

THE JOURNEY

PATH MARKERS

Daniel A. Brown, PhD

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by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

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INTRODUCTION

Walking with God and enjoying His nearness is supposed to be the most natural activity of your life. But in the beginning, it can feel unfamiliar and foreign. That's because He doesn't think like we do, and His ways take a bit of getting used to. No one naturally lines up perfectly with the spiritual life God wants to give to us. It takes time, and it is a process.

Throughout your journey with the Lord, you will feel His delight, His pleasure in being with you. At one time, you were lost to Him forever, and like a father who has only recently received back his ransomed child from the clutches of a kidnapper, He still has not gotten over the horror of being without you in His life.

He wants to teach you the themes and truths that form the very foundation of the cosmos. Though they are invisible and spiritual, His ways are interwoven into the fabric of our world, and no matter where you look—if you know what to look for—you will find them. Learning kingdom truths is not like learning facts from a textbook; rather, it is like hiking over the rise of a hill and catching, for the first time, a glimpse of a valley where you could gladly spend the rest of your life. With each new truth you grasp, you find yourself thinking, “This is the best yet.”

The simple topics in these booklets will become familiar places to which you will come again and again in times of realization, in hours of need and in moments of worship. They may be simple understandings, but they have a way of penetrating even the most complicated life situations. They are the earliest lessons, what some people refer to as the basics, a curriculum for new believers in Jesus. These landmarks have been, throughout the centuries, the timeless passage markers, the faithful signposts where generations of saints before you have paused, considered, wept and rejoiced.

One of the most astounding God-works (miracles) is captured in a simple phrase: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” That, of course, refers to Jesus, the Word of God, being born into flesh, so that we on Earth could make sense of God's message.

This is called the Incarnation. The truth of God was embodied in the person, Jesus Christ. Incarnation is God's basic plan for communicating His ways to people.

Jesus invites each of us to participate in that communication pattern by explaining to other people the truths we have learned from God. We pass

2 INTRODUCTION

along lessons-learned so others can learn the same lessons more quickly. Because God made each of us unique and individual, the way we learn—and how we pass along what we learn—is also unique. Like a few drops of lemon in a glass of water, our lives give a faint flavor to the truth. We don't change the truth; we just explain it from a slightly different angle.

That is what I want to do in the four booklets of *The Journey* series. When I was approached to write something for newer believers, I immediately asked if I had to write what usually gets written, or if I could say what I wanted how I wanted. They told me to 'go for it' and give it my 'voice.' So, I did.

Rather than giving you facts to digest, like so many vitamin pills, these booklets give you a language, a vocabulary to make simple but profound sense out of walking with Jesus day by day. It's what I've learned—especially what has changed my life most dramatically. I believe it will radically change yours, too.

— *Daniel A. Brown, PhD*

#1 WORSHIPPING GOD

Let's talk about love. Love motivates God and prompts Him into action on our behalf. He loves us with such powerful affection that He promises nothing "will be able to separate us from [His love] in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:39). Inseparable love! That makes total sense because when we love someone, we want an engaging, connecting relationship with him or her. Being in love means we want to be around them and with them, doing things and experiencing things together. Love is all about joining together with, sharing with, and communicating with someone else at the deepest level of our being.

Though true love can love from a distance, and even sustain itself in the face of outright rejection, its primary urge is to link us vitally with the person we love. Nothing is more important to God than relationship with us. From the very beginning, He desired living interaction with us, and He paid an incredible price to securely reestablish lasting connection with us. He wants to relate to us in such intimate and profound ways that we experience Him for who He truly is, and find ourselves drawn into deeper and deeper closeness with Him. Love is like a language: it transforms feelings into expressions. True love desires to express itself. Love has to say something.

On your journey with God, you will increasingly have that same desire—to express your love for Him. The more you come to realize just how much He has done, and continuously does for you, you won't be able to resist telling Him. God is love (See 1 John 4:7-8). Because His love for us is so boundless, you can imagine just how strong the urge is in Him to communicate His love to us. Remember that verse we studied in Booklet #1—"For God so loved the world that..." (John 3:16)? Love cannot contain itself; it must speak and act in order to be satisfied.

God knows first-hand how fulfilling it is to be able to express love, so He gives us a way to declare our love for Him. Worship is the language of love and understanding we get to use with the Lord. Many people mistakenly imagine that worship is something God requires—either because He likes to hear Himself praised (as an ego-starved, insecure deity), or because He lives in a perpetually bad mood, and we must appease His wrath with verbal sacrifices (like throwing people into a volcano to pacify a rain god).

Silly, really, when you think about it. God needs nothing from anyone.

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL LEARN THAT . . .

- Worship is an expression of love and truth.
- We can worship anytime, anywhere.
- Worship is a powerful spiritual force that transforms us.
- Worship can be hindered by some things in our lives.

4 WORSHIPING GOD

He is completely complete. That is the very meaning of the expression “God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4). He lacks nothing, and He has no missing parts. He certainly doesn’t need praise from His created beings to reaffirm His preeminent place in the cosmos, and He takes no self-satisfying pleasure in fawning, adoring humans.

.....
*Worship is the language of love and understanding
we get to use with the Lord.*
.....

God’s heart for worship has nothing to do with what He receives from our praise. Worship, like every aspect of truth God provides for our walk with Him, has one great purpose: to bring us into closer relationship with Him. Just as His love welcomes and honors us, so our worship verbalizes our delight in Him. When we worship, we focus our attention and our affection solely on Him. We become “single-hearted” and centered on God as Savior, Provider, Way-Maker. We thank Him for all He has done, we acknowledge His hand at work in our lives, and we tell Him how glad we are to know what we know about Him.

Worship acts as a rejuvenating reminder that we are not alone. We are known, loved and helped throughout our lives. We worship the Lord for what He has done, and for who He has been to us. Like best friends rehearsing the joys of their many-year relationship, like a daughter reflecting on those special moments when her mother first let her play with her jewelry box, or first explained the intricacies of so-called best friends in Jr. High—worship allows us to review God’s dealings with us in days and years past. Consequently, worship creates incredible anticipation for our future.

QUESTIONS:

Praise and worship declare powerful truths—about what God has been like, and what He has done in the past. Why does rehearsing His past dealings increase our faith for the Lord’s future work on our behalf? _____

Read Psalm 56:4 and 71:14. Describe the connection these verses reveal between praise and hope. _____

Read Jeremiah 7:14. What does it mean that the Lord, Himself, is our praise? _____

“THANKS, DAD, FOR EVERYTHING”

Thanksgiving is at the very heart of worship and praise—gratitude to God for all that He has done, and for all that He is. With worship, we acknowledge the Lord’s hand in our life, and we tell Him how glad we

are for it. It is simple and spontaneous, like the thanks expressed to a father by a youngster who just caught his first fish: “Thanks for taking me fishing, Dad.” So much is wrapped up in those words, and they become the highlight of the trip, cherished for years by the father, even if long forgotten by the son.

Worship is the gratefulness of a child for whom the father has arranged and done so many other things. Though the child knows nothing, really, of the preparations for the trip, much less for daily life back home, the father accounts the simple thanks as more than enough reward for everything. Almost nothing else can make a father feel more successful with His life. That is how God receives our worship—as saying, “Thanks, Dad. I love you.” Though our worship cannot possibly encompass all that God is, or all He has done for us, He receives it as His most cherished honoring. The angels cry out in majestic worship all the time, but the Lord loves the sound of our worship more.

The world in which we live presents us with an intimidating message of aloneness in the midst of forces and events much too large for us to grapple with on our own. Dwarfed in the face of everything—the size of the cosmos, the uncertainty of the future, the needs of food and friendship—we are like that solitary high school freshman who has just moved from out-of-state, standing in front of his new school on the first day of classes, knowing no one. Anything awaits us. Who knows what will happen or what our portion will be. That is why one of God’s most frequent and enduring promises to you is, “I will be with you and bless you” (Genesis 26:3). Jesus repeated His Father’s pledge (Matthew 28:20), and His name, Immanuel, means “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). Worship is a way of thanking the Lord for being closer to us than any friend could ever be (Proverbs 18:24).

And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

—Matthew 28:20

There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

—Proverbs 18:24

SPIRIT AND TRUTH

So, what exactly is worship? How do you worship God?

Probably the best place to begin is with Jesus’ explanation to a woman who had similar questions. Jesus clarified aspects of worship that make it much more than a mere ritual, and far more powerful than just a physical exercise. The woman’s cultural upbringing taught her that worship should be done in a special place, and according to a prescribed religious formula. Her religion said that true worshippers of God must go to a holy mountain to meet Him.

Jesus gently corrected her misperception. The keys to worship are “spirit and truth,” not form or location (John 4:23). As a spiritual activity, worship transcends our physical surroundings. That means we do not

“But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. “God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”
—John 4:23-24

have to go to special buildings, travel to sacred mountains, face a particular direction or ascend a lofty peak to “get in touch” with God. “God is Spirit,” so anyone who wants to worship Him must do so “in Spirit” (John 4:24). Since He dwells in the spiritual dimension, He is not attached to any Earthly location, and there are no “dead zones” like with cell phones where He cannot pick up a signal.

We do not have to wait to get to the proper place to worship the Lord. We do not need to make a pilgrimage to a holy river, to a shrine or to any other location on the face of the Earth because He is Lord over all, and His glory is over all the Earth (Isaiah 6:3). God can be worshiped anywhere, anytime.

The religions of other gods differ from the relationship our God offers us in several ways. But one of the biggest differences is access—when, where and how we can contact the One we worship. Because Jesus has given us bold and “confident access” to God through faith (see

Ephesians 2:18; 3:12), we are able to “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace” anytime we need or want (Hebrews 4:16). For us, certain days of the year are no more auspicious than others. We do not need to follow elaborate rituals of cleansing or concentrating in order to approach Him. We don’t need special clothes or accoutrements, such as incense or beads to worship. Furthermore, we do not need to meditate or sit in particular positions in order to get in touch with and worship God. We do not have to wait for the right time or place to worship.

QUESTIONS:

Read the following verses. What do they tell you about when, where and how to worship the Lord?

Psalm 34:1. _____

Psalm 103:20-22. _____

Hebrews 13:15. _____

Romans 14:11. _____

Hebrews 10:19-32. _____

Right where we are, in the midst of the most hectic schedule, while chasing down the last cheerio from our toddler’s breakfast, on the busiest street corner,

or alone in our room—anywhere, any time we can worship the Lord. “Thank You, Lord. Praise You Jesus. I love what You’re doing in me these days. You are great. I surrender freshly to You because You have been so faithful to me.” What a privilege to have instant admittance to God! Whenever and wherever we worship, we touch the realm of spirit.

TRUTH

Not only does worship take place at a non-physical dimension, but as Jesus explained to the woman at the well, worship also involves a dimension of “truth” that comes only by spiritual revelation. He did not mean mystical or peculiar “secrets of the universe.” Jesus simply meant that the natural mind cannot grasp the truths of God, no matter how hard we might try on our own—through severe treatment of our body or by subjecting our daily schedule to hours of meditation. By means of our native intelligence, you and I cannot know God for who and what He is (1 Corinthians 1:21).

Did you know that Jesus actually thanked His Father for hiding the simple truths of the kingdom of God from those people who insist on figuring them out on their own (Luke 10:21)? Jesus did not list steps of enlightenment or meditative paths to higher planes of spiritual knowledge. On the contrary, He insisted that truth about God is always something that God, Himself, reveals to us—not something we figure out or attain on our own.

The Spirit of God, whom Jesus calls the “Spirit of truth” (John 14:17), imparts understandings to our spirit and discloses insights about God to us (John 16:13 and 1 Corinthians 2:10; 12-13). The Holy Spirit is the One who alerts us to Jesus’ true identity (Matthew 16:17). In fact, no one can worship Jesus as Lord, except by revelation from His Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3).

Remember the concept of grace? If we could grasp spiritual truth by means of our natural intelligence, we

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.”

—John 16:13

Therefore I make known to you, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is accursed”; and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

—1 Corinthians 12:3

For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

—1 Corinthians 1:21

I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and Earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.

—Luke 10:21

would not need grace. Because His ways are so much higher than our ways, and His thoughts transcend our very limited mental ability, He intentionally makes the truths of His kingdom on Earth very, very simple. In a sense, He hides them in plain sight beneath where people think to look. The Lord conceals His wisdom and His ways in simple truths that the world scorns as foolish nonsense (1 Corinthians 1:18-25).

God chooses to disguise profound truth in seemingly foolish things because He wants us to believe Him and rely on His words, rather than try to figure everything out on our own. He wants to move us away from boasting about ourselves. In a way, worship is the highest form of name-dropping in the cosmos. You will make much more progress in life and on your journey by “throwing His name around” than by trying to impress everyone with your reputation. In the midst of complicated, difficult circumstances, “boasting in the Lord” (i.e., worship) sets many powerful forces into motion.

QUESTIONS:

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. What does the world think about the wisdom of God? What does God think about the wisdom of the world?

Why would the Lord choose not to use something more impressive in the world’s eyes to communicate His truth? _____

Now read verses 26-31. Look at the definitions below, and answer the same question (“Why would God use foolish, base, despised things when He could have used more impressive ones?):

Foolish [hidden, not obvious, unimpressive, silent] things to befuddle and confound the wise: _____

Base [ordinary, not noble-born, without connections in high places] things to shame the things of reputation: _____

Despised [thought nothing of, least valued] things to bring to nothingness the things that are: _____

WORSHIP AND REVELATION

Aside from receiving the love of God in Jesus, worship is the smartest thing you can ever do; it is like instant (spiritual) intelligence. Worship is a profoundly wise activity because worship declares what is true of God. Praise and worship are the closest we can ever come to uttering pure truth. During times of worship, as we thank our Heavenly Father for “taking us fishing,” our heart and mind expand to understanding much more that

He has done for us. It is like coming to the realization that the very pleasant man we sat next to on the plane, who gave us his cell number to call if we ever needed anything, was the owner of the airline!

God wants to disclose Himself to His children. One of the primary times He shows Himself to us, and reveals more of His character, is during our worship. Worship heightens our sensitivity to spiritual truth. Worship sets our eyes upon the Lord, so we become more attuned to His slightest gesture (Psalm 123:2). Those who know what to look for and expect often receive points of revelation during worship. If we let ourselves worship freely—without laboring so awkwardly or worrying about what others think of us—we will surprise ourselves with how much our spirit “understands and knows” God (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

Have you ever wondered why you sometimes feel awkward or foolish while worshipping? In your heart, you know worship is wonderful—and truth-speaking. Why, then, do you sometimes feel embarrassed to worship? The world around us is so out of tune with God, that anyone who worships Him stands out as different, even peculiar. Most of us do not like to be different from those around us. That is partly why we do not worship as frequently or as freely as we could. When our spirit wants us to lift our voice and our hands in praise, our self-consciousness often tries to veto the idea.

But it isn’t just self-consciousness that causes you to draw back from whole-hearted worship. The natural world thinks the truth of God is foolish and inconsequential—a waste of time and stupid. Since worship expresses thanks for God’s ways, our old self thinks it is doubly dumb. Our self-sense challenges us with two questions: “What good do you think those little truths are going to do?” and “Do you really want everyone to know you are trusting in invisible remedies?” As you walk with the Lord, you will confront those lies over and over.

Doubt and worship don’t fit well with one another. The more you doubt God, the less you worship. But the reverse is also true: the more you worship God, the less you will doubt Him and His ways. Worship effectively overcomes doubts because it proclaims, “Yes! I believe.”

Question: Read Isaiah 43:21; Psalm 147:1; 150:6; Matthew 21:16; and Romans 14:11. Do you think God intended worship to be an awkward activity for us? In other words, is worship foreign to how God created us, or has something of our original constitution been stolen from us? _____

To You I lift up my eyes, O You who are enthroned in the heavens! Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the LORD our God...
—Psalms 123:1-2

REJOICING ALWAYS

Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. —1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Why would God tell us to keep celebrating even when life is not going well? That can almost sound like a spiritualized version of “keep a stiff upper lip.” Is that what God wants to tell us—not to cry, to tough it out, or to at least remember it could be worse? Are we supposed to pretend that we’re happy about a lost job? A chronic illness? An empty apartment? Is God testing us to see whether or not we can remain cheerful when terrible things happen to us or those we love?

Nothing could be further from the truth. The truth always begins with, “For God so loved the world that He gave...” He is not a God who wants His children to pay or to prove anything. He wants to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He is a God of grace and affection. Whenever we read our Bible, we must always interpret its words in light of what we know to be true of the Lord. This statement, “Rejoice always,” is a good case in point.

Our Heavenly Father isn’t telling us to thank Him for everything—the flat tire, the lost job, the broken friendship. Rather, in the midst of everything, He reminds us to keep our attention focused on the One who is above and beyond the brokenness that surrounds us. God did not fashion the world as it has become—with its loss, barrenness, futility and pain. No, He fashioned Eden—with everything pleasing and good (Genesis 2:9). He wants our portion to be every good thing, and abundant life.

But since we live on a broken, derelict planet, we inevitably encounter situations where ruin and bleakness and degradation spill into our lives. So, what is there to celebrate at such times? The Lord and His goodness—that He does not forsake us in our time of need; that He does not despise our afflicted state (Job 36:15; Psalm 22:24; Isaiah 63:9); that He can redeem even the worst of situations, making us fruitful in our affliction, and turning them to ultimate spiritual profit in our lives (Genesis 41:52; 50:20; Romans 8:28-29). Look at how wise Solomon put it:

Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, “I have no delight in them;”... Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; then the dust will return to the Earth as it was, and the

spirit will return to God who gave it. "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "all is vanity!" —Ecclesiastes 12:1, 6-8

God is not interested in us doing exercises or activities just to prove we are willing to do what He wants us to do. Worship is not a proving ground for devotion or an obstacle course for elite forces training. The Lord doesn't say, "I don't care how hard life gets, just keep praising Me because that's all you're good for." No. He is telling us that He is our resource and our recourse when life gets hard—He has ample supply for any need, and He can change the course of things in our life.

Worship and praise keep us focused on who God is and what He has done in our lives thus far. That is why it produces incredible peace and joy deep in our hearts. When the hard times come, we can thank Him for being with us and seeing us through. No matter what, His promise of miraculous intervention is still true. "Thank You. Thank You, Lord. Amen."

.....
*The more you doubt God, the less you worship.
 But the reverse is also true: the more you worship God,
 the less you will doubt Him and His ways.*

A WHOLE-BEING EXPRESSION

Worship is a language that God gave us to express our devotion to Him. It is a whole-being language that allows us to express our love to Him with our entire self—body, soul and spirit. Because we speak out of what fills our heart, worship starts in our heart and spills over to our lips (Luke 6:45). The more our heart is filled with adoration and delight in God, the more we will want to declare it. Consequently, worship and praise are not limited to internalized thoughts and emotions, but are mostly external activities and postures. You could almost say that worship is our body language.

In worshipping, we adopt a posture of humility, acknowledging God's greatness and our desire to serve Him. In fact, worship (*shacha* pronounced *shaw-kahw*) literally means to bow, to kneel, to crouch prostrate before the Lord. That is why we bow our head when we pray, and why we often kneel as we sing. But the emphasis is on approaching the Lord, not just remaining frozen

The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.
 —Luke 6:45

in fear before Him. Just like a puppy might lovingly lick his master's hands, eagerly pressing to get close to his face, so we kiss the Lord with our worship. Worship is tender and intensely personal between the Lord and us.

You may have wondered why fellow travelers on the journey choose to sing songs of praise, and verbally worship God aloud. Praise boasts. In song or in announcement, praise celebrates God and His doings; it centers all the attention on Him and gives Him credit for what He has done. Praise (*tebillah, a hymn*) sings a song that makes clear how you feel about God. You make your inner feelings clear to the outside world. Praise is like polishing a car or motorbike to shine it up and to show it off. Your praise lifts God up, and holds Him out in front of everything for everyone to see.

And what about the practice you have noticed (and perhaps wanted to do yourself) of lifting hands while worshiping God? Why do we do that? Thanksgiving (*towdah, pronounced to-daw*) literally means to extend your hands, to lift your hands. The posture of lifted hands, that so profoundly communicates our surrender, as well as our inability to accomplish what needs doing by means of our own (empty) hands, declares to all the world that we lift God up.

King David, the greatest worship leader of all time, understood this. That is why, in thanks for God's love and kindness, he says, "My lips will praise You...I will bless You...I will lift up my hands in Your name" (Psalm 63:3-4). Jeremiah, a mighty prophet of old, also understood the connection between physical postures and spiritual realities; he says, "Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens" (KJV, Lamentations 3:41).

WHY DO WE LIFT OUR HANDS IN WORSHIP?

- To signal our surrender to God and to His purposes for us.
- To acknowledge that our hands are empty of needed resources.
- To "give Him a hand," thanking Him for His work.
- To ask to be lifted and carried by our "Daddy God."
- To focus everyone's attention on Him, pointing toward Him.

Question: In each of the following verses, identify a physical expression of worship:

1 Chronicles 29:20. _____

Psalms 34:1. _____

Psalms 40:3. _____

Psalms 103:1. _____

Psalms 134:2. _____

Isaiah 12:5-6. _____

Praise and worship bless God. Throughout the Bible we are encouraged to bless the Lord. In the Old Testament, to bless (*barak*, pronounced *baw-rak*) meant to kneel as a physical statement of adoration and respect. Blessing was a salute—pressing the knees to the ground instead of pressing the hand to the forehead like soldiers salute a superior. And in the New Testament, to bless [*eulogia*, pronounced *yoo-log-ee'-ah*] primarily had to do with speaking well of someone; it is the word from which we get eulogy. On Earth we eulogize someone after they have died; since God is alive forever, we bless Him day after day throughout our lives.

THE FRUIT OF OUR LIPS

Because our culture has tried to convince us that our faith is a “private matter” between God and us we have a subtle resistance to speaking out loud to Him or about Him. This affects the way in which we witness: we want our life to “speak” to people. That is good. Our life-choices and behavior should communicate to other people that we have a relationship with God—one they could have as well. But if we do not actually tell them about the good news of Jesus’ sacrifice, they are not going to have the opportunity to believe.

The “private” nature of faith in our society also affects our worship. Society is fairly accepting of reverence as an act of worship; being quiet, observing moments of silence are okay even for non-believers because such observances do not have an impact on unbelievers. If, on the other hand, we who exalt the Lord do so out loud, our praises become very disturbing to them. They overhear something they do not want to hear; they are confronted with our belief in a God whom they do not follow.

The point is not to rattle people with public praise. But it is interesting to see the difference in impact between silent and spoken worship. What we speak has more definition than just what we think within ourselves. It puts more on the line. It is not surprising, then, that the word of God talks about praise and worship as the “fruit of our lips” (Hosea 14:2). Believing and speaking always go hand in hand in the Bible:

“Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.” Hebrews 13:15

In fact, the Lord says that the people He will form for Himself—like you and me—will “declare His praise” with our mouths (Isaiah 43:21). Verbal worship is one of the primary ways for us to give glory to the Lord (Isaiah 42:12). That is why David prays, “O Lord, open my lips that my mouth may declare Thy praise” (Psalm 51:15).

It is not as though we have done something wrong by praising the Lord only in our heart. He can “hear” us when we do. And many times, inner worship is more appropriate to a situation than outward praise might be. We can pray

silently, as well as out loud; and we can worship with our lips or without them. But especially in church with other believers, we want to sing aloud new songs and old songs (Psalm 149:1), and we want to celebrate Him with our words (Psalm 35:18):

"I have proclaimed glad tidings of righteousness in the great congregation; behold, I will not restrain my lips, O Lord, Thou knowest. I have not hidden Thy righteousness within my heart; I have spoken of Thy faithfulness and Thy salvation; I have not concealed Thy lovingkindness and Thy truth from the great congregation." —Psalm 40:9-10

PRESENTING OURSELVES FOR TRANSFORMATION

Beyond these particular activities of worship (and others, like clapping, shouting, playing instruments, etc.), we also express our praise to God by presenting our whole self to Him. As newly adopted children of God, we are living testaments "to the praise of His glory," meaning that our recovery and restoration communicate to all of creation just what is really true of Him (Ephesians 1:5-6, 12). We are ambassadors of His Kingdom, and the more we come to live His way of life, instead of our own former way, the more attention we draw to Him. Our lifestyle reflects on Him.

The Apostle Paul defines the ultimate "spiritual worship service," not as a song meeting at church, but as an offering you make of yourself (Romans 12:1-2)! The most profound worship statement you can make is to lay yourself on the altar and say, "Here is my life, Lord. Use me as You want to use me. I surrender all to You." In short, you sacrifice yourself to Him. In our culture, a sacrifice is generally seen as something you give up, a choice you make to deny yourself something you really want. So it is understandable that many people get confused about what God wants to do with them when they sacrifice themselves. They think, "Well, my life won't be as full or fun as it would have been, but I want God to know that I choose to live for Him."

But how does God view sacrifice—and why might He want us to sacrifice ourselves to Him in worship? God's purpose for sacrifice has never been to leave us with less. Primarily, sacrifice is atonement. It is a means of transferring sin and its penalty away from us. Sacrifice eliminates blotches on our record—taking care of the wrongs that separate us from God. This is truly a case of "less is more."

Sacrifice is also a means of transformation. In order for an Earthly

He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.
—Ephesians 1:5-6

sacrifice to ascend into Heaven, it had to transfer a message from one dimension of reality to the other. In its physical, bodily form, a lamb cannot be offered to God in the heavens because it is flesh and blood. A person can try throwing a lamb into the sky in an effort to send it to Heaven, but it will always tumble back to Earth. How then does one get the lamb into the sky (spiritual realm) to stay? Transform it into a sweet smelling savor; turn the tangible carcass into intangible smoke.

And that is a hint about one of the greatest benefits (to us) of worship: worship changes us. The life-long process of your journey with God will change you drastically. The world wants to keep you conformed to its patterns, but God transforms your life so that it resembles His. Our thoughts and actions need lots of realignment to fit His patterns. Worship and praise miraculously aid in that transformation (see 2 Corinthians 3:18).

Your worship of the true and living God will increasingly shape you into His image. Sacrifices of praise and worship will change the way you think and feel. This can be a daily offering to Him, not just a once-in-a-lifetime experience. When you received Jesus into your life, and surrendered to His Lordship, you received once-for-all-your-life forgiveness and adoption, and your forever connection with Jesus means you can have daily guidance from and interaction with Him. There is no better way to receive interactive guidance from Him than in times of worship.

Read Deuteronomy 5:7-8. Based on what you just read, why do you think God warns you not to worship any image of other gods?

Read Psalm 115:1-8. What happens to people as they worship an idol or a god? _____

Read Luke 16:13. Why do you think that worshiping (serving) one god makes us unsuitable for worshiping another? _____

TWO TRAPS TO AVOID

On your journey, there will be days and seasons when your wrongdoing or discouragement will accumulate—and make you feel that you are unacceptable to God. That is not true, of course, because Jesus' sacrifice made you perpetually acceptable—even pleasing—in God's sight. But in your own soul, you will feel like you are not "doing well." That is the first trap: believing that I am not good enough to worship the Lord. At such times, you will be tempted to draw back from worship, to withhold yourself from Him out of a sense of shame or guilt. We feel better about praising God when we feel better about ourselves. That is natural to think that way, but it is not correct.

Worship is always about what God has done, not what we have done. All His works are perfect (Deuteronomy 32:4). He is worthy of our praise

even when, and especially when, we do not feel worthy of praising Him. So, when a string of your own mistakes causes you to shy away from full-hearted worship, the best thing to do is concentrate on how different His works are from yours. Hallelujah!

QUESTIONS: Among the many hindrances to full and free worship, pride is probably the worst. That is because pride and worship are antithetical to one another. Worship thanks God for how He has arranged things and for what He has done; pride is sure it could do better and that it knows more. The devil, whose name used to be Lucifer, was the chief worship leader in Heaven before pride entered his heart (see Isaiah 14:11-14 and Ezekiel 28:1-18). He wanted things his way, not God's way; ultimately, he declared that God was wrong. That is what pride always leads us to conclude.

Read Deuteronomy 32:4; Daniel 4:37 and Psalm 145:7. Why is praise the antithesis to pride? _____

Read Psalm 25:9 and James 4:6. Worship automatically puts everyone in the right place—God, the Great and Mighty One above, and us on Earth where we can receive all He wants to do for us. What does the Lord want to do for us—especially as we worship? _____

A second trap lies in wait for you in the opposite direction: it is worrying that your worship is not good (or frequent enough) to please God. Whereas the lie behind the first trap is that YOU are not good enough, the lie behind the second trap is that your WORSHIP comes up short. “Worship better, and don’t think God finds your miserable offering acceptable!” the lie shouts. Devotion to God and thankful praise for what He has done, can inadvertently be turned into a legalistic mandate—something we better do or suffer consequences.

We can put lots of pressure on ourselves to worship God (i.e., it really is something we ought to do), and so can well-meaning worship leaders. Especially in churches where the wisdom and beauty of worship gets expressed freely and regularly, the prodding toward higher or more worship can become very fleshly, and result in a charismatic legalism. Worship and devotion to God are heart-attitudes that manifest in behavior, but when the behavior is focused upon more than the attitude—when devotion gets turned into devotions—danger is not far off.

Legalism looks holy on the surface, but it always transfers onto our shoulders a burden Jesus wants to carry for us. Legalism concentrates on our works, rather than on His. The benefits of worship are unmistakable. Worship is like having air-conditioning in a Texas summer heat wave: turn it on as often as you want. The more frequently and freely we worship, the greater blessing we experience. But that is not because we earn blessing the way a dog earns a pat on the head for retrieving a newspaper. God doesn’t

say, “There’s a good little worshipper.”

AN ACTIVE FORCE

Many physical forces and powers and processes propel things in the world and make things happen—magnetism, gravity, electricity, wind, fission, etc. Our natural world is “governed” by various laws: actions have reactions; friction slows movement; matter and energy may change form, but they do not cease to exist; everything tends toward chaos, etc. Living your life in Jesus will expose you to spiritual forces, powers and processes that likewise affect life. Worship is among the most powerful of these spiritual dynamics, and the enemy of your soul does not want you to understand it, much less do it.

Not only does worship signal our allegiance to the Lord, but it also accomplishes great things in and around us. Worship postures us to better receive His instructions and intentions. That is partly due to the change it effects in us, but also because worship actively invites the rulership of God to establish itself in our life situations. Did you know that God is enthroned in the praises of His people (Psalm 22:3)? In a spiritual sense He inhabits our praise, so worship compellingly invites Him to invade our circumstances with His kingdom power.

Read 2 Chronicles 20:1-23. What was the situation for the people of God; why did they cry out to the Lord (vs. 12)? _____

What did God tell the king to do (vs. 17, 20)? _____

What did the king do (vs. 21)? _____

What happened as they praised the Lord (vs. 22)? _____

By praising God, we reassert that He is “far above all [other] rule and authority” that may be trying to direct how our life turns out (Ephesians 1:20-22). The next time you are facing an attack from circumstances or spiritual forces, what will you do? _____

Worship is a powerful agent of deliverance and rescue. When Paul and Silas were in prison, their songs of praise before the Lord—even in the midst of their confining circumstances—brought about a miraculous Earthquake that opened the jail cells (Acts 16:25-30). The more familiar you become with the Bible, the more you will see how the people of God choose to exalt and magnify the Lord when they are surrounded by enemies or in the midst of danger (see Psalm 57:4-11). Why? It’s because worship acts as a special call for deliverance. Worship acknowledges God’s place as the Most High, as the Faithful One. And, worship signals to everyone that we are helpless on our own to do anything about what faces us.

When you're in the midst of a hard time, your natural inclination will be to do anything but praise God (little lies whisper that He is at least somewhat responsible for us being where we are). Worship is tailor-made for times of trouble. That is a lesson you'll have to keep learning throughout your journey. Worship magnifies our sense of God's presence and work.

Worship also ushers us into His courtroom—not physically or in some sort of weird, out-of-body transport, but in the realm of spirit. Worship is the primary activity in Heaven, and it is one of only a few things we can do on Earth as it is done in Heaven. Hence, the Bible tells us we enter His gates and courts with our praise and thanksgiving (Psalm 100:4). Just as we pray for His will to be done on Earth as it is in Heaven, so our praise can be done on Earth as it is in Heaven (Matthew 6:9-10). Truly, worship draws us closer to the Lord and brings us nearer to Him.

WHAT JESUS SAYS ABOUT PRAISE AND WORSHIP

Read Matthew 4:9-10. While resisting temptation in the wilderness, Jesus quoted a very important truth to Satan: "You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only." Worship, service and bonded allegiance are the same concept. We worship the Lord by looking only to Him for our ultimate outcome and our daily instructions. Worship is a signal of allegiance to God. Difficulties in this life try "to bring us to our knees," to make us acknowledge defeat. However, when we voluntarily bend our knees to the Lord in worship, surrendering to His Lordship, we can defeat the very circumstances that try to overwhelm us.

Read Matthew 21:16. When the religious leaders grew indignant at the praise being given to Jesus by the multitudes, He told them that even little children instinctively know enough to worship. God designed us for the special relationship He wanted us to have with Him, so He created in us an inborn desire to worship Him. As they grow older, most people become too sophisticated or knowledgeable to worship the Lord, or they bow down to false gods. When people refuse to celebrate the Lord, they completely miss one of the most basic purposes for mankind. Hence, Jesus explains that God uses children, and their innocence, to repair and adjust worship among people

Read Luke 19:40. In fact, the whole of creation is so bent upon worshipping its Creator, that if people do not exercise their privilege as the only ones on Earth who can loose their tongues in praise, even inanimate objects like rocks will find a way to cry out in adoration. Human's ability with speech and language—all the intricate and creative ways we could verbally thank the Lord—far exceeds that of any other creature. How sad it must be to the Lord to have people choose to be as inarticulate as sheep, as silent as stones.

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

How have your thoughts changed about worship from reading this chapter? _____

Did you ever wonder why God wanted to be worshiped? In what ways is worship really for our sake? _____

Since we worship God, doesn't it make sense to worship Him the way He wants to be worshiped? How do we worship God? What does it look like? _____

Why does God prefer to be called "Daddy God"? What makes it hard for us to have a comfortable relationship with Him? _____

Why do you think that people want to make their own choices about how to worship Him? _____

Explain why the Lord warns us not to worship false gods? How does worship transform us? _____

In this chapter we learned about some things that keep us from worshipping God. In your own life, what makes it difficult to praise the Lord? _____

Why do you think people struggle with worshipping the Lord with their whole being—including their lips, their hands, their knees, etc.? What would you say to a friend who asked you why you lift your hands in praise, and speak words of worship to the Lord? _____

Thank God for all that He has done for you. Acknowledge His hand at work in your life. Tell God how glad you are to know what you know about Him. Are you in any danger, trouble, in the midst of hard times or do you feel surrounded by enemies? Worship God. Acknowledge His place as the Most High, as the Faithful One. Thank God for how He has arranged things and for what He has done.

PRAYER:

Surrender everything to God. Lift your hands and
begin to praise Him, simply, with your lips:

“Father, I love You. Thank You for what You have done in my life.

Thank You, Lord, for Your mercy and forgiveness.

Thank You that You have a plan for my life.

*And praise You, Jesus, that You are always with me,
and that You died for me. Thank You for Your faithfulness to me.*

Praise Your Name, Lord. I love You.

*I worship You as the Almighty One, the Maker of Heaven and Earth,
who spoke the worlds into existence, who made me as your child.*

I serve You and surrender freshly to

*Your purposes for my life. Thank You that You go before me
and lead me in the way I should go.”*

How I bless You for all You have done for me.

*Receive my worship and praise as an offering,
as incense before You.*

Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!”



#2 READING THE BIBLE

There is a huge difference between religion toward God, and relationship with God. Religion essentially outlines ways in which people like you and me must live, in order to be(come) acceptable to God. Religion puts the emphasis on what we need to do for Him. The relationship God offers to us, on the other hand, is completely based on what He does for us. With religion, the great question mark is whether or not God will find what we do adequate enough to measure up to His standards: will God accept what we do for Him; will He willingly receive us into His presence? What the Bible teaches about God and the relationship He wants with us is exactly opposite to that. The issue is not whether He will accept what we do for Him, but whether we will accept what He has done for us.

Religion is one of the worst enemies to your relationship with the Lord. The religious mentality that lurks in the fleshly corners of every soul will always attempt to interpret your walk with the Lord as a series of steps you must take for Him, things that you need to do to prove something to Him or to show Him how hard you are trying. Whereas God wants to do good to us all the days of our lives, and pursue us with mercy (Psalm 23:6), religion tells us we have to do good and pursue Him by following rules and regulations all the days of our lives. God wants to lift our burdens and sustain us (Psalm 55:22); religiousness wants to add other loads and put the burden of sustaining our connection with God on us (see Matthew 23:4).

God is the One who “daily bears our burden” (Psalm 68:19), the One who breaks “the yoke of our burden” (Isaiah 9:4). That is why Jesus invites us to come to Him when we are loaded down with all the stuff life puts on us (Matthew 11:28-30). The things He gives us to carry are handy and amazingly helpful for hauling the rest of the junk to the dump. Everything God does for us and offers to us comes with these words attached: “Here, you will find that this really helps you...” Religion twists God’s words around to sound like this: “If you want Me to help, you better do this...”

As you follow Jesus on your journey, you will get better and better at distinguishing His voice from all the

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL LEARN. . .

- Why God wrote the Bible, and how its promises change you.
- The power of God’s Word to renew and to restore you.
- Why the Bible is unlike any other book on Earth.
- How the Bible reveals the truth about God and you.

Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.
—Psalm 23:6

Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.
—Psalm 55:22

others vying for your attention. One of the best helps in that discerning process is to listen to the tone of what you hear. Jesus is kind and merciful. He offers to bless you and assist you. Even when He warns or corrects you, His voice is assuring, love-filled and merciful. Any voice that sounds condemning, threatening or conditional in its love isn't your Good Shepherd!

Your earnestness can fool you into doing right things for wrong reasons. God's posture of grace toward us always means that He wants to do things for our sake; He isn't asking us to do things for His sake. Whenever He tells us to do something, we can be assured that it is meant to benefit us—not Him. This is a delicate balance, of course, because right and wrong, good and bad, appropriate and inappropriate choices face us everyday. It is important to “keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:22). God doesn't give instructions in order to get you to do something for Him; He intends His counsel to do something for you.

QUESTIONS: Listen to the tone of these two sentences:

1. “If you do not do what I tell you to do, you are not going to be blessed.”
2. “If you follow my instructions, you will be blessed.”

Can you hear the difference? The first sentence sounds angry, threatening and authoritarian; the second is merciful, concerned and advisory. Though the Lord is the ultimate authority in life, He speaks to His children differently than He does to His enemies. He wants to teach us how spiritual life really works, so He instructs, counsels and guides us. He does not bully, threaten or condemn. Read the following scriptures with the sound of the second sentence in your ears, and then put them into your own words:

Deuteronomy 5:29. _____

Psalm 81:13-16. _____

Isaiah 48:17-18. _____

Matthew 11:28-30. _____

... and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.

—John 10:4-5

I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me.

—John 10:14

MAN WAS NOT MADE FOR THE SABBATH

Unfortunately, one of the easiest places to get confused about who is doing what for whom (You for God, or God for you?) is in reading the Bible. God wants you to read the Bible, not to prove something to Him or to earn something from Him, but because He wants to do you good. People like me, who have been on the journey for decades, will tell you that reading your Bible is one of the most important and helpful things you can do to grow spiritually strong and stable.

In this chapter, we are going to look at why that is true, and explore many incredible benefits that come to us from reading the word of God. But throughout your life with the Lord, remember that His intent for His word is to serve you, not for you to serve it. Reading the Bible is not a religious obligation; it is a marvelous, life-giving opportunity.

Jesus got in frequent conflicts with religious leaders of His day. One time they accused Him of violating the Sabbath. Why? Because He allowed His disciples to pick a few heads of grain to snack on while walking in the fields (see Mark 2:23-28). The legalists said, “God has a rule: no work on the Sabbath (Period).” Jesus told them they completely missed the heart of God. God did not create mankind so that there would be someone to obey His rules. He made the Sabbath as a blessing for people—giving them rest, and a regular reminder to rely on His finished work, and to cease from their own works (see Hebrews 4).

So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.
—Hebrews 4:9-10

.....
*Reading the Bible is not a religious obligation;
 it is a marvelous, life-giving opportunity.*

God wrote the Bible, like He made the Sabbath, for the sake of people—to do us good. Today, the legalist claims that reading your Bible is a requirement mandated by God. If you want to do what you are supposed to do, READ IT! Sadly, that mentality will steal away your incentive to read it. If reading His word is merely a discipline of obedient devotion, a compulsory exercise of our religion, we miss much of the advantage God wants to bring to us through it.

So, why would God want us to spend time regularly reading His word? Where is the advantage to us; what spiritual benefit do we derive from taking His words into our heart? What can be found in the Bible that cannot be found anywhere else?

To start, let us focus on what the Bible is—and is not. It is not just paper and ink (or digital letters on a screen), words divided into books, chapters and verses. Those are just the means by which the Bible can be

read. As simplistic as it may sound, the Bible is the word of God—what He says about the crucial matters of true, spiritual “life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3-4). When you read a chapter or several verses, you are actually reading what God determined is so vital to the subject that He took pains to have it recorded for all time.

The Bible is filled with what God says are the very most important things for you and me to know on our journey. Nothing is bigger than that! Think for a moment about the power of God’s words. In the beginning of time as we know it, He spoke, and out of nothing, all creation came into being (Genesis 1; Romans 4:17). God’s word is filled with a creative power so life-giving that it framed the cosmos (Hebrews 11:3). That power still reverberates in His written words to us.

CREATED FROM NOTHING FOR WHAT PURPOSE?

Science has several theories about the origin of the cosmos, and life on Earth. The odds against life, and against existence (period) are so enormous, that any plausible explanation for why we are here must factor in astronomical sums of natural substances (like time) to the equation.

Life is simply too big of an improbability to have happened without some huge element outside of our present experience, and what we can see in the world as we know it now.

The scientific investigation concludes that something “just happened.” Amidst the vastness, out of the primal energies and elements of the infant cosmos, life (somehow) began and evolved to its present form. What could have been powerful enough to scatter the galaxies—and bring forth life of any kind, much less humanity, on the Earth?

For Jesus-Followers, the origin of our species is far more than a matter of idle curiosity. It sits at the center of what is true of God—that He created the worlds as an arena for loving relationship with us, and that He did so intentionally, personally and miraculously.

QUESTIONS: What does the Bible say about how we got here? Read these verses and answer the questions that follow:

Genesis 1:1, 27. The Hebrew word for create is *bara* [pronounced *baw-raw*]. It suggests a deliberate choice, like someone selecting to cut down the choicest tree for lumber to build a house. Science says things exist because of chance and accident, but the Bible says what? _____

Hebrews 11:3. The Greek word for prepared or formed [*katartizo*] means completed thoroughly, made completely perfect. Science tells us that the cosmos, and everything in it, is evolving toward a higher order even though the evidence points to the fact that it is actually falling apart. What

was the power behind the perfect and complete cosmos when God made it? _____

Romans 4:17. What two things can God do by His word? _____

FROM CREATION TO CONVERSATION

After six days, God rested. He stopped speaking things into existence (Genesis 2:1-2). He wasn't tired or worn out. Rather, He was finished, and everything was perfectly the way He wanted it to be. Just like a student who knows all the answers on a test, and finishes before the allotted time for test-taking ends, so God finished the cosmos with plenty of time to spare. His rest was a silent comment about how pleased He was with what He had made. God arranged the cosmos perfectly—exactly as He wanted it. Like a designer with an unlimited budget and endless amounts of time and energy, God decorated the universe and put His signature touch on even its smallest details.

He no longer needed to speak creative words; now He could have conversation with the people whom He created. [He loves to talk with us and speak to us. That has always been the point.] But mankind's rebellion reconfigured the worlds, splashing garish colors everywhere and knocking the furnishings out of place. What God had made, we unmade; what He had fixed and arranged, we broke and scattered in disarray. Sin messed everything up.

When sin came and broke the worlds, it cut off much of the dialog between God and us. And so, in love, God began to speak again—not creative, call-into-being-out-of-nothing words, but curative, get-everything-fixed-back-up words. His word still has the same power it had to create the worlds and give birth to us. But now, that word-wealth expends itself to renew and to restore us. Like a man discovering intruders have broken in and ransacked his home, God's first thought is for what He cherishes most—His family. The shambles can be taken care of later; the broken drawers can be fixed tomorrow. Right now, he wants to make sure everyone is okay, and he wants to relieve them of the trauma they suffered.

So it is with our Heavenly Father. In the midst of a wayward, off-base world, God's word repairs the damage we have suffered, and tells us about the new life we will enjoy with Him forever. Because His word is exactly the same as it has always been (Isaiah 40:8), it is perfect for perfectly restoring us to our original condition (Psalm 19:7). God's word reframes and reconstitutes our being.

The grass withers,
the flower fades,
But the word of
our God stands
forever.
—Isaiah 40:8

The law of the
LORD is perfect,
restoring the soul;
the testimony of
the LORD is sure,
making wise the
simple.
—Psalm 19:7

Read 1 Chronicles 16:14; Psalm 119:60, 89 and 1 Peter 1:25. Since God's word never changes, what can it do in our lives? _____

In what way can the word of God act as a reference point for our life today? _____

Now look at John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-17 and Luke 6:46-49. Why does Jesus claim that His words are a sure foundation? _____

THE ESSENTIAL TRUTH ABOUT THE TRUTH

The Bible is unlike any other book in the world. To begin with, it is the word of God, not man (2 Timothy 3:16). Though people through the ages penned the Bible—it is inspired [lit. God-breathed] by God—who “watches over” it to assure that it does what it is supposed to do (Jeremiah 1:12). Men “moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God”; they did not write Scripture, as “an act of human will” (2 Peter 1:20-21).

You will find that this point—the ultimate authorship of the Bible—receives the most assault in our culture and in your own mind. Why? Because as long as the Bible is just a good book, a collection of nice stories, an anthology of historical fiction, a moral code or a treasury of quotable quotes, it doesn't have any real authority in someone's life. They can take it or leave it; read it or not read it; follow it or dismiss it.

God loves us profoundly. He wants us to experience an abundant life (John 10:10), as free as possible from the ravages of wrongness all around us. That is the whole point for the Bible having authority in your life. When you realize the Scriptures are a message from God Himself, and believe He is the actual author of the Bible, you will read it differently and more attentively, the way that you would read a long letter from someone who loves you.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.

—2 Timothy 3:16

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

—Romans 15:4

He wants you to know Him and His heart and His ways. He wants you to see what He is like by reading the record of what He has done for us and what He has said to people through the ages (Romans 15:4). The scriptures reveal how He thinks about things, stuff He did before we got to know Him, and ways He handles problems like ours. Reading the Bible is the best way for you to grow familiar with His voice and to become acquainted with His manner of doing things. We read it to receive life-changing truth and

revelation.

What we get out of reading the Bible is often determined by what we expect from it and look for in it. For instance, people who approach the Bible as though it is nothing more than a series of long-ago stories will likely only glean an understanding of historical events. Likewise, those who view the Bible as nothing but a long list of rules and regulations will usually only “see” laws and requirements. They remain blind to all the instances of God’s mercy.

Jesus explained this spiritual principle this way: “For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you” (Matthew 7:2). Whatever judgment you come to about God’s words is the benefit you receive back. The evaluation or expectation we have on the front end usually determines what comes out in the end. That’s one reason why people have a hard time reading their Bible; they don’t know what to look for.

Mostly, the Bible is a book of counsel and transformation—God uses it to change the way we approach life so that we “see” things according to His perspective. His thoughts and ways are not like ours (Isaiah 55:8-9); His are spiritual, ours are natural. As we read the Bible, we learn more and more about how to appraise things spiritually (1 Corinthians 2:14). That opens all sorts of realizations to us.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-11, especially verse 11. The examples from history contained in the Bible have been personally chosen by the Lord (like an artist’s sample portfolio) to do what in our lives? How can others’ example instruct [call attention to] us? _____

GOD PROMISES

When we “give” someone our word, we pledge to stand behind what we say. “I give you my word,” means, “I promise; this is true.” The Bible contains all the promises God has made to you. It is full of declarations about how He will provide for your needs, how He will contend with your spiritual adversaries, as well as how He will carry you, answer you, change you and love you throughout your life. His promises are born out of His heart of love. Love promises a future; love loves to enumerate what it is going to do for the sake of another.

Parents awaiting the birth of a child understand this. So do brides and grooms, young boys with their first puppy, and closest friends moving away to another city. True love calls forth promises from the deep places in our heart—pledges, commitments and vows of what we will (always) do and feel for the one we love.

You will be amazed, as you read the Bible, just how much God has sworn to give to you and do for you. If you rarely read the Bible, you simply won’t

know about His promise, for example, to never desert you no matter how bad things get, you will go through unnecessary and agonizing uncertainty. You'll find yourself wondering if He will do something that He already promised He would do. The more of His promises you know, the more you can stand with certainty and without fear. His promises are the mainstay of your inheritance—all He has bequeathed to take care of you and to bring you incredible fulfillment.

Read Isaiah 26:9. What do we learn about when we experience one of God's words in life? _____

Read Joshua 21:45 and 2 Corinthians 1:20. What do we know about the promises of the Lord? _____

Read Romans 10:17 and Hebrews 11:33. How do we receive promises from Him when we read the Bible? _____

We are “commended” to God's word (Acts 20:32); that is, we are encouraged to place ourselves in its safekeeping and under its benevolent care. The Bible is not a taskmaster driving us to do God's will; neither does God appoint overseers to make sure that we read as much as we are supposed to read. Instead, He gives us His word as a kind and careful mentor who watches over us. The simple words in Acts 20:32 teach us two incredible, yet simple, truths:

And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.
—Acts 20:32

God's word builds us up. The word increases our maturity and gives us spiritual girth. The Bible “edifies” us—establishes, builds up, frames and secures us. Picture a house-builder and imagine yourself as the soon-to-be owner of the custom home the builder is constructing. If you are like me (a man who owns no tools), you would like a builder to be on the job as much as possible. The more days he works on the house, the sooner it will be built! Exactly the same is true of the Bible. It builds our spiritual understanding and it constructs things for us that we cannot build on our own.

God's word explains our full inheritance. As a collection of magnificent promises, the Bible lays out the many, many things freely given to us by God (1 Corinthians 2:12-13). Think of Bible verses as computer “memory sticks” that download our spiritual heritage from God deep into our soul. Scriptures bring the things of God into our daily experience. Through His word we become more aware of our full inheritance as ministering sons or daughters of God.

As we read the Bible, our inner person, our spiritual life is developed and matured like a fast-growing adolescent (Ephesians 4:14). God's words increase our strength and confidence, and they add weightiness to our character, so that we become firmly established in God's ways.

CHANGE AGENTS

His promises in the Bible have supernatural capability to change you. Just as worship has a transforming power in your life, so too, does reading the Bible. Not only do the promises of God neutralize corrosive influences, but His words proactively enable you to think and act like Him (2 Peter 1:4). Scripture teaches you what is true about life and how it works. It realigns your thinking and adjusts the course you are on. Like a practiced mother cleaning up her teenage boy's room, the Bible can sweep into your heart and mind to put things back where they belong.

In other words, even though you and I have been tragically infected and corrupted by the ways of a world gone bad, the promises of God act as a counterbalance and an antidote. In fact, truth from the Bible actually liberates people from false and deadly mentalities (John 8:32).

Sometimes, general principles taken from Bible verses help us make decisions. For instance, lots of scripture alerts us to the undesirability of debt because of how debt takes away our freedom and causes us to come under the hand of a stranger (Proverbs 6:1-5). Facing a decision about our future, you likely want to make the choice that reduces or eliminates your debt—rather than increasing it! It isn't a rigid, hard-and-fast rule, but the general, biblical principle, "Avoid debt," counsels you.

Other times, verses from the Bible give us precise direction and prompt you to action. For example, when reading about the ministry of reconciliation God has entrusted to us (2 Corinthians 5:17-21), you might find yourself thinking about a broken relationship from your past—and know it's time to write a letter of apology. That doesn't mean you accept total responsibility for the not-as-it-used-to-be condition of the relationship; neither is it completely up to you to repair the relationship. Rather, as another verse counsels, as much as it depends on you, "be at peace with all men" (Romans 12:18). The whole counsel of God informs your thinking. Amazing things happen as a result of responding to such promptings.

He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.
—2 Peter 1:4

If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.
—John 8:31-32

.....

God's word has the uncanny ability to burrow down to the true heart of every matter, separating issues well enough for us to see what's really going on in our heart—or in others'.

.....

Like seed that becomes an orchard, God's word hidden in our hearts produces fruit that others can enjoy from our lives. If you want to be a person of spiritual insight—someone who can help and counsel others—realize that God's word, read regularly through the years, is the basis for all good (spiritual) counsel. God wants His word to actively guide us in the midst of our days, giving us insight and understanding about the choices we face and the problems we want to resolve. God's word has the uncanny ability to burrow down to the true heart of every matter, separating issues well enough for us to see what's really going on in our heart—or in others'.

ALIVE AND ACTIVELY PENETRATING

This leads us to another way in which the Bible is unlike any other book you will ever read. It is not an inert textbook to be memorized and studied like a science volume. It is not just a static collection of facts like an encyclopedia, or a set of principles and axioms like in a geometry book. It isn't even just a list of rules and moral guidelines to follow. It is alive!

The word of God has a life of its own, an animated quality that enables it to “perform” its intended work in us almost on its own (1 Thessalonians 2:13). It is like a chemical compound that reacts to other elements. Similar to how hydrogen peroxide fizzes and bubbles in response to infectious agents, so the word of God has a spiritual reaction to things in us. The Bible works like a solvent, getting down and under even the deepest issues in your psyche, bringing with it God's restorative and healing power.

Read Hebrews 4:12-13. After reading the verse in your own Bible, read the expanded translation below, and answer the questions.

“For the word of God is living and active [powerfully effective, efficient] and sharper [able to cut right through to the real issue] than any two-edged sword, and piercing [reaching through] as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge [discriminate between and among] the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His [God's] sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do [give an account].”

Not only is God's word alive, but it is active. What does it actively do?

In your own words, explain the process of piercing and judging. _____

What should you expect to happen in your heart and mind as you read the Bible? _____

BIBLE ATTRIBUTES AND READING ADVANTAGES (PSALM 19:7-11)

<i>The Bible is...</i>	<i>Reading it will...</i>
<p>Perfect—exactly correct in every detail pertaining to life; it is wholly complete, and it lacks nothing that we need for life.</p>	<p>Restore your mind, heart and conscience, and bring your thoughts and emotions to different conclusions. It recovers areas of your inner life that have been broken, bound or bruised by life.</p>
<p>Sure—absolutely reliable and trustworthy as a basis for living life and making decisions; it is a firm foundation upon which to stand, no matter what the circumstance.</p>	<p>Make you unbelievably wise, with keen insights on what to do, think or say in any situation. Rather than relying on your limited experience and expertise, Bible stories and verses will come to your mind, offering you counsel and direction for right decisions.</p>
<p>Right—precisely as it should be, like a clear, sunshiny morning or an exquisitely set dinner table; it doesn't get any better than the genuineness of God's word.</p>	<p>Counteract the pollutants of life, and introduce a fundamental sense of well-being and prosperity to your life. Constant exposure to the Bible brings a deep-seated joy to your heart in the same way the beauty of an evening sunset fills you with awe and peace.</p>
<p>Pure—totally free of worldly contaminants or elements of distortion; it has no mixed motives or mixed messages that need to be filtered out.</p>	<p>Reveal counterfeits, subterfuges and falsehoods that you would otherwise not discern in life. The Bible is like a powerful flashlight shining on the path in front of you; it lets you see hidden pits and traps, and points out the best places to step.</p>
<p>True and Righteous—thoroughly and expertly revealing the way God intended life to work; it discloses revelation to us—things we cannot learn from any other source.</p>	<p>Contrast what lasts unto eternity, and what is merely passing away. The word of God abides forever, and when the dust finally settles in this life, only those things lined up with eternal truth will remain standing.</p>

Desirable—intensely craved by your spirit as its favorite meal; nothing tastes better to your soul than the Bible, and nothing can offer such perfect nourishment for growth and health.

Develop your spiritual immune system, guarding you from external disease agents and internal ailments that might otherwise exploit your vulnerabilities. Scripture provides you with a great line of defense against all sorts of infections.

God's word is especially suited to recover us from the past and to outfit us for the future. As we read our Bible, it fixes and rebuilds aspects of our God-given personality—without requiring us to know ahead of time what problems or wounding(s) may be in us. It builds us up and provides us with resources and tools God intends us to use and enjoy. Like a time-release cold capsule or super potent multiple vitamin, the Bible starts work after we get it inside. It nourishes our inner person and strengthens us against spiritual attack.

Additionally, the Bible supplies us with heightened discernment and a keener sense of what is going on—inside and out. Scripture is like a lamp shining in the dark, lighting our way and chasing back the shadows (Psalm 119:105). To God, day and night are alike (Psalm 139:12); He sees perfectly well in both. Nothing is hidden from His sight, and His word has that same capacity to navigate in the hidden recesses of our being. A steady diet of Bible verses will create an inner sense of peace and joy (Psalm 119:165)—a kind of optimism that enables us to believe God has everything under control.

Since God knows how everything is supposed to work, and has the final word in everything, His written word (given to us long before the final end) is the surest and longest-lasting foundation upon which to base life-decisions. His truth outlines a path that we can reliably follow with all our heart. The wisdom contained in God's word transfers itself to the seat of our thoughts and emotions. His counsel gives us a huge advantage for living. Life just works so much better when we read the Bible.

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR BIBLE READING

1. Begin by believing what you are reading is true, rather than reading and then deciding if it is true or not.
2. Pray a simple prayer: “Lord teach me from Your word; plant these verses in my heart to bear fruit later in my life.”
3. Read as regularly as possible—a little each day is better than a lot once in a while.
4. Read the Bible like you would read a treasure map—looking for things in your life that resemble what you find in the verses.
5. Expect revelation. Listen to what comes to your heart about issues in your life, or concerning matters about which you have wondered.
6. Mark or underline every verse that sticks out to you—especially verses that build you up.
7. Keep your eye out for promises or commands that reveal the heart of God.
8. Look for contrasts between what the Bible says and how you think, feel or act. When you spot those differences, ask the Lord to change you.

PERFECT MIRROR

The Bible also acts as a magnifying mirror, giving us an up-close glimpse of two images. First and foremost, it reflects the glory of the Lord in the same way that a giant mirror enables astronomers to see objects in the heavens through a telescope. Stars that are faint to the natural eye because of their physical distance from the Earth are brought close by huge mirror lenses. In similar fashion, God’s word, which is “near” to us (Deuteronomy 30:14), offers us a first-hand look at God. Since He inhabits another realm (in the heavens), God is often observed as being distant from us. Looking into the Bible reveals truths about God—what He is like in personality, character and activity.

The Bible mirror has no warps or distortions. It is perfectly smooth and shaped to give back an exact picture of God. The contorted view many people have about God comes from their own impressions, not from the pages of the Bible. Sometimes, too, well-meaning people take a few Bible verses out of context and attempt to interpret God’s ways in light of a small portion of the whole mirror. If the mirror lens is not smooth, the warp of the lens creates a distortion in the magnified reflection. The whole Bible must be seen in light of the whole Bible; individual stories or verses can be misleading if taken only on their own.

Second, reading the Bible is like holding up a mirror to ourselves. It returns

an accurate portrait of our likeness, and it shows us things we cannot see with our natural eyes (James 1:21-25). Without a mirror, no one can see the back of their own head. Who knows how the strands of hair are standing up and out? Faults and needs in our soul often remain undetected and unanswered when left only to our natural perceptions. The word of God has a miraculous way of bringing hidden things to light in our heart.

Not only can we behold wonderful truths about the Lord in the mirror of His word, but we can also see some not-so-wonderful realities about our life. God's amazing promise is that He never draws our attention to broken or sinful areas of our life just to inform us about them. He intentionally uses His word to identify what hurts or enslaves us—then His words heal and deliver us (Psalm 107:20; Matthew 8:8, 16).

Do you sometimes have fears or negative thoughts? Look for promises from the Lord in the Bible that relate directly to those painful emotions and thoughts. The more of His promises you know, the more you can withstand the lies that come against you.

On your journey, you will be reminded of verses and phrases from the Bible that alert you to what God is saying. Recollected scripture is one of the primary ways God will guide you. In fact, that is one of the main benefits for reading the Bible. It heightens your ability to hear God's voice. When God leads us in life, He does so mostly by bringing passages and verses from the Bible to our remembrance. The more Bible that is stored in your memory banks, the better able you will be to hear His voice leading you. Discovering God's will for your life, being led by the Spirit, hearing God's voice, ministering to other people, resisting temptation—and virtually every other aspect of your walk with the Lord—develop largely as a result of spending time reading the Bible.

Always remember, however, that we do not earn spiritual growth like a merit badge. We don't "work our way up the (spiritual) ladder" as a result of doing something for God (i.e., putting in the required amount of Bible study). God never intended for reading His words to become a legalistic obligation for us to fulfill. Rather, the Bible is the most useful, all-purpose tool for your growth in understanding the Lord and His ways. The Bible will introduce as much blessing into your life as you allow it to.

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.
—James 1:23-24

He sent His word and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions.
—Psalms 107:20

When evening came, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill.
—Matthew 8:16

WHEN HIS WORDS CONVICT YOU

During times of Bible reading, when you feel convicted or alerted to an area of your mind or heart that does not line up with God's way, try these things:

1. Meditate on the verse(s) throughout the next several days—repeat it in your mind, think about it, look for connections to events in your life or to other thought-patterns, etc.
2. Ask Jesus to teach you from His word; ask Him to open your eyes to what He is saying to you.
3. Look up similar verses and look for more patterns and connections—use the cross-references in your Bible or a concordance to discover the whole counsel of God as it relates to the specific issues He is bringing to your attention.
4. When the pieces of the puzzle come together, thank Jesus for alerting you to danger—and thank Him for setting you free.

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

Before you read this chapter, what was your impression about the Bible, and how has that changed as a result of what you have read? _____

What is God's primary purpose for giving us His word? _____

Why does God want you to read the Bible? What advice would you give to a friend who asked you if they should read the Bible? _____

Most people are looking for a philosophy for living—guidelines for decisions and actions. Why is the Bible the best philosophy for living? _____

How would you explain the connection between the creative power of God's word, and the restorative power it has? _____

In light of what you have learned in this chapter, what is the importance of Jesus being called the Word of God? _____

Even though our lives have been tragically affected by a world gone bad, the promises of God act as a counterbalance and an antidote. How do God's words enable you to become more like Him in how you think and behave? _____

PRAYER:

*“Dear God, thank You that You have given me the Bible
to support me in every area of my life. Help me to have a heart
that loves the Bible and wants to learn more.*

*Thank You for the many promises
You give to me through Your Word—the instruction provided
and the principles that are life giving to me.*

*Father, I ask that You speak to me through Your Word
and that I grow more each day.*

*Thank You Heavenly Father for giving me Your words in the Bible.
They are perfect, sure, true and righteous.*

*Reading Your words restores my mind, heart and conscience
to how You intended them to work. Your words introduce well-being
and prosperity to my life.*

*Open the eyes of my heart to see what You are saying to me personally
as I read the wonderful letter You have written to the world.*

I want to line up my life with Yours.

Thank You...in Jesus' Name.”

#3 ASKING FOR GOD'S INTERVENTION

To the secretaries and junior associates of a large corporation, the CEO can be a fearsome presence, and not someone to interrupt lightly. They would never think to walk into the BIG BOSS's office and start fiddling with the items on his desk; some things are just not done, no matter how casual the working environment claims to be. Rarely would the rank and file workers approach the top executive to request a raise or to ask for some situation to be looked into. That simply isn't done. There are managers to handle such matters.

But on a school holiday, the granddaughter of any powerful CEO can walk into the office, climb up on grandpa's lap and make paper-clip necklaces. She can suspend international negotiations or multi-million dollar business plans to ask for another color pen to draw with, or to announce that the stapler is empty. Some employees might grow indignant at the interruption, and secretly marvel at the way the little girl is so oblivious to the fact that this is a workplace, not a living room, but no employee misses the main point: adored family members get in to see the Boss anytime they want.

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL LEARN . . .

- God delights in you coming to Him anytime, anywhere.
- Jesus' Name is the vital access point in prayer.
- You do not have to be "good enough" to pray; just be thankful and believe.
- Prayer affects the invisible dimension—and shakes up this world.

.....

That is the essence of prayer—coming to God when we need help, asking Him in Jesus' Name to intervene.

.....

Learning how to welcome God's activity and purposes into your life is much like learning how to be a child in the lap of God. You will be amazed at how many resources He offers to put at your disposal, and how easy it is to ask for them in times of need. That is the essence of prayer—coming to God when we need help, asking Him in Jesus' Name to intervene. God wants us to ask because He loves to answer.

But before explaining some of the simple ins-and-outs of prayer, let me dispel some of the faulty impressions you may have picked up about conversation with God. Spiritual truth is so contrary to how we naturally think about things, and if we are not careful, our natural (or religious)

thinking races ahead to choke the life out of what God wants us to know.

A good example of this is the story of the Prodigal son on his way home to see his father (Luke 15:11-32). The son knew he had been wrong, so he rehearsed an entire “I-know-I-don’t-deserve-anything” speech, hoping his father would at least give him a job with the servants. Ironically, the boy never even had a chance to start the well-rehearsed speech. When his dad saw him at a great distance, he was so overjoyed to have him back home again that he smothered the son’s speech with a tearful embrace that made it clear nothing else mattered. His son was home. Grieving was over. It was time to celebrate the future together.

Obviously, the father’s interest and perspective were nothing like what the son imagined. The son expected the reunion conversation to revolve around his past mistakes. The Dad’s only thought was for a future—together. Sincere believers like you and me will often find ourselves on that walk back to our Father, after realizing we have not lived as we should. Our prodigal nature leads us to squander our spiritual inheritance—striking out on foolish pursuits that leave us bankrupt in heart and mind. Or, perhaps less blatantly, we conclude that we do not deserve to receive much from the Lord because we have not done well enough or tried hard enough.

QUESTIONS:

Read Luke 15:11-32. Why do you think we evaluate our worthiness when we come to God to ask for something in prayer? _____

How would the Prodigal’s father feel if the son insisted on punishing himself because of his mistakes—even after the father wanted to celebrate their reunion? _____

Based on this story, how pleased is the Lord when we come to pray? _____

LEGALISTIC TRAPS

Let’s face it, our thinking is fundamentally flawed about how we relate to God—and how He relates to us. We are tempted to approach things in the Kingdom of God based on what we think we know about where we stand with God. Our tactic is to rehearse what we should be doing more, or better, how we have blown it, etc. Prayer is one of the best examples of our human tendency to focus on what we’ve done wrong, not lived up to or failed in. God’s loving and simple offer to be a “present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1), and to give us “help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16) gets lost in the lines of the speech we practice in our mind.

Mention the subject of prayer to many on their journey with Jesus, and their attention snaps to lines of a well-memorized speech about missed

opportunity, failed requirements or unmet obligations. In California slang: “My bad!” Somewhere in that mental conversation with themselves—practicing for the imagined conversation with God—they hear, “You lousy Christian; you need to pray more.” That accusation against themselves subtly brings a false charge against prayer itself: asking for God’s intervention becomes an obligation, rather than on an opportunity.

God means for prayer to relieve us of burdens, but legalism turns it into an additional load. Such thoughts of unworthiness push believers away from conversation with the Lord, and compound their sense of failure—of not living up to what they should. That’s when the mental speech comes full circle: “You are too lousy of a Christian to pray at all.”

The devil, your journey-adversary, does not care if you crash to the right (“You are supposed to pray more”), or to the left (“You haven’t been good enough to pray”). He just wants you off the road. He wants you to approach prayer like the Prodigal son: feeling guilty for not coming sooner and more often; and/or, feeling too unworthy to come at all. The enemy of your life urges you to begin prayer by declaring how bad and wrong and unworthy you are. God will have none of that. He is just thrilled to have time with you again and again.

When a Kingdom key is more notable to us for its heaviness on our key chain, than for the amazing number of doors it unlocks, we have missed something. When a truth is more of a burden than a blessing, we’re seeing it incorrectly. The spiritual principles and tools God wants us to grow familiar with on our journey with Him are always cause for greater celebration, not greater condemnation. We want to keep viewing them in light of why they make us rejoice, not how they seemingly point out our failings and unworthiness. That is why some truths in the Kingdom of God are better understood from the inside out—understanding the heart of the truth, before that truth is precisely defined and outlined as a behavior.

HOW TO PRAY

If you feel like you do not know how to pray, you are not alone. The disciples asked to be taught, and most believers have the same sense of uncertainty about praying effectively.

But just because we need help learning how to utilize this most incredible privilege of being able to access the God of everything, does not mean that we have to “work hard at it” in the same way that we might have to study extra hard in an algebra class. God never intended us to struggle with prayer like some students struggle with math or language.

You are not dense or saddled with a low spiritual I.Q. Do not believe the lies of the enemy, or your own unkind voice, telling you that you will never “catch on” to prayer. Without offering you a formula for the one-and-only-

way-to-pray, here are some helpful pointers (in no particular order):

1. Begin with praise and worship, focusing on God's greatness, His overarching authority in both realms of the cosmos, and, most importantly, His arrangements for you to be His adopted child.
2. Feel free to bring each of your needs (the ones weighing on your mind) to Him without worrying that they are too small or that He is too busy to listen. Do not "nobly" avoid praying for yourself, but let Him deal with your long-range future needs without worrying about them.
3. Acknowledge your own sins, rather than trying to hide them. They do not disqualify you from praying, but they will cause problems for you if left unconfessed. Tell the Lord of your choice to forgive others, and leave their sins and yours in the same place—behind you.
4. Ask for strength to resist temptation, and for deliverance from those "not good" spots in your heart that make you especially vulnerable to sinning. He already knows about them, and He wants to help you overcome what has been overcoming you.
5. Remember, prayer deals with the invisible, so it should mostly be done out of the sight of others, when we are alone—except when a group is together praying corporately about various concerns.
6. Repetition doesn't actually accomplish much, and God is no more able to hear you the fifteenth time than He is the first time you say something. But some matters bear ongoing prayer—where we continue to ask and seek in His presence. Repeating your prayer does not make it more likely to be heard and answered, but it can keep your heart focused on the Lord as your only answer.
7. There is no suggestion in the Bible that extra volume, perfect grammar or strange inflections in your voice will aid your prayers. Human emotion and enthusiasm are wonderful aspects of who God has made us, but they do not make our prayers heard more attentively by God.
8. Ask the Lord to show you what to pray—and about what. Let Him bring things and people to your mind. Then pray for those people/situations according to Bible verses that come to your heart.
9. Believe in God—His power, His promises, His willingness and His answers. Believe that He has taken care of what you talk to Him about, and hold on with faith to the answer that may not yet be visible in the natural arena.
10. Close every prayer with these simply incredible words: "In Jesus' Name."

Questions: The Bible presents us with several images of prayer that take away some of the fears we have of inadequacy—that it is too difficult for us to do well. Read the following verses in light of the suggested picture, and then put into your own words how they change your impression of praying:

Genesis 20:7. (the first mention of prayer in the Bible) Praying is like “putting in a good word” for someone to the Big Boss because He listens to you. _____

Psalm 5:3. Praying is like placing an order at a restaurant, and then waiting for the food to arrive. _____

Psalm 141:2. Praying is like lighting a stick of incense, then letting the smoke ascend into the air until it fills the room with its fragrance.

A FRIEND “HIGH UP” IN THE COMPANY

As the saying goes, “It’s not what you know, but who you know that counts.” If you have ever received backstage passes, free airline tickets, a special tour not open to the general public—all because of someone you knew who was “high up” in a business company—you have a good idea what the Bible means by prayer. First and foremost, prayer is about special access. Prayer is a privileged opportunity, like pre-boarding an airplane along with the First Class passengers (even though you only have a Coach Class ticket).

When we wonder what it would be like to have been best friends with a wealthy person for years—since before they were rich (so that they would not think we liked them just for their money)—and imagine how generously they could help us, we get a hint about prayer. Knowing the friend is the basis upon which we begin to legitimately anticipate help.

Our relationship gives us hope that our friend will want to do something for us. We are not strangers desiring a handout. We are life-long buddies who would love each other even if neither of us were rich. Additionally, we contemplate the contrast between what our wealthy friend has (tons of money) and what we have (not enough money). The contrast inspires thoughts of receiving help. We do not spend much time thinking about potential help from friends who are as poor as we are.

Think of how rich God is. He owns everything. Jesus has all authority in the heavens and on the Earth (Matthew 28:18), and nothing is impossible for Him. He makes a decision and no one can question it. The more you understand just how close the relationship is between God and you—how He feels about you, not just the other way around—and the more you grasp how wealthy and resourced the Lord is, the more you

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on Earth.”
—Matthew 28:18

will believe that He is able to do exceedingly beyond your wildest hopes (Ephesians 3:20).

So it is with prayer. God has a life-long relationship with us, not just as a friend, but as a loving Father. Our Father is extremely well connected, and He has a limitless supply of everything, so it is not as though He is going to have to weigh our needs against what He can come up with or afford at this time.

.....

We do not spend much time thinking about potential help from friends who are as poor as we are. Think of how rich God is.

.....

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.
—Ephesians 3:20-21

Read Luke 18:1-8. Why does Jesus use the picture of an unrighteous judge in contrast to our loving Father? _____

Read verses 1 and 5 again. Why does Jesus tell us not to grow weary in prayer, but to persist in faith? _____

Prayer is a private audience with the Lord, an opportunity to ask any question, to wonder about any occurrence, to ask for help and provision from the richest, most powerful and most knowledgeable One in all Creation. What we are entitled to do while praying, and what eventuates as a result of our prayers, happens no other way and to no other people. We can do all things through the Lord—things that we have no hope of doing without Him.

IMPOSSIBLE WITHOUT GOD

So, a first lesson about prayer is that it deals with what is impossible for us to accomplish on our own. With prayer you enter the arena of what you cannot do and cannot change, and where your only hope is in the Lord's intervention (Luke 18:27). As obvious as that may sound, it is an easy truth to forget. Our tendency is to evaluate a situation—sizing up the possibility quotient—deciding what is likely to happen, and if it is just a bit out of our reach, or a trifle beyond our ability to change it on our own strength, we add prayer like a little spin on our bowling ball.

But Jesus said, "The things that are impossible with people are possible with God."
—Luke 18:27

On your journey you'll be tempted to treat prayer like added insurance, a little "extra [that] can't hurt." If you are not careful to counteract this natural tendency, you will end up praying only about situations when you

think there is a good possibility for something to happen all on its own—without requiring God's intervention. Then when God answers your prayer, it won't seem like that big of a deal because you already determined the situation could take care of itself. If you pray about circumstances and needs that are hopeless without Jesus' touch, you will see more answers, and your faith to pray for even more impossible situations will increase.

Read Luke 1:37 and 18:27. The point of prayer is asking God to do what only He can do. Can you think of recent prayers you offered up to Jesus that were not much more than “wait-and-see-if-it-will-work-itself-out” pauses with God's name attached to the waiting? _____

Have there been needs that seemed too big to pray about? How has your thinking about prayer changed as a result of these verses? _____

Prayer accomplishes the impossible. It is for those life situations when you do not “have a prayer,” when the situation is hopeless or insurmountable. Obviously, right?! But did you know that prayer's suitability for the impossible explains why Jesus frequently spoke about forgiveness when He taught His disciples about prayer (see Mark 11:23-26 and Luke 11:1-4)? Nothing in life is more impossible than removing guilt for our sin. In fact, the most wondrously impossible miracle of all time took place long ago on Mt. Calvary when Jesus' death removed our guilt from us. Casting a physical mountain into the ocean is child's play compared to God casting our sins behind His back “into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19).

Once while Jesus was speaking to a large crowd of people gathered in someone's house, a paralyzed man was brought to Him (in an unusual way), and Jesus told the man his sins were forgiven (see Mark 2:1-11). The religious leaders said Jesus could not do that—only God had the power and authority to do something so incredible, so life changing. Their protest was theological (“God would never forgive such a sinner”). But they actually understood a truth that we sometimes forget: no human being has the authority or capability to transform another person's spiritual condition. It is impossible for us to change anyone's eternity. However, to prove that He did have the ability to forgive sins, Jesus healed the man and told him to walk.

Affecting the natural world is easy for the One who created the worlds by speaking. The spiritual world is always more difficult to change than

Who is a God like
You, who pardons
iniquity and passes
over the rebellious
act of the remnant
of His possession?
He does not retain
His anger forever,
because He delights
in unchanging love.
He will again have
compassion on us;
He will tread our
iniquities under foot.
Yes, You will cast
all their sins into the
depths of the sea.
—Micah 7:18-19

the natural world. But human beings are usually unaware of how much the Lord accomplishes for them in the invisible realm of reality—and they are more impressed by observable miracles than they are by ones that last for eternity. By healing the man, Jesus declared that He had ultimate “authority” “in Heaven and on Earth” (Matthew 28:18). God made the worlds, and He also made a way for our sins to be removed. Once you realize that the Lord decreed the worlds into existence, and redeemed us by His grace, you understand that nothing is impossible for Him (Jeremiah 32:17).

Ah Lord GOD!
Behold, You have
made the heavens
and the Earth by
Your great power
and by Your
outstretched arm!
Nothing is too
difficult for You.
—Jeremiah 32:17

QUESTIONS: God can do what no one else can do. In each of the following episodes, God says He will do something unheard of, something beyond the realm of natural plausibility. As a way of practicing how to read your Bible for personal encouragement and direction, read each passage, and (1) outline the actual situation into which the Lord is going to introduce His rule; and, (2) describe a circumstance in your own life that parallels the situation faced by the people in the story.

Genesis 18:9-15. (1) _____
(2) _____

Zechariah 8:1-8. (1) _____
(2) _____

Therefore let us
draw near with
confidence to the
throne of grace,
so that we may
receive mercy and
find grace to help
in time of need.
—Hebrews 4:16

Prayer taps His loving authority for the sake of His beloved children. Like the little girl who climbs up onto the lap of the Big Boss, we can come to our Father in Heaven, anytime, to ask for help and grace in times of need (Hebrews 4:16). Prayer appeals to the jurisdiction of the All-Mighty Lord over all the heavens and earth. When you pray, you are essentially asking, “Lord, let Your will be done—let Your sway and dominion and right-to-rule affect things on Earth, like it does in Heaven (see Matthew 6:9-13).

INVISIBLE TO US

And that leads to our second lesson about prayer: it accomplishes breakthroughs in the natural arena of life by first affecting things in the invisible dimension of reality. Prayer deals not only with what is impossible for us, but also what is invisible to us. There are two dimensions of reality, two spheres in which we live and function. The spiritual realm is more real than the natural. Remember, physical reality was spoken into existence by the word of the Lord, so what we see around us “was not made out of

things that are visible” (Hebrews 11:3). Jesus is the One through whom everything seen and unseen was created (Colossians 1:15-16).

Jesus taught His disciples to start their prayers with a simple acknowledgment of God as their Father in Heaven—in the spiritual dimension where all the action takes place. He is the Lord of the heavens and, thereby, Lord of the earth. As the Scriptures say, “To the Lord your God belong Heaven and the highest Heaven, the earth and all that is in it” (Deuteronomy 10:14). God is not limited by natural circumstances like we are. His answers to our prayer can as easily call into being “that which does not exist” (Romans 4:17), as they can rearrange existing natural circumstances. That is what gives us “hope against hope,” just like Abraham when God promised to miraculously produce an heir for him.

As an old man, Abraham knew reality was against him. He “contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb,” but He also knew the reality of God, “who gives life to the dead” (Romans 4:17-19). He is the “invisible,” eternal God (1 Timothy 1:17). We have almost no concept of what He can set in motion on our behalf—things that are not usually perceptible to our natural senses, things that we would never think of on our own (1 Corinthians 2:9). The Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, invite us to ask for their intervention.

Read Matthew 6:5-6. The Greek word for “secret” is *kruptos* [pronounced *kroop-tos*] meaning concealed, hidden. The true dynamic of prayer happens in the sight of the Lord, not in the view of other people. What is the main point Jesus is trying to make? _____

Read Luke 18:1-8. The unrighteous judge offered the widow legal protection for only one reason. Why did he act on her behalf? Jesus contrasts the unrighteous judge with God, our Father. God has an additional reason for answering us? What is that extra reason? _____

Prayer is a “divinely powerful” tool to use often on your journey (see 2 Corinthians 10:3-6). Prayer enables us to get at life’s spiritual roots and deal with what’s really going on. That takes some getting used to because we are so accustomed to living our life on a natural level, and walking by sight, not by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7). We have been trained to do something (physical) about our problems and needs. We expect what we say or how we act to influence decisions and outcomes in life. To our natural way of thinking, praying about situations does not feel like doing enough.

But the real issues of our life are spiritual. Life’s scuffles are not primarily against natural forces, but spiritual ones (Ephesians 6:12).

Flesh and blood reality cannot penetrate the realm of the Spirit (John 3:5-6), and neither can it inherit the eternal (1 Corinthians 15:50). The physical world doesn't really have the power to imprint itself on spiritual reality, but changes in the spiritual realm have tremendous impact on the natural world. Conversely, spiritual forces like prayer shape and influence things on Earth: prayer binds and looses (Matthew 18:18), opens doors (Luke 11:9; Colossians 4:3), heals the sick, delivers the bound (Mark 1:34), etc.

FAITH IN GOD

That leads us to a third lesson about prayer: since it is an invisible activity, and seemingly small compared to the impossibly large needs facing us, prayer requires faith. Faith is best understood as confidence in, reliance upon and persuasion about what God has said. He speaks, and by faith we believe what He says. Faith sees what your natural eyes cannot see. It is like a pair of infrared goggles that allows you to “see in the dark” what people without goggles cannot see.

Faith specializes in the invisible, and holds onto promises God speaks even when the fulfillment of those words is nowhere to be seen (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is knowing, even at 1:30 p.m. in the afternoon, that the stars are still out there; not seeing them does not nullify their existence. Frankly, without faith it is impossible to receive everything God wants to give you (Hebrews 11:6).

Throughout your journey, you will find a difference between what Jesus says to you, and what your circumstances say. Faith is a decision about whom to believe, not just what to believe. We pray in faith, making the simple but profound choice to believe that God is there, that He welcomes us and that He hears us. When we tell Him about the money we need for the kids' braces, about the job we lost, or about the broken friendship we want restored, we're telling Him the truth. Those are our reality, and He knew about them even before we told Him (Matthew 6:32).

He wants to add His reality to ours—not to convince us to deny our reality. Faith is not a pair of rose-colored glasses, or a game of make-believe. Jesus promised He would never leave us to our own devices or resources (John 14:18; Hebrews 13:5), and prayer is one of the ways He steps in to deal with the true, sometimes heart-wrenching, realities of a broken world. He says, “Have faith in God” (Mark 11:22). God doesn't say, “*Trust Me; those problems do not exist.*” Rather, He says, “*Trust Me; I can take care of them in ways you cannot imagine.*”

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.
—Hebrews 11:6

Read James 5:13-16. Why do you think the Lord encourages us to pray when we are suffering? What kind of prayer will restore someone to health? _____

Having faith in God is a choice to believe in His promises to secure us in life, and use us in ministry. He is true to His words: what He promises is as good as delivered (Mark 11:22-23). It is like your boss taking you to dinner at a fancy restaurant and telling you to order anything you want on the menu; ask for whatever you want, and it will be yours (John 15:7). Your faith is not in what you say you want—as though you could even get into the restaurant without being your boss's guest, and make a fancy meal materialize on the table in front of you just because you repeat, "*Beef brochette, beef brochette, beef brochette,*" several times each hour.

No, the boss gets you in, and he is the only one who can arrange for the beef brochette to show up in front of you. While it is important to verbalize your requests and speak in faith, some Christians place slightly too much emphasis on "speaking things into existence." The main point is to believe that because he invites you to pick anything, you will eat what you ask for; you can start anticipating how good the entrée will taste even before the waiter brings it to your table. Think of it, you exercise faith every time you order food in a restaurant: you make your request to the waiter and never doubt that he will deliver it.

Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be granted him.
—Mark 11:22-23

Read Philippians 4:6 and Colossians 4:2. Notice that both verses mention the importance of thankfulness in prayer. In light of what we are learning about faith, why is it important to be thankful when we pray? For what are we to be thankful? _____

THANKFULNESS TO GOD

On your journey you will see how often and how completely God welcomes you to participate with Him in what He is fully capable of accomplishing without you. Prayer is typical of all such Kingdom enterprise. We get to be key players in His work, and we have a hand in how life turns out for others. God delights in our delight; like a mother allowing a child to help set the Thanksgiving table, God loves to share tasks with us. Prayer is our way of "helping" place the silver and china. We couldn't set the table without Him, but He could easily do it without us. Prayer not only makes the impossible possible, but it also allows us to be part of the process.

That leads us to another lesson about prayer: Though we pray to

ask God to step into situations, our prayers each day follow answered prayer from days before. I don't necessarily mean that literally—as though every prayer from one week earlier has been answered. But it makes no sense to pray to God if He has not answered prayer before. Consequently, gratefulness is a key component of prayer.

Prayer isn't an obligation or a burden. God doesn't invite us to invite Him into situations so He can measure how spiritual we are by the frequency and length of our prayers. Prayer isn't a tool God uses to evaluate our sincerity or effort; prayer is a tool to unleash God's power. Prayer can dislodge even the most stubborn thought or circumstance, every "fortress" in the visible or invisible world (2 Corinthians 10:4). Prayer changes things. Prayer allows us to remake life's circumstances back into conformity with God's will.

In Jesus' Name, we ask and God intervenes. His works, His answers to prayers before today, fill us with gratitude for His past works ("Thank you, Lord, for what You have done!") and expectation for His future handiwork ("Faithful One, thank You for what You will do!"). If you ever feel burdened or expected to pray, if you pray as duty, start your prayers by rehearsing the answers He has given.

Answered prayer is one (more) expression of God's love. He intervenes in our lives because He cares for us—not because we manage to hit upon the right combination of words or postures to unlock a secret. Answers to prayer are not password protected. The access code is free and simple: JESUS. Prayer is not like an old car that works one day but must be coaxed to run the next. God likes you, and He cares about your situations. God does not score our prayers like an Olympic judge deducting points for slips, hesitations and imperfect landings on the balance beam. He is more like the coach of an under-8 basketball team, scrimmaging his players at practice: rather than being a stickler for details and calling every traveling violation or every foul, His basic bent is to smile and say, "*Play on.*"

It is not as though prayer is a game, or that the crushing issues of real life are of no more concern to the Lord than a practice scrimmage. But learning to pray within the safe, encouraging and affectionate atmosphere of His love—remembering that He does the real work—is far more helpful than imagining He won't do any work unless we get our part exactly and always correct. Prayer is one of the most personal and powerful resources God gives us to assist in our journey, and it is a gift to be enjoyed.

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

—2 Corinthians 10:4-5

Like a mother helping her Thanksgiving helper, the Lord frequently directs us in how to pray, and even what things to pray for. If we know that the Lord hears us when we pray, we also know that “we have the requests which we have asked from Him” (1 John 5:14-15). He puts desires and requests on our heart to pray for. Not only does His Spirit teach us how to pray according to God’s will, but sometimes He even directs prayer on our behalf beyond what we know to pray on our own (Romans 8:26).

Question: Most of us on the journey learn about prayer a little bit at a time. Early on we tend to worry about praying correctly and “getting it right.” So, it is easy to fall into the trap of trying too hard or concentrating too much on external affectations—mannerisms, intonations of the voice—that look like praying. God “looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7), and He “knows what you need before you ask Him” (Matthew 6:8). There isn’t a correct form or proper language in prayer; prayer is your heart-filled petition to God who knows, loves and approves of you before you even ask.

Read Psalm 38:9 and Psalm 139:4. What do they tell you? If the Lord knows what we are going to ask before we ask it in prayer, do we need to worry about the exact way in which we pray? _____

IN JESUS' NAME

I don’t want what I say next to sound like I’m contradicting what I just said. Let me say again, there is no prescribed vocabulary or ritualized formula for prayer. God isn’t impressed with ceremony or form. Prayer is honest, real and very down-to-Earth. It’s simply talking with God—and letting Him speak to you.

According to the Traveler’s Handbook (the Bible), whatever we do in our life, we are to do “in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father” (Colossians 3:17). When God reestablishes His complete rule over the new heavens and Earth at the culmination of time, every knee will bow at the name of Jesus, acknowledging Him as Lord over all (Philippians 2:10).

God does not hear our prayers because we pray correctly. God hears and answers because we come in Jesus’ name—in the privilege and authorization He

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.
—Romans 8:26

At the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on Earth and under the Earth.
—Philippians 2:10

Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.
—John 16:23-24

gave us. Jesus tells us to ask the Father for whatever we need, but to do so in His name (John 16:23-24). We are like young teenagers out shopping with mom's credit card; her name is on the card because she has the good credit and she pays the bill. Our name, like that of a 14-year old, is not found on any spiritual credit card that would enable us to walk out of the store with a new pair of shoes. Jesus, on the other hand, is the Name above all names (Ephesians 1:21), and there is salvation in no other name. His is the only name in Heaven or Earth by which people can be saved (Acts 4:12). The name of Jesus empowers and backs up our prayer requests.

God reaches into our world to heal people and to perform miracles in Jesus' Name as a way of bringing glory—and recognition among people—to Jesus as the Savior of the world (Acts 4:30). Just as Jesus performed miracles in His Father's name (John 10:25), so we ask in prayer for breakthroughs and answers in Jesus' Name. Prayers to the Father in Jesus' Name, answered by the power of the Holy Spirit, show the world just how completely “as one” the Father, Son and Spirit are (John 14:13-14).

The Lord's Prayer serves as a good model for all our prayers. It begins by acknowledging God's supreme place in the cosmos (“Our Father in Heaven”), then Jesus taught His disciples to also acknowledge the supreme power of His name (“Hallowed be Thy name”). God authorizes us to use His name—a privilege He grants only to His people—as an expression of His very presence and power on Earth. “In His name” is synonymous with “on behalf of Him and His authority, by virtue of what He has accomplished.” Jesus' Name is a really big deal!

.....

*No issue or need is too large or too little for us
to bring before the Lord.*

.....

Questions: The Bible tells us many things about God's name. Read each verse and write what the Bible says about the name of the Lord.

Deuteronomy 5:11. _____

Psalm 113:3. _____

Proverbs 18:10. _____

[Christ is] far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.
—Ephesians 1:21

And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.
—Acts 4:12

PRAYER TIMES

Bottom line, God the Father and the Son love to hear from us. Communion with the Lord is a two-way street, a dialog, a sharing back and forth. As surely as God opens His heart and plans to us, so He longs to have us “pour out our heart” before Him (Psalm 62:8). He engages us in intimate, personal dialog—wanting to hear about everything in our lives, from points of uncertainty like a pending job interview, to huge obstacles like an only daughter’s leukemia. Prayer gives us freedom from worry and anxiety (Philippians 4:6-7); no issue or need is too large or too little for us to bring before the Lord. And, interestingly, Jesus Himself daily comes before His Father in conversation and intercession—about us (Hebrews 9:24).

God loves the free and open exchange with us in times of prayer, much like parents enjoy talks with their youngster returning home on spring break from their first year at University. The longer you walk on your journey the easier prayer becomes. In fact, ongoing conversation with God will be one of the most satisfying and securing elements of your new life. You will find it helpful and refreshing to set aside times for intentional prayer when you ask for Him to intervene. But few things are more death-dealing to spiritual life than to think of prayer in set, required amounts, as though getting an answer from God is like buying a can of cola from a vending machine: it requires a certain number of quarters (minutes) before you can push the selection button.

Some people mistakenly interpret Jesus’ question to His disciples, “Could you not even wait with Me for an hour?” (Matthew 26:40), and worry about how long they are supposed to pray. Jesus asked His friends to stand with Him as He faced the culminating agony, the deepest testing in the hours before His crucifixion. In utter humanness, Jesus reached out for company and companionship. It was a question posed by His personal need, not a dictate meant to establish a minimal time-standard for real praying. He knew what it was like to have a willing spirit, but reluctant flesh. That is why He told His disciples to pray that they would not often find themselves in situations where their flesh was so tempted to go against God’s will (see Mark 14:32-38).

What we pray is more meaningful than how long we pray. Nevertheless, setting aside a time each day to pray helps you develop consistency—and a response pattern to life. You have likely already noticed that life’s complications vie for your attention and steal away opportunities to pray. You’ll find that if you get your day started with prayer (before the inevitable happens), that ‘begin-with-prayer’ mentality will influence your entire outlook. The spiritual is more real than the physical; invisible forces shape life far more than natural causes. Prayer-talks with the Creator of everything, who totally understands reality, are conversations between the two of you.

Although it is certainly fine to pray just before you fall asleep at night, chances are you will fall asleep just before you pray. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is not always up for these conversations with God. You will be more fulfilled in prayer if you pick times (or physical positions) when your body is a bit more cooperative. Remember how very glad Jesus is to have you use the access He granted you; you can be confident that God wants you there with Him, and He looks forward to your times of prayer more than you do.

Not all prayer should be by appointment. That makes the relationship too stilted and artificial. Pray all the time by offering up little sentences of thanks, quick “Go-before-me’s” and other brief acknowledgments to God that you do not want to live on your own. An ongoing dialog with the Lord throughout your days is quite precious to Him. You can pray spontaneously “on the go,” as well as whenever you decide you “need to talk.” God enjoys that kind of relationship with us.

TALKING TO GOD

Though there are several different types of prayer mentioned in the Bible, they are each essentially just conversing with the Lord. For instance, 1 Timothy 2:1 uses different words to describe ways in which you will find yourself approaching God in Jesus' Name:

Entreaties (supplications, KJV)—Requests about some specific need, especially when you are acutely aware of your inability to come up with the answer; you have been brought low by what you lack (wisdom, money, another chance, patience, strength, etc.), but rather than being knocked down by your need, you choose to humbly ask God to intervene.

Prayers—Earnest and more prolonged conversation with God to find His will and counsel, not so much for a particular situation, as for your life in general. You lay yourself before God, with all your attention focused on Him, just like you would speak openly and deeply to a trusted counselor or best friend. You ask Him to tell you anything because your main desire is to freshly orient yourself and your whole life in the direction He prefers.

Petitions (intercessions; KJV)—A series of questions much like an interview with a famous or knowledgeable authority. You ask God about anything of interest to you, and confer with Him about the state of your life, marriage, future, ministry, etc. You have the chance to compare opinions with Him about the important and serious issues facing you, and when you are done conferring, there is little doubt where He stands on each matter.

Thanksgivings (giving of thanks; KJV)—Active expressions of gratitude and worship, telling the Lord how much you appreciate who He is and what He has

done in your life. The thanks may be profoundly moving like a husband thanking his wife for 17 good years of marriage, or simple like thanking a friend for a ride home from school. It is a way you share your complete joy with Him (John 16:24), just like a 7-year old screams in delight over a Christmas gift. The scream of delight delights a parent's heart.

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

How has your thinking about praying changed as a result of reading this chapter? _____

How would you describe prayer (in your own words) to a friend who had never talked to the Lord? _____

Why does God welcome our prayers? _____

What happens when we pray? Think of a recent answer to a prayer that God brought to you. _____

Two common lies about prayer are: "You lousy Christian, you need to pray more"; and, "You are too lousy to pray at all." Does either of these statements sound familiar in your mind when you approach prayer? What did you read in this chapter about prayer that changes those old ways of thinking? _____

Why does Jesus almost always talk about forgiveness whenever He teaches His disciples about prayer? Is anything too hard for God? _____

Why are thankfulness and faith important in prayer? _____

Is there a formula we are supposed to follow when we pray to the Lord? Are our prayers to be short or long? Is there a correct time frame for our prayers? _____

Think of an analogy to share with a friend about prayer; finish this sentence (and explain why you finish it the way you do): Prayer is like: _____

It's easy to be disheartened with long-term situations in our lives that seemingly have little hope for change. Can you think of an unresolved circumstance that you have stopped praying about? Will you consider talking with God about it again? _____

Set aside time each day to pray. Ask the Lord to show you what issues and needs to pray about—and how to pray about them. Let Him bring things and people to your mind in addition to what you pray about

regularly. Believe in God—His power, His promises, His willingness and His answers; believe that He has taken care of what you talk to Him about, and hold on with faith to the answer that may not be visible in the natural arena.

PRAYER:

“Father, thank You for the way You love to be with me, talking and sharing with me. Thank You, Lord, for wanting to listen to me—even when I know so little about the bigger picture and when I understand only a small part of what is really going on. I am so glad that I may tell You what is troubling me, and as I do, I am aware that I am releasing all to You for a solution.

I am not giving-up; I am giving myself over to You by being willing to let You work through me, through others and through the challenge itself. Thank You God for blessing me with life and blessing me throughout life. You have been so faithful to me—even when I did not realize it was You at work in my life.

Even though I know You know what I need before I ask You, I still want to ask You to take care of the situations I set before You. Somehow, asking You directly like this helps me remember all that You do for me. I love coming into Your “office” and how You are never too busy to listen to me.

I do believe that nothing is impossible for You. Thank You, Lord. Praise You, Father. In Jesus’ Name—Amen.”



#4 BEING BAPTIZED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

Science fairs for elementary school youngsters are a mixed bag of the ingenious and the mundane—probably reflecting the parents’ bent toward or away from the scientific more than the kids’. The subjects of study range from the need of plants for light, to the relative conductivity of different materials. Most projects have been recycled from previous years, and only once in a while is one truly noteworthy. But what makes Science fairs delightful to attend, aside from the fun of spotting the same basic experiment we ran a few decades ago, are the many reminders about facts and forces of the material world that we take for granted, or simply forget about. Take, for instance, the three states of matter: solid, liquid and gas.

No Science fair would be complete without a poster board display of snapshots and charts, faithfully recording the temperatures at which water and other substances (like shampoo or chocolate) become gaseous, liquid and solid. The physical appearance of the elements changes, but their molecular composition remains constant: everyone knows ice, steam and water are all H_2O with different names. Yet no one confuses steam with ice. Most likely, one of the snapshots on the poster board will be a chunk of ice melting in a pot of boiling water that is emanating steam—three states with the same essential composition.

Something of the same can be said about the triune God with whom you now have relationship. There is no exact Earthly analogy to fully explain the nature of perfect oneness between God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. How they can be One and yet distinct is a great mystery, but not one to stumble over. In a way, it is as simple as how Jesus puts it: seeing one of the One is the same as seeing another one of the One (John 14:9, 17). Likewise, we are baptized in the name of all three of the One (Matthew 28:19)—not as though appeasing three separate gods and making sure not to leave any one of them out of the equation, but rather as a declaration of the fullness and completeness with which the One true God attends to everything in creation.

Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”
—John 14:9

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL LEARN . . .

- Who the Holy Spirit is, and what He does.
- The difference between receiving and being baptized in the Spirit.
- What it means to pray in the Spirit and to prophesy.
- How to cooperate with and be baptized in the Spirit.

God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were and are in one accord; their unity and oneness do not require them to merge into one entity, but to be in complete agreement. Your eyes, for instance, work as one—unless there is something wrong. They can function independently of one another (i.e., taking a vision test for your license), and there is a difference between your left eye and your right, but together they offer you a single view (Matthew 6:22). Though your eyes are plural, they are a single characteristic of your features.

In Jesus “all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form” (Colossians 1:19; 2:9-10). While on Earth, He perfectly manifested the Father to His disciples; that is, Jesus was the “touchable” expression of the invisible God “whom no one has seen” (John 1:18; see also 1 John 1:1-3). Jesus did nothing on Earth acting on His own initiative apart from His Father. What He saw and heard from His Father became what He, Himself did (John 5: 17; 8:38). There are some who claim to be followers of God, but they deny Jesus’ identity, and don’t accept what He told His disciples about Himself: “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).

The writer of the Book of Hebrews explains that Jesus is God’s perfect Spokesperson, and that through Jesus, God did His creative work in the beginning of time, as well as His redemptive work in the fullness of time (Hebrews 1:1-3). Jesus is “the radiance of [God’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature.” The truth of Jesus’ identity is perhaps the most important path marker on your journey. If you ever drift away from that landmark, and lose sight of Jesus’ absolute and perfect oneness with the Father, you are far, far away from the path God wants you to walk.

WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

In exactly the way Jesus and the Father are One, so the Holy Spirit is One with them. It’s hard to describe how the Three—Father, Son and Spirit—are One, yet distinct in their respective roles in Creation and in our lives (John 10:30). When I was a kid, church-people called God’s Spirit the Holy Ghost. I admit that put me off; ghosts aren’t exactly my thing. The church I attended as a youngster didn’t teach much about the Holy Spirit, so He remained a mystery. Since I knew little about Him, I thought little about Him—and wrongly concluded there isn’t much to Him. He is the lesser known of the Trinity because He constantly brings us to the Father and the Son, just as Jesus brings us to the Father (John 14:6). So, who is the Holy Spirit, and what is He like?

First of all, the Holy Spirit is not a vague force or a misty, shadowy power; He is a distinct and knowable persona like both the Father and the Son. He is the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit expresses everything that we

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

—Matthew 28:19

need to know about the Father and the Son. The Spirit, like Jesus, existed from the beginning with God, as God (John 1:1-3); He was the One who moved upon the emptiness of the world at creation (Genesis 1:2).

When your fellow travelers speak of “hearing” God or “being led” by Jesus, they are actually describing an experience they have had with the Holy Spirit. His is the work and the voice with which you are most familiar. Jesus took what He knew from the Father and shared it with His disciples. He did not do or teach things that He came up with on His own. In the same way, the Spirit works in and through us according to what He sees and hears from God, not according to His own initiative (John 16:13). Jesus’ teaching was not His, but His Father’s (John 7:16). The Spirit’s instruction is not His but Jesus’ (see John 16:14-15).

As you will learn in your journey with the Lord, that is the secret to true ministry—doing and saying what the Spirit prompts us to, rather than just doing and saying whatever we think of on our own.

One of the main assignments of the Holy Spirit is to assure us of our connection with our Father in Heaven—to convince us that He is our Father (Galatians 4:6), and that we belong to Him (Romans 8:9). The power of the Spirit transforms us from (merely) “flesh and blood” into spirit beings, alive and in lasting relationship with God. Jesus told everyone they must be born again, “born of the Spirit,” or they cannot enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5-7). When we receive Jesus by faith, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in our spirit as Jesus’ promised representative from God.

So Jesus answered them and said,
“My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me.”

—John 7:16

[The Spirit] will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.”

—John 16:14-15

QUESTIONS: These three scriptures talk about the Holy Spirit as a pledge from the Lord. Another translation for pledge is down payment. Some people use the phrase “earnest money” because it isn’t the full amount to be paid, but it is enough to convince the seller that we are earnest [sincere, serious, intent] about paying the full amount. A pledge is a non-refundable deposit. Having the Spirit in our spirit is a guarantee of God’s ultimate interest in and plans for us. Read each passage and write what they tell you in your own words.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22. _____

2 Corinthians 5:4-5. _____

Ephesians 1:13-14. _____

Because the Spirit is so integrally tied into relationship with God, those who do not know and receive the Lord cannot even receive Him (John 14:17). He is a total stranger to people who claim to be “close to God” without receiving Jesus into their heart. No one can be “related” to God, our Father, without the Holy Spirit. The adoption is complete only when the Spirit takes up residence in a person’s spirit.

Read John 14:16-17. How long will the Holy Spirit be with us? _____

Why does Jesus want us to have the Holy Spirit? _____

Why do you think the world cannot accept the Holy Spirit? _____

WHAT DOES THE SPIRIT DO?

The primary work of the Holy Spirit is to communicate what Jesus is really like; He convinces people that Jesus is the sum-total of God’s message to them (Matthew 16:17; John 16:14). The Spirit woos individuals to Jesus and enables them to say, “Jesus really is the Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:3). He does this partly by convincing people of their sin (John 16:8), and partly by pouring the love of God into their hearts where it gels into an undeniable reality (Romans 5:5; 15:30). Confronted with their own wickedness, and by God’s tender mercy even in the face of their wickedness, people respond to Jesus’ offer of complete forgiveness.

Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is accursed”; and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

—1 Corinthians 12:3

He is called *parakletos*, a Greek term meaning *helper, advocate, near-by aid giver, the called alongside One*. Jesus, who sits at the right hand of His Father in Heaven (Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1), does not want us to be left as orphans, all alone on Earth. That is why He gives us His Spirit—to keep us in immediate touch with Him and the Father (John 14:18). The Holy Spirit is in the closest possible proximity to the deepest and most profound aspect of your being: your spirit. That is what assures your communion with God. The Lord wants us to get in on the incredible oneness and unity between Father, Son and Spirit (John 17:11, 21-22).

Almost every aspect of our spiritual life and ministry reinforces the value God places on communion between Him and us. And that is where the Holy Spirit concentrates much of His work—enabling us to be in one accord with the Father and the Son. Even though we might try our best to line up our life with God’s way, we simply cannot do so with the

limitations of our natural abilities, strength or insight. How exciting that God is not just a distant Creator, but also One who actively involves Himself in our lives.

The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.
—Romans 5:5

God never intended to have us attempt to follow Him on our own. Like a nuclear physicist with a class of 8th grade students, He knows we will not be able to stay with Him without some very special tutoring. He wants to lead, teach, prompt and strengthen us supernaturally. And God does that mostly by His Spirit. Because of the Spirit, we can understand what the Lord wants us to know.

The Holy Spirit knows everything God thinks and feels (1 Corinthians 2:11-12); He searches “the depths of God,” and discloses those hidden truths to those on the journey. As you learn more and more from the Spirit, you become capacitated to do, say and know things that would otherwise be incomprehensible. That is why He is named “the Spirit of Truth” (John 16:13); He discloses to us the way things really are, the way God decrees them to be.

QUESTIONS: Spiritually speaking, Truth is far more than just what is true. As far as it relates to spiritual matters, Truth is not something we figure out on our own or learn by lots of study. Spiritual Truth is revealed Truth; it comes to us only on the basis of revelation from God.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:9-10. For whom are these wonderful secrets prepared?

How does God reveal these things to us? _____

SANCTIFICATION

In a way, the Spirit is like a construction manager who moves a trailer onto a newly purchased piece of land with a dilapidated building in the middle of the property. He erects a sign announcing a soon-to-be-renovated store. The old structure does not yet look like much, but everyone realizes—through seeing the sign and the resident manager—there really is going to be a new store someday. That renovated store, envisioned years before by the Lord who purchased the land, will be in process for the rest of our lives. Following the blueprints drawn by God, the Holy Spirit oversees the transformation of the old building into the new; He restores us to be more and more like what we were intended to be (1 Corