives of believers to create perseverance. Perseverance in turn transforms our inner character to the point where we not only have firm faith in Christ, we take on the rock-solid faith of Christ! (See Rom 5:1–5; James 1:2–4; 1 Peter 1:3–9).

God also uses "unjust" suffering to allow us the privilege of sharing in the similarity of Jesus' own sufferings. Ironically, Christians have testified over the centuries that the greatest joy they have ever experienced occurs in the midst of this kind of suffering. Probably nothing else imprints the character of Jesus into our souls more than suffering for Christ's sake. While we don't recklessly seek this out, when suffering as a Christian comes (and it will), we know that our God will use this for great good.

## What Are The Classical Spiritual Disciplines?

*“But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”—Luke 5:16*

The disciplines for life in Christ are spiritual activities, modeled on those practiced by Jesus Himself, which we carefully and purposefully practice ourselves. It is through the faithful practice of these disciplines, that our inner life gradually transforms so that we arrive at the point where we freely and “naturally” carry out the teachings of Jesus.

Many different disciplines have been practiced by disciples over the centuries. The ones which have been most significant in my own life are the following:

- Solitude
- Silence
- Scripture memory
- Contemplative Prayer
- Study
- Simplicity
- Giving
- Fasting
- The Lord’s Supper
- Worship
- Confession
- Intercessory prayer
- Serving

If we can consider that “confession,” listed above, is the practice of deep honesty with God, and not just the confession of wrongdoing, we can without hesitation say that all of the above disciplines were personally practiced by Jesus. We assume too that Jesus had practiced these at least from the time He was a teenager. It is important to understand that the spiritual disciplines, as a means of grace in transforming our character, must be regularly practiced over time to reap their full, intended effect.

## Why Are the Spiritual Disciplines “Means of Grace?”

*“I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.”—Rom 7:18–19*

Spiritual disciplines serve as means of grace. Through the deliberate, purposeful practice of spiritual exercises such as solitude, silence, study, service, fasting, and prayer, God imparts grace to increasingly transform our inner being. The spiritual disciplines work the way lifting weights work for the athlete. The “under-muscled” 150 pound lineman on a high school football team can put all his heart and soul and strength into trying to block an opposing 250 pound lineman, but that effort will be doomed to failure, again and again. This “failure” will be repeated until that young man gains the necessary increased strength and weight through diet, calisthenics and weight-training.

Jesus taught us: *“Bless those who curse you.”* Pretend that you work at a retail store. An angry customer, not satisfied with your help, erupts in a rage, screaming and cursing at you. How will you respond? I guarantee that you, like the rest of us, will react “without thinking.” In other words, whatever habits of response to such threat we have taken into our souls and bodies over the years will come forth! Unless our souls and bodies have literally been trained by grace through appropriate spiritual disciplines over time, what will come forth will be some form of “flight or fight.” The fact that we are committed Christians will not “save” us from these reactions—unless we have become inwardly transformed by grace. Discouraged Christians will later regretfully think, “If only I could have been calmer, more understanding, less threatened! Why didn’t I maintain a firm but kind response like Jesus would have? Why did I react so to his bad behavior? If only I had tried harder!”

Trying harder would not have done it. It is what has been previously formed in us that needs to be “trans-formed.” Christlikeness of character is a real possibility, but it takes time and the grace of God—and it takes our careful, measured, and practiced use of spiritual disciplines.

## What is the Discipline of Solitude?

*“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”—Mark 1:35*

Most sins we commit do not come from conscious, deliberate choices. Few people intend to do the wrong they do. Sin usually rises “automatically” from ingrained patterns formed into deep habits of response, well beyond our conscious choice. This condition does not excuse us; it simply amplifies the point that just “trying harder” will not transform us in Christlikeness. In the practice of solitude, the deep recesses of our being open to receive the tender healing of God.

We practice solitude when we take significant time to be alone with God. The key to solitude is to get away from all other human interaction and influence. Ideally, we find ways to practice solitude out in nature. We may initially experience fright at being alone. Provided that our place of solitude is safe, this fright is simply our attachment to human company to provide our sense of security. How dependent we all become to the presence of people and the background noise of TV, radio, and human chatter! We may also experience boredom at having “nothing to do.” Both fright at being alone and boredom will gradually disappear as we practice solitude. We will also find dissipating the inner churning and agitation created by the pressure of schedules, others’ expectations and our own “issues.” Most importantly, we will find God. The aloneness of solitude brings with it the company of God’s gentle presence. This “presence” is not one we work up but one that simply comes to us as we practice solitude. God honors our taking time to be alone with Him.

How do we begin? Schedule some time each day to be alone. Find time early in the morning before others are up, at a quiet place during lunch, or in a park on the way home from work. Deliberately invite the heavenly Father to be present in this place and time of quiet—and then be still.

## What is the Discipline of Silence?

*“Be still and know that I am God.”—Psalm 46:10*

The discipline of silence is practiced most easily in solitude, but must also be learned in the midst of crowds and noise. In silence we quiet our hearts before God, directing our thoughts towards Him, and when faced with other distractions (including our wandering thoughts) we gently re-direct our minds back towards God. The practice of silence is the practice of inner listening. Most of the time when I practice this inner listening, I do not hear the voice of God. But on the other hand, those times when I do hear the “still, small voice” of God most often occur during times of deliberate silence before God!

Silence not only trains us to hear the voice of God in our thoughts, it also begins to break up sinful habits of speech. How often do we interrupt, threaten, criticize, manipulate, seduce, injure, or in other ways attempt to over-ride the wishes of others with our speech? James’ word on this is so important: *“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry”* (James 1:19). Think how often anger only increases its venom the more we let our lips speak without thinking!

Sin as a power lives in our bodies. Our bodies have developed “automatic” patterns of behavior directed by this power of sin. (The Bible calls this our “flesh.”) All of us are familiar with automatic behaviors of our bodies. In fact we depend on our bodies to do this. Driving a car becomes “automatic.” The golfer masters his swing to the point where it becomes automatic. As I type these computer keys, I give almost no thought to where my fingers should go. My fingers just “know.” So too our tongue, mouth, and vocal cords. Unless trained in new patterns, given the right offense, our speech will erupt in cursing, shouting, name calling, condemning, and many other injurious forms of speech, to ourselves and others. The discipline of silence begins to help us re-form those parts of our body from which speech arises. This in turn enables us by grace to increasingly become people who bless rather than curse!

## What is the Discipline of Scripture Memorization?

*“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.” --Joshua 1:8*

As you read in the New Testament, notice how often Jesus and the Apostles quote from the Old Testament. Scrolls were so valuable that there might be only one set of the Old Testament for each village. How did they do it? They had memorized large portions of it by heart! As boys, Jesus and the Apostles had done the hard work of memorization. Scripture memory has unfortunately become “old fashioned” among Christians today. Yet it was a primary discipline for Jesus and the Apostles. Should we not also memorize Scripture?

When we memorize, word by word, sentence by sentence, God’s thoughts are implanted in our mind and then into our spirit. Our thoughts are re-structured around God and His ways. If we do not, then by default, our inner selves are likely to be formed by TV, movies, magazines, and radio. The Holy Spirit uses what we memorize to comfort and encourage us. We are able to help others in their struggles by directing them to something in God’s Word that has been helpful to us. We have “ammunition” to counter the destructive suggestions of Satan. We have a new means to pray, slowly meditating in prayer over the very words of Scripture. I have also found that it helps tremendously to fall back asleep at night by mentally reviewing some favorite passages!

Take some note cards and write down the reference and text of select verses you find meaningful. One at a time, state the reference, then the text word for word. Experts say that if you do this once a day for six weeks you will have them forever! It is also very important to memorize entire passages. You will be surprised how much your mind can memorize if you just try a little at a time. I have listed at the end of this guide some passages I believe would be most helpful for the sincere Christian to commit to memory.

## What is the Discipline of Contemplative Prayer?

*"You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed."*

—Luke 10:41

Jesus spoke the above words to Martha, a good friend fretting over preparations for dinner. The "one thing needed" was what her sister Mary was doing: *"Mary sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said."* Mary is the perfect illustration of contemplative prayer. When we give our undivided attention to "looking" to Jesus, listening deep within our hearts to any word He might speak, we are practicing contemplative prayer.

Contemplative prayer is our preparation for a contemplative life. The "practice of the presence of God" is the supreme discipline for our life in Christ. As our minds and spirits and souls and bodies increasingly abide in the presence of Jesus, we become changed people. I believe it is virtually impossible to sin when our full attention is lovingly focused on Jesus. May those precious few moments become our lifestyle!

The words Jesus spoke to His disciples in the garden of Gethsemane apply to all His disciples. *"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."*—Matthew 26:41. To "watch" is to look to Jesus with the inner eyes of our hearts. It is a continuing state of alertness and awareness of God. This state of mind creates an inner poise and readiness to do in Christ and for Christ whatever any situation calls for. This state of readiness, this "watching" can be cultivated through practice. The great Christians over the centuries have all witnessed to this fact.

We begin contemplative prayer in solitude and silence. Then, as we leave our set time of prayer, we continue to keep our thoughts towards Jesus as we go through the other events of our day. When we discover that our thoughts have been distracted we must not be discouraged—just laugh, thank God for the reminder, and gently turn our attention to Him again.

## What is the Discipline of Study?

*“But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”—Luke 2:19*

When the word “study” is mentioned, the remembrance of classrooms, teachers, and textbooks come to mind. For many people, these are not happy remembrances! The discipline of study does include learning the content of the Bible, so in that sense it is similar to academic study. But the greater idea behind the discipline of study is that of “pondering.”

The disciple of Jesus studies God and His ways by pondering over them. Four areas in particular: (1) God as He is revealed in nature and science; (2) The workings of God in the believer’s own life, both His providential actions and the personal inner knowledge gained by experience and prayer; (3) God’s activities in the history of the Church; and (4) God’s purposes for the universe, His people in general, and the individual believer as displayed in the Bible. All such pondering by the Christian will deepen our focus of attention on how tremendous our Lord Jesus Christ is, and result in praise, thanksgiving, trust, and obedience to Him.

I encourage the reader to keep a notebook near your Bible to periodically record by date any particular insight you have gained into God and His ways. This is a habit I have kept for years. At times, there have been daily journal entries; at other times weekly; and at other times, once every few months. I find deep satisfaction when such insight is given me by God. Things I puzzle over, even for years, do come to light in God’s time. Such “revelation” is too precious to be forgotten.

When reading the Scriptures or when facing a predicament, ask God for understanding. My experience is that it usually is not given right then. But if I persist in asking, an answer will eventually come—often just a brief word or phrase—but packed so full of meaning that somehow I can immediately understand a wide range of things about the issue, together with the ramifications of that insight.

## What is the Discipline of Simplicity?

*Your beauty should not come from outward adornment...Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.*—1 Peter 3:3-4

The mature follower of Jesus is not a “high maintenance” person. To be a “complicated” person is not a virtue. Our goal is inner simplicity. We practice a discipline of outward simplicity because God will take those efforts and infuse grace with them to the transformation of our soul. Jesus did not “try real hard” to refrain from luxury, or sensuality, or the haste that comes from a long daily “to do” list. The simplicity of His heart, developed over years in fellowship with God, made such things as hurry and greed foreign to His preferences. It can also be so for us.

What can we practice? I would like to mention three disciplines toward simplicity—not because I do well with them (I don't!) but because others over the centuries have found them to be helpful. The three deal with time, food, and spending. In terms of time, are we convinced that God will give us the time to do what He would like for us to accomplish? Trying to squeeze in more than that comes from our own ambition and anxiety. Practice praying throughout the day, “What now, Lord?” You will develop a sense of God's leading in your daily tasks. You will also “know” when to take rest and when to calmly say “no” to other demands made upon you, either by others, or by your own fretful thoughts!

This same prayerful, Spirit-led approach to daily living applies to what we eat. So much of our eating comes from habit or for the calming of our anxiety. Similarly, our spending habits can come under the control of the Holy Spirit. There is a time to spend and a time to refrain. How dependent we are upon that rush of pleasure at having something new! Our “flesh” will resent not being given the freedom to indulge. But under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, the calm saying “no” to the urging of our desires will result in inner simplicity of life—which in turn will make our choices more and more reflective of our real life, which is in Christ.

## What is the Discipline of Giving?

*“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”*

—2 Corinthians 9:6–7

We can give lots of money and still be pretty selfish people. The world applauds large contributions to charitable causes. Yet for how many wealthy donors is the gift a real sacrifice? Jesus observed a poor widow putting two small coins into the Temple treasury. He said of her that she had put in more money than all the rich—since she put in all she had to give, whereas the wealthy still had a lot left over (Mark 12:42–43). God is not interested in our money. God is interested in generous hearts.

What disciplines can we practice that God would use to transform us in generosity? Again, the virtues of Jesus are not formed in us by “trying hard.” The virtues are formed in our depths, by the working of God, yet with our acts of faith and love, combined with our purposeful, planned use of spiritual disciplines. This is why the practice of tithing—giving 10% of our income to God—can be so helpful. Granted, tithing can easily become a self-righteous “work” in which we feel like we have “paid our dues” and have no further obligation to be generous. But it is a place to start. A lack of generosity comes from fear—fear that we will suffer if we give our money away. To purposefully give away 10% of our income as a regular practice will teach us that God really will make our bills and income “work out.” Our fear of lack of money will begin to go.

It is often harder for me to give my time away than my money! So, a discipline I try to practice (sometimes not very well) is to purposefully lay aside whatever I am working on to give the person seeking my help my full attention. The fear I experience is that if I give others my time, I will not get to complete what I felt I needed to finish. Not only does seeing my interruptions as God’s “interruptions” help me trust Him more with my “to do” list, it also is (hopefully!) training my soul in generosity.

## What is the Discipline of Fasting?

*“When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do...But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”—Matthew 6:16–18*

The New Testament makes clear that Sin as a power lives in our bodies. Our bodies have been trained by this power to respond “automatically” in the ways of Sin. Lying out of fear of getting caught, calling names in retaliation, taking what does not belong to us, cursing when we are angry, fantasizing in lust—all these arise from our bodies, usually without thinking. The Bible calls this ingrained tendency to sin our “flesh.” Spiritual disciplines are bodily activities designed to train us away from these sin-tendencies so that increasingly the “automatic” responses of our bodies will be those of Christ Himself. Keep in mind that Jesus did not have to “try real hard” not to lose His temper, or lie, or steal, or lust. He had trained His body and mind over the course of His life so that the natural flow of His life was one of righteousness.

Fasting is the most powerful spiritual discipline I know. It is also the most uncomfortable! It is the deliberate practice of not taking food for a definite period of time so that as we fast from food, we learn to “feast on God.” I recommend that you try fasting one meal a week, for six weeks and evaluate what has happened to you spiritually. During the time you would normally eat, pray. (Do drink water.) You will find that in the discomfort of hunger, your mind will almost automatically turn to God. I do not know why fasting “works.” I suspect it is because as our bodies are being deliberately ignored in the good desire to take in food, a “dampening” effect also takes place in the wrong desires of our “flesh.”

After the fast, you will notice a strengthening has occurred in your inner being towards God. Longer fasts can be very beneficial, but should be taken only when directed to by God. I cannot say that fasting will be “fun,” but I can assure you that it will be beneficial spiritually!

## What is the Discipline of the Lord's Supper?

*"And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.'—Luke 22:19*

In all the centuries since Jesus Christ, no spiritual discipline has been regarded more highly as a means of grace than the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Whether the believer is a Baptist, seeing this event as a memorial to their beloved Lord, or a Roman Catholic, taking into their very bodies with love and deepest reverence, the very essence of Jesus, or a Presbyterian rejoicing in the communion of fellowship with our risen Lord, all Christians believe themselves to be spiritually fed in this feast given us by Jesus Christ Himself.

With just the simple act of eating bread and the drinking of wine (or grape juice), this event in itself would be only sentimental except for the fact that Jesus indicated that in some mysterious way, His disciples receive His body and blood as they partake in this Sacrament.

We prepare ourselves by "coming clean" about our sins. Should we be in the midst of sin, we seek Jesus for the grace to leave our sins behind. As we come to the Sacrament, we come to Jesus: body, spirit, soul, mind, feelings, attitudes, intentions. We present ourselves to our Lord: everything we are, everything we have, everything we want, everything we desire to be. We offer to Him our past, our present, and our future. We place "in His hands" our virtues, our sins, our strengths, our weaknesses, our success, and our failures. We come to Him seeking His grace, His healing, His support, His holiness, knowing that "He who seeks will find."

As we eat the bread and drink the juice, we take confidence that Jesus Himself is investing new grace into our very bodies. Our communion is with our risen Lord and with our fellow believers, present in the room with us, present everywhere on the planet, and even present with us in heaven!

## What is the Discipline of Worship?

*“Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.”—Psalm 105*

To worship is to be in awe. Being present at the birth of my children, standing at the south rim of the Grand Canyon for the first time, looking over the cliffs near Ensenada out across the Pacific Ocean, gazing upward at a Giant Redwood tree—these are events that evoked awe in me. This kind of awe is akin to worship.

True worship of God happens when the Holy Spirit comes to us and brings to us a fresh awareness of God—His goodness, greatness, majesty, and awesomeness. A feeling of warmth, humility, energy, even delight may often accompany this awareness. At times even the human body is overcome by the gentle power of God flowing into us. Our bodies may become inert, yet our spirits will be rejoicing within and our minds are full of the beauty and glory of God.

Whatever the sensations (or lack thereof), the clear indication that worship of God is taking place is our response of attention to Him and praise. To our discomfort, we must honestly face the fact that often our “worship services” evoke precious little actual worship of God. Far too often our services are simply times set apart for religious observance. Not that this is a bad thing—it is a spiritual discipline in itself to come together once a week as a group of believers to observe and remember and think about our Lord. But our worship of God must transcend this.

Begin in private. Turn your thoughts to Jesus. Talk to Him out loud. Tell Him how grateful you are for Him and for what He has done in your life. Sing love songs to Him—songs you would be embarrassed for others to hear but that are intended for His eyes and ears only. Use your body to kneel before Him, or to stand with arms outstretched towards heaven, or to dance in jubilation before Him. Exult in the Lord your God!

## What is the Discipline of Confession?

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." --1 John 1:9*

I believe that the three hardest words for any of us to say are: "I was wrong." Why is that so hard for us? We invest a lot of energy in being "right." Consider how we respond when accused. Is not our first response to justify ourselves? Pride is the source of this bondage of always needing to be right. We have convinced ourselves that WE are only motivated by the best motives—and believing that of ourselves—we believe that our behavior could only be appropriate. Our "accusers" simply have misunderstood that we were right after all! We resist and squirm at the thought that God knows everything—and that He sees right through us.

The discipline of confession begins to free us from the blindness of our pride. It begins to let the dawn of truth into our souls. It shows us that we have truly been wrong. The prison doors of denial start to crack open.

We confess when we are ready to leave sin behind. We confess by coming "clean" with our motives and actions, not minimizing or excusing, and we humbly ask God's forgiveness. His willingness to forgive sincere repentance is not in doubt. So, even out loud, we then say "Thank you Jesus for forgiving me!" Having confessed our sins, accepted His forgiveness, we turn back to Jesus, give Him our attention and follow after Him.

If we have wronged someone else, we go to them and apologize and seek to make that right—unless in doing so, more hurt would be done to that person. Great blessing also comes if you can find some other Christian with whom you can be honest about your sin. You do not ask this person to excuse you—you ask him to hear you, and pronounce over you the assurance of your forgiveness in Jesus Christ, based on His work on the Cross and your repentance and confession.

## What is the Discipline of Intercessory Prayer?

*“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”—Ephesians 6:18*

We must face the fact that the center of gravity of our “flesh” is our self. The reason the flesh produces what is opposite of God is that it is aligned 180 degrees away from God—namely towards our self! The characteristic impulse of our flesh is always one of self-effort, self-direction, self-righteousness, self-centeredness. Our lack of peace and self-obsession painfully reveals itself with our hurried “help me” prayers, and the only occasional “bless them too” prayers tossed-in.

The discipline of intercession works like a pick ax and shovel to begin to break up the hard earth of our narcissism. The Bible declares that we are “priests unto God” (1 Peter 2:5, 8). A priest intercedes for someone else. The discipline of intercession involves the sacrifice of our time and energy to pray God’s blessings and mercy upon our fellow Christians as well as all other peoples. Interceding in prayer is a ministry in itself. But as a discipline, it becomes a means of God’s grace to enlarge our compassion and interest in other people.

I suggest that you approach intercessory prayer in two ways: first, by “flash prayers” for people you pass on the sidewalk, speak with on the phone, and interact with in stores. (The term “flash prayers” was coined by Dr. Frank Laubach, pioneer missionary for literacy in the Philippines.) God will touch these folks as you concentrate upon them with the love and blessing of Jesus. Those few seconds in prayer will make a difference.

Second, find a regular time to invite God to bring others’ needs before your mind. You may find yourself thinking and praying about our President, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the persecution of Christians in the Sudan, an old friend, your distant relatives, or the family next door. Be sure to always include your pastor and congregation in prayer as well.

## What is the Discipline of Serving?

*“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”—John 13:13–15*

I have noticed that in many marriages, one spouse seems to be more of the “taker” and the other more of the “giver.” Most of us had in our family of origin some who seemed to expect to be served and some who did most of the serving. Those who did most of the serving seemed more virtuous—and maybe so. But serving that is done from fear, or the desire to avoid conflict, or simply out of a grudging sense of duty does not arise from a heart ruled by the Kingdom of God.

As followers of Jesus we certainly do not want to be the demanding person who insists his needs must be met before others and by others—but neither do we want to be the one coerced or manipulated into being a “servant.” The follower of Jesus serves in imitation of his Lord, because he values and desires to bless others, and because he is also strong enough to not be forced to serve!

Since the nature of the “flesh” in us all is permeated with self-serving desires, serving others as a discipline is quite important. Begin with our family. What “acts of service” can we do for them on a regular basis? These would be things that are not being asked of us, but that we can do to be a blessing. Washing the dishes? Helping with homework? Being in charge of the maintenance of the cars? Planning a once-a-month trip to an event that would mean a lot to our children? Dedicating one night a week for our spouse? We choose service as a discipline as a proactive step to imitate our Lord and follow His command.

For some of us though, we begin to truly serve only after we are able to courageously say “no” to demands made by manipulation or pressure. Forced service is not service for Jesus’ sake. When we have the strength to say “no” we will then have the integrity to say “yes” to serve others.

## Who is the Holy Spirit?

*“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”* —Romans 8:15–16

It is not an exaggeration to say that almost everything the Old Testament prophesied would come to God’s people through His Messiah comes to us in the person of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God, living inside our bodies with us. He is described as the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9). In other words, when we experience God’s presence, when we feel the love of Jesus, it is the Holy Spirit whom we actually are encountering.

The Holy Spirit comes to live inside all followers of Jesus. Indeed, we first came to faith in Jesus by the working of the Holy Spirit within us giving us new life and persuading us to repent and believe. The Holy Spirit comforts us, encourages us, strengthens us, gives us divine insight, and leads us. It is this aspect of “leading us” that I want to elaborate on.

Our life in Christ is literally life in the Holy Spirit. This means two very practical things for us: first, it means that we live life primarily by following an invisible person—Jesus Christ—living inside our bodies with us by means of the Holy Spirit. (This idea will seem like nonsense to those without Christ, but since I am writing to Christians, I will not explain further, but just move on.) Rather than living life by means of the Bible alone, we literally can interact with Jesus and follow Him on a daily basis through faith, prayer, and hearing Him speak to our mind and conscience. The second practical work of the Holy Spirit is to give us divine energy, desire, and power to trust and obey God. When Christians falter, we often do so because we don’t “feel” like obeying or because we don’t “feel” as if we have the strength. In our natural selves we are very weak. Jesus Himself said this: *“The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* Our life of obedience though, happens by the working of the Spirit. At times He strengthens us directly, on the spot, through infused power, but primarily through growth in strength through our practice of the spiritual disciplines. Thank God for the Holy Spirit!

## What is it to be Baptized in the Holy Spirit?

*“I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”—Mark 1:8*

Of all the topics addressed in this “Guide” probably none has a greater variety of opinion among sincere Christians than this one: what does it mean to be “baptized in the Holy Spirit?” Again, rather than try to argue my point, I will simply present my own convictions about this matter.

The New Testament associates the miracle-working power of Jesus among the early apostles and disciples with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Often, they spoke in tongues and “prophesied.” The disciples were able to cast out demons, heal, and speak clearly and courageously of Jesus Christ after being baptized with the Holy Spirit.

To be baptized with the Holy Spirit is to be consciously “immersed” in His presence and power. In my own thinking, to be “filled” with the Spirit describes the subsequent, repeated empowerments believers receive after being initially “baptized” with (or in) the Spirit. While all believers “have” the Holy Spirit, not all believers normally have the experience of the empowerment (“baptism”) of the Holy Spirit—until they deliberately seek this from God. God does amazingly different things with different people. But in general, I counsel sincere believers to seek the empowerment of the Spirit through surrender of their will to God, with a deliberate asking of God for the power and life of the Spirit—so that they might be witnesses of the very life and ministry of Jesus Himself!

Since the Holy Spirit already lives within the spirit of the believer, this empowerment, this “baptism,” is a release of God’s Kingdom power, already latent within the believer. For some folks, this empowerment is quite dramatic, with visible bodily manifestations and feelings, sometimes accompanied by the grace to speak in tongues; for other believers it is very gentle and peaceful, not accompanied by dramatic “signs”—but absolutely real and powerful nonetheless!

## What About Speaking in Tongues?

*"I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue."*—1

Corinthians 14:18-19

The New Testament speaks of three "workings" of this gift of grace: first, as a means of witness to non-believers of God's power (for example, the "languages" on the day of Pentecost); second, as a means of receiving a prophesied "word" of encouragement from God in the midst of gathered believers in worship; and third, as a means of personal prayer and praise to God. Some traditions are able to make good use of the speaking in tongues in public worship. The Presbyterian Church normally does not. I do not believe that we necessarily dishonor God in this—God seems to be very patient with various traditions of worship. But it is the third use of this gift—praying in tongues—that I feel is most important.

To pray in tongues to Jesus is to be able to express deep feelings and sentiments that words and deliberate thought simply cannot. Expressing delight and dependent love—like a very small child to his mother—is possible through such a "prayer language." Praying in tongues follows no discernible vocabulary or pattern—it is more of a song that flows through one's vocal chords and lips in love to God. A person desiring this grace (to express love to Jesus, not to have some "sign" of approval) should pray, seek, and ask God. He is the giver of all good things for us.

Not all followers of Jesus can, should, or will speak in tongues. Yet, to pray in tongues (especially) is a wonderful grace from God. To speak in tongues was a quite normal and non-controversial part of life in Christ in the early Church. It was in no way seen as "weird" but wonderful. The fact that Paul had to correct excesses over speaking in tongues in the church in Corinth (see 1 Corinthians 12-14) only highlights how special and meaningful this gift had become to them. It is very unfortunate that "speaking in tongues" has been a source of hurt, confusion, derision, and division in our churches in the last 50 years or so. It should not and need not be so.

## How Do You Recognize the Voice of God?

*“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”—John 10:27*

It is possible that God is speaking to you right now and you don't know it. But as you learned to recognize the voice of others in your life, you also can learn to recognize the voice of God. Being tall, I occasionally have had three and four-year old children hug me around the legs, thinking I was their Daddy. Realizing their mistake, they ran off to find their real Dad! In this matter of recognizing the voice of your heavenly Father, you will make similar mistakes! I know of no other way though, than to simply experiment, prayerfully, and in faith, knowing that your God deeply desires that you learn to recognize when He is speaking.

The primary way God speaks to us is through the “inner voice.” This inner voice is not audible, but a current of thought along the speech pathways of our own thinking. It is an inner awareness and consciousness of being addressed. Sometimes this simply takes the form of new insight. At other times it will actually be a conversation where God initiates a question—we answer—He responds—we respond.

How then do we recognize thoughts from God versus our own thinking versus thoughts that might be from the devil? Dr. Dallas Willard's book, In Search of Guidance, has been an immense help to me in this. God's voice in our thoughts has a certain QUALITY, a certain AUTHORITY, and a certain CONTENT that we can learn to recognize. God's thoughts in our minds have the quality of certainty, “peaceableness,” patience, and kindness. There is no frenzied rush to take immediate action. There is also an unmistakable weight of authority. God simply “says.” He does not plead, or whine, or beg. And the content of the thoughts will always be Biblically consistent. Specifically, God's thoughts in our thoughts will deal with “rightness” of action and belief, encouraging us to hope, faith, love, repentance, acts of obedience, and new confidence in Him.

## How Do We Follow the Leading of the Holy Spirit?

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

For twenty–some years, I have searched to find a clear and simple statement that describes most of what a Christian needs to know about how to follow the leading of the Spirit. I still haven’t found one—in fact, I am concluding that there is no “formula” sufficient to describe what in essence is the mystery of relationship. The place to begin though, is to enter a season of prayer asking, “Teach me, please Lord, how to follow your leading?” As you persist in prayer and obeying what you do understand, you will be further instructed by Jesus in how to follow the leading of His Spirit. No formula, just leading by a Person.

There are some things I have learned which may be helpful. Assuming we are ready to be led (let’s face it—sometimes we are not) the phrase we learned as children, “Stop, Look, and Listen” is an appropriate place to begin. We must cease our striving and haste (Stop!). God speaks in a “still, small, voice” which we will miss if we are careening ahead in our rush of daily business. We pause in the midst of what we are doing, turn our “eyes” to Jesus (Look!), and ask, “What now, Lord?” Cultivating inner silence, we wait upon God to speak, if He so chooses (Listen!). If we receive no direction, we continue looking to Jesus and do the next thing we have to do, but not just to get it done, but done “unto Him.”

Wise ones in the way of Christ have said that the Holy Spirit often leads by “checks” in our spirit. What they mean is that if we are prayerfully following a course of action, the Holy Spirit will create an inner discomfort and “pause” if we are about to take the wrong path. I have experienced this many times and know by success and failure that this is often quite true. Having said these things though, I encourage you reading to begin and ask God to teach you how to follow His Spirit. He will show you, in His way and in His time.

## How Do We Witness to Others About Our Faith?

*“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”—1 Peter 15–16*

Suppose a friend tells you about a new mega-vitamin product she has discovered. As you look at her you can't help but notice the glow of health about her and the sparkle in her eyes. You will try that vitamin product because you have “witnessed” the value of it for your friend! Most people who become disciples of Jesus do so because they have witnessed the value of knowing Him in the lives of other people.

Although it may be uncomfortable, take a good look at yourself. Do others see in you something of value about Jesus? Are you known for your gentleness, your serenity, your kindness, your quiet strength in tough times? These are not attributes you “work up.” Rather, these are evidence of Jesus living inside you. The place to start being a “witness” for Jesus is to dedicate yourself to the lifelong pursuit of discipleship—and to the enjoyment of the presence of God!

There does come a point in which WORDS are necessary, though. Each of us needs to memorize the basic facts of the gospel and be prepared to share that information with others. Any Christian bookstore will have gospel tracts on sale to help. Often, a simple question to one whom God has prepared is really all that is needed: “Would you like to ask Jesus Christ to come into your life to be your Lord and Savior?”

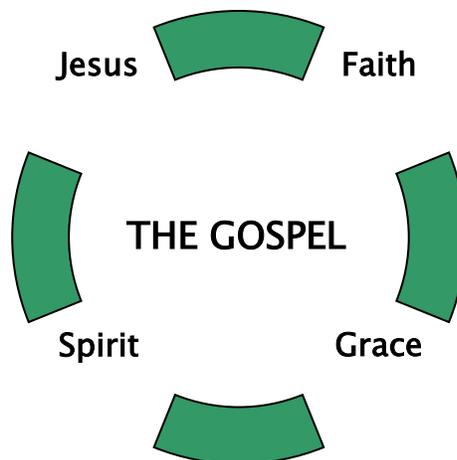
My own conviction about witnessing is that it is done in the context of everyday life with those whom God has given us opportunity to be around. As we live our lives unto Jesus, He will lead us in establishing relationships with others who need Christ, in giving us compassion for them, in doing things that earn their trust, and when the time is right, the words and encouragement they need to hear to be saved.

## What is the Essence of the Gospel Message?

*‘For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...’—1 Corinthians 15:3–4*

It is important for every Christian to be able to explain the essence of the gospel message. Just a brief background: the gospel Jesus preached was that the Kingdom of God was available NOW, to everyone who was willing to turn and enter it by becoming His disciple. The gospel the Apostles preached was essentially the same, but with these additional convictions: that this Jesus Christ was crucified as atonement for sin, was raised from the dead, was now reigning over the universe, would return one day in glory, and that the Holy Spirit would now indwell all who were His disciples.

The Apostle Paul in Romans gives the most complete explanation of this message. The essence of his gospel is this: (1) that salvation from God is available now through Jesus Christ to all—both Jew and Gentile; (2) Jesus Christ has been declared God’s Son by His resurrection from the dead; (3) this salvation is received not by merit through works, but by faith; (4) believers are supervised not by the written code of God’s Law, but by the supervision of God’s grace in Jesus; (5) righteousness of life is developed in believers not through the energies of the “flesh,” but through the working of God’s Spirit; (6) the lifestyle of believers is one not of following the leading of their flesh, but rather setting their minds on Jesus through the Holy Spirit.



## Who is Satan and what are Evil Spirits?

*“He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”* --

John 8:44

The devil, or Satan is not a creation of man’s imagination. Jesus “believed in” the devil and encountered him many times and defeated him. In fact, Peter summarizes Jesus’ entire ministry as one of conflict with Satan:

*“... how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.”*—Acts 10:38

Much in our popular culture about Satan actually derives from John Milton’s Paradise Lost rather than the Bible. The Bible is not very explicit about the origin of Satan, but this much seems to be clear: the devil is a fallen angel, working constantly to undermine the working of God and to defame His character. Satan’s object with Christians is to deceive us into believing lies about ourselves and about God, to move us into sin and despair and renounce our trust in God. Remember, it is our faith in God’s goodness and faithfulness that brings Him the most glory—so Satan’s strategies and efforts are directed to the harming of our faith in God and Jesus.

The origin of evil spirits (demons) is less clear. Milton paints them as fallen angels—yet, the gospel accounts render demons as such low and loathsome beings it is hard to imagine them as having been angels. Whatever their origin, evil spirits are part of a hierarchy of evil, under the control of the devil, to do his bidding to cause torment, destruction, sin, and despair. Evil spirits apparently seek a host, either human or animal. I think we should imagine them as rats infesting a house. Rats can live in fine mansions as well as humble trailer homes!

Though the devil is fearsome, he is not to be feared by Christians. He is like a vicious dog on a leash—and God holds the end of that leash. The good news is that dog is on the way to the pound to be done away with!

## How Do We Find Deliverance From Evil Spirits?

*“Jesus said to him, ‘Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’ Then the devil left him...”—Matthew 4:10–11*

Every Christian needs to know how to defend himself and defeat the approach of evil. The defeat of evil spirits is not a central part of the Apostles’ teaching, yet they do make it a clear point (see Eph 4:27; 6:10–17; 2 Tim 2:26; James 4:7; 1 Pe 5:8). Evil spirits seek entrance into our minds and bodies. People with far more experience than me teach that demonic infestation can occur through willing activity in flagrant sin (sexual immorality, the use of pornography, robbery, acts of violence), in purposeful harboring of pride or vengeance, by mind-altering drug use (heavy use of alcohol, hallucinogenic drugs), and participation with the occult (Ouija boards, séances, astrology, witchcraft, and the like).

What is the approach of evil like? For me, it is the experience of inner condemnation, feelings of uncleanness, hatred, “deadness,” confusion, dread, or despair. I am hardly able to pray or read my Bible. Yet it is that very time in which I most need prayer. Ideally, we have a close Christian who can authoritatively demand that any evil be removed from us. Sometimes though, we must do as Jesus did and out loud, order the devil (and his influences) to leave us and not return. We do this because we have been made children of God through Jesus and have the right to exercise His authority over the devil. Students in a classroom know when a teacher will exercise authority or not. Evil spirits react in much the same way. They will continue to harass and bully Christians until compelled to leave by someone exercising authority in Jesus Christ.

The encounter with evil is an encounter with lies and falsehood. The greatest weapon we can bring to bear is our assertion of the truth—that we are in Jesus Christ, that His blood covers all our sins, that we are indwelt by the Spirit of God, that we are eternal children of our heavenly Father and that we simply will not allow evil to have authority over us!

## How Do We Find Freedom From Addictions?

*“Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.”—*

Romans 13:13–14

Addictions have power because of force of habit and the relief from pain they bring. Whether the pain is guilt, anxiety, fear, anger, or rejection, people search out for things that will ease the pain. Food, alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, sex, work, shopping—all these bring relief (at least temporarily) to inner pain. The “use” of these things for relief can quickly become habitual—and then the habits become addictions.

Addictions are a curse in two ways: first, the law of diminishing returns sets in. The stimulation and relief that one six-pack of beer, or one pornographic video, or one carton of ice cream used to provide must be ever more supplemented, because the measure of relief lessens over time. This in turn leads to more addiction and more destruction. The second, more serious aspect of an addiction is that it becomes a god and brings us into the very serious sin of idolatry. We organize our life around the addiction, rather than Jesus Christ!

Addictions will not be conquered by will power alone. People need the support of others (therapist, pastor, 12-step group, prayer group) and must relinquish control over their lives to God. The decision to wholeheartedly belong to Jesus is the first, most important step. Experiencing the love and power and presence of Jesus provides the alternative to the temporary relief found in the addiction.

Ultimately, it is the “expulsive power of a greater attraction” (in the words of Dr. Frank Laubach) that frees us from addiction. We walk away from the prison of addiction when our desire for Jesus becomes greater than our desire for the addiction. Jesus delivers from addictions—it may take time, it will involve pain, but the freedom and the self-respect is worth it.

## How Can We Learn to Live With Difficult People?

*“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”—Romans 12:17–18*

I believe God arranges to have a difficult person in the life of every Christian, so that we will learn to love as Jesus loves. The obstacle to be removed is not that other person’s upsetting behavior, but the reactions we have to that behavior. We are the ones who are upset. Is it possible then, in the Lord, to grow in ways so that we are not as upset inside in the presence of this person? It is possible, though not easy. Disciplines of solitude, silence, and prayer are essential. We can learn to practice praying silent blessings (not curses!) upon those who offend us.

To “live in peace” we must also learn to be assertive. We often assume that to be Christian is to try to always be “nice.” Jesus was not always “nice.” Just read His words to the Pharisees in Matthew chapter 23. It is a wonder they didn’t crucify Him right then! Assertiveness will not guarantee friendship, but at least we can live around difficult people with integrity. We speak clearly and firmly about our needs, likes, and dislikes—then we give the others the same opportunity.

To the bossy co-worker say: *“When you try to direct me in my work, I feel offended. I don’t like it, I feel angry when it happens, and I would like you to please stop.”* By giving voice to your feelings in a calm, mature manner your frustration will lift. You will be strengthened to live unto Jesus obediently, regardless. If the co-worker cooperates with your request, fine. If he doesn’t, you will be able to better stand your ground and politely refuse to follow his “supervision” the next time around. Yes, there are occasions when it is time to leave a job, a friendship, even a marriage. But that should be the last resort. Everybody is difficult to live around at times (even you and me!). Everyone is in the need of the love of Jesus through some other human being. Will you and I grow to become those in whom Jesus lives, loves, and blesses difficult people?

## What About Marriage and Divorce?

*“At the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh... Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”*

—Matthew 19:4–6

God’s intention for married couples is that we stay married and learn to love each other. What a disservice our culture does to marriage! It creates the fantasy for young women of a fairy-tale wedding and marriage to Prince Charming—and the fantasy for young men that marriage should be an unending sexual playground. Worst of all, our culture lifts up “being in love” as the highest virtue and goal for life.

Being “in love” is not yet real love—it is the preliminary phase of real love. It draws a couple together toward a covenant commitment to love. It is very possible to fall in love with someone who will not be a good spouse. Parents and friends should be consulted and their advice heeded. Real love only begins after the formal covenant of marriage has been made and the “tarnish” starts to appear. Love is a commitment to actively seek the blessing and well-being of our spouse—even if they are not pleasing to us. Our model, of course, is Jesus. How “pleasing” to Him are we at all times? Do we not depend on His loving us even when we are awful?

Jesus intends us to stay married. Divorce among Christians does occur, however. The divorce itself is usually the last chapter of an unremitting failure to love. What about remarriage? I believe that repentance is possible following divorce and that God gives some couples a second chance at marriage. This second chance should not be taken lightly. The breaking of the previous covenant must be looked at by the pastor and the couple seeking remarriage. The giving and receiving of forgiveness between former spouses must be attempted. Restitution of property, finances, and reputation must occur. And the new covenant, made possible by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, must be honored and kept.

## How Do We Help Those We Love Find Christ?

*"I speak the truth in Christ—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish myself cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers..."*

—Romans 9:1–3

Who has not felt the frustration of wanting what is best for someone else, only to have the one we love reject the very thing we know would be best for them? This is supremely the case when the one we love has not accepted Jesus Christ. What are we as believers to do in that situation?

We must understand that the real initiative in salvation lies with God. Yes, it is true that all are lost in rebellion until we yield to Christ—but the nature of our hard hearts is such that without God bringing us to new life, we simply will not choose to repent and accept Jesus. In this sense, you can argue and persuade until you are blue in the face, but if the person's heart has not been first prepared, it will be like hailstones bouncing off a sidewalk. Even worse, the one without Christ may feel so outraged at our "pushing," that for spite, he may push God away.

Where children are concerned, I believe it is our parental obligation to insist that they attend church and Sunday School. Certainly, until a child is 15 or 16, there should be no question about their going to church. If your church is not suitable for children, you should find a new church. It is in a loving church environment, where the gospel is believed and taught, that most children will give their lives to Jesus.

Adults are a different story. I strongly believe that we should pray for ONE opportunity to verbally express the gospel and our desire that our loved one find Christ—then it is time to shut-up and show what the goodness of Jesus can mean in a person's life. We must prepare for a lifetime of prayer and kindness towards those we love who are without Christ—and the confident expectation in Jesus that He will indeed intervene and bring to faith those whom we love.

## What About All the Christian Denominations?

*"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."—2 Chronicles 7:14*

No Christian can believe that the present situation in our world today, that of having several thousand different Christian denominations is a good thing. It is very hard to reconcile the present facts with what Jesus prayed in John 17:21: *"...that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you."*

Despite all our divisions, we must also realize that God does know who belongs to Him and who doesn't. Those who belong to God are indwelt by Christ's Spirit. We are all, regardless of denomination, under the authority of the love of Jesus, to humble ourselves before God, to pray, to seek God's face, and to turn from our wicked ways! This is where we will find unity of Spirit and action and increasingly, of doctrine. Our life in Christ is the same reality with each other—our doctrines are and will continue to be different to some degree until we all reach heaven.

I do not believe that it is wrong for there to be Baptist disciples and Presbyterian disciples and Pentecostal disciples and Roman Catholic disciples. It is wrong for us to attack and criticize one another, to hold one another in contempt, or to regard other parts of His body as not really part of the "true Church."

It is not the case as is sometimes said, "If everyone would just accept the Bible for the Word of God then we would have unity." Every denomination of Christianity accepts the Bible as the Word of God. The doctrinal divisions are both accidents of history as well as continuing sincere differences over meaning. Yet, Christian humility should instruct each of us individually and as denominations that no one of us will contain or correctly hold all the truth of Christ and of God! And as we wait for heaven, let us humble ourselves before God and each other.

## How Do You Recognize a Cult?

*“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.”—2 Timothy 4:3–4*

A “cult” is a group that is a break-away and a distortion of true Christianity. As such, a cult is different from other world religions, such as Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism. Well-known cults today include the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Mormons, and Christian Science. These are true cults in that their historical foundations are rooted in Biblical and orthodox Christianity. As these groups developed though, they added to the Bible in significant ways to develop their own unique doctrines. The Mormons are particularly disturbing to me in that they deceitfully market their religion as true Christianity—when in fact, their leadership knows that many doctrines have little or no similarity with historic Christianity.

A cult distorts Christianity in two ways: what they proclaim as truth as well as how they “hold” the truth. The most serious distortions always involve Jesus. Is He fully God as well as fully Man? Is His death and resurrection a complete atonement for sin, or must it being added-to by hard work on our part to be satisfactory?

“Holding” the truth is a different matter. In this respect, some Christian groups have become cult-like. These groups wield unreasonable authority over their members, require members to follow legalistic schemes to be “good Christians,” and even promote aberrant marital and sexual practices.

People in cults are not “bad”—they are deceived. Cults can produce people who are outwardly moral and good. I privately believe that there may be some people in cults who are actually “saved” in that they do trust Jesus, despite the official doctrines and practices of their religious group. This opinion, however, would never prevent me from encouraging someone to leave such a group.

## What is the Purpose of the Local Congregation?

*“Go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”—Matthew 28:19–20*

The primary purpose of the local congregation is not to save the lost. It is to provide a God-indwelt setting in which believers can be trained to become mature disciples. As we are trained as disciples, part of our growth will involve the reaching out to non-Christians with the gospel. Evangelism must take place, as well as service to the community and world, but maturing in discipleship is primary. Everything the local congregation does should support Jesus' mission of making disciples.

The leadership of the local congregation, pastor and elders is most important. Their growth in holiness, their personal practice of spiritual disciplines, and their life in the Spirit is the only way their leadership can with integrity be trusted and followed and blessed of God.

A good church is one where Jesus is loved, appreciated, honored, preached, and sought. In such a church, a spirit of love and gentleness will be evident. There will be a light-heartedness and joy among the people—their cooperation has been enlisted through loving persuasion, not guilt or pressure. The Bible will be a central focus of all the teaching, doctrines, and practices of that congregation. In this kind of church, the pastor is respected, supported, and encouraged, but not held in awe or fear. The pastor will proclaim God's truth fearlessly and completely, yet without manipulation or the seeking of applause.

This kind of healthy, God-indwelt congregation will have worship services in which visitors and members feel the presence of God's Spirit. Healing of body, mind, and soul will take place. Lives will be mended, marriages strengthened, forgiveness of sin proclaimed and accepted, and arguing and disputing and gossiping will take a very low place. “Church” will be a place where both adults and children look forward to going to!

## What Will the Return of Jesus Christ Be Like?

*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.”—Matthew 25:31–32*

Since His resurrection, disciples of Jesus have looked forward to a day when He will come again. This “advent” will be one of glory and honor. Every living person will see Him—some with delight, others with terror. In that day it will be too late to change sides. Jesus will come again for three main reasons: 1) to vindicate the Father’s choice of Himself as Savior and Lord before the eyes of the world, 2) to bring final salvation to those who love Him, who are waiting for His appearing, and 3) to bring final judgment on angels and men who have lived in rebellion to God.

Three general “timelines” of His return have been held throughout the history of the Church. All deal with the idea of the “millennium” spoken about in Revelation 20. One view, pre-millennialism, sees the return of Jesus before this period of time. Another view, amillennialism, holds the idea that the millennium is a figurative time, occurring now. The third point of view, postmillennialism, believes that Jesus will come again after a “golden age” of prosperity (the millennium) occurs on earth. All three views have good biblical proofs and as well as biblical inconsistencies! We do well to hold to our particular viewpoint and at the same time to respect that sincere Christians over the centuries have differed greatly over the details of Jesus’ second coming.

There are convictions though, that all three views have in common. These include the expectation that Jesus will return personally, visibly, and in glory. His coming will be preceded by “signs” in the heavens and by the proclamation of the gospel to all nations on earth. There will be great apostasy, evil, and persecution of believers near this time. Jesus will come in power, overthrow Satan and all his servants, and bring His people into glory. The Day of Judgment will follow and the eternal state of heaven and hell will begin. Will we be ready to greet Him on the day He returns?

## A Summary to Life in Christ

*“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.—John 17:3–5*

By nature all of us have lost communion with God. Our hearts have grown hard through indifference to God and willful rebellion. We have no “life” in us—only the pursuing of self-serving ends which will ultimately result in our death and eternal destruction. Yet in love, God comes to individuals and breathes into them the life of the Kingdom of God. This life of the Kingdom, this life of “heaven now,” is placed into the core of our being. It is “seed-like” in its beginning, yet with the proper watering, fertilizing, and weeding on our part, God will cause it to grow. The goal of this “growth” is that our inner character becomes increasingly like that of Jesus Himself.

Our part in this growth is two-fold: first, to live life focused on Jesus, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, especially during trials and temptations; and second, to organize our lives around a living communion with Jesus through our planned spiritual disciplines. This focus on Jesus will in itself transform our lives and create virtues and the suppression of vices which human self-effort simply cannot. Our life is lived “in the Spirit” not “by our flesh,” under the supervision of God’s grace in Jesus, not by the supervision of the written code of God’s Law. Yet in this life in Christ we will fulfill the requirements of God’s Laws, and from the very inside, out.

Christ’s majesty and presence will be fully known on this earth one day. We have the high privilege now of serving as His ambassadors. To the extent we are faithful in the variety of small ways we have been given to serve Jesus, we will be given greater responsibilities in the life to come. All of created existence will serve to bring glory to our Lord Jesus Christ. We, even with all of our failures and sins, will have a part in His receiving glory. What higher purpose could we possibly have? And whatever comes our way, nothing will ever separate us from His love. To God be the glory!

## What Books Have I found Most Helpful?

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”—Hebrews 12:1–2*

My life in Christ has been formed by the influence of many devout Christians—this “great cloud of witnesses” spoken of in Hebrews. Some of these are ancient disciples, some more recent, some still living. These books have been my favorites—especially the four with the asterisks.

Dubay, Thomas, S.M. Fire Within. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989.

\*Foster, Richard J. Celebration of Discipline. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.

\*Laubach, Frank C. Letters from a Modern Mystic. Westwood: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1937.

Laubach, Frank C. Prayer: The Mightiest Force in the World. New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1956.

Lewis, C. S. Mere Christianity. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1943.

Lewis, C. S. The Great Divorce. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1946.

\*Willard, Dallas. In Search of Guidance. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993.

Willard, Dallas. The Divine Conspiracy. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998.

\*Willard, Dallas. Renovation of the Heart. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002.

Willard, Dallas. The Spirit of the Disciplines. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1988.

## Scripture Passages to Memorize

### **EXODUS 20:1-17 (KJV)** Note: this is an abbreviated form of the full text

And God spake all these words, saying,

I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

- I. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
- II. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.
- III. Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain.
- IV. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
- V. Honour thy father and thy mother.
- VI. Thou shalt not kill.
- VII. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
- VIII. Thou shalt not steal.
- IX. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.
- X. Thou shalt not covet any thing that is thy neighbour's.

### **PSALM 23:1-6 (KIV)**

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

### **PSALM 46:1**

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

### **PROVERBS 3:5-6**

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

### **MATTHEW 11:28-30**

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

### **MATTHEW 22:37-40 (KJV)**

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

This is the first and great commandment.

And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

### **JOHN 3:16-17**

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

### **ROMANS 8:28-37**

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

"For your sake we face death all day long;  
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

### **Philippians 4:4-8**

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.

### **COLOSSIANS 3:1-17**

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

### **1 JOHN 1:9 KJV**

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.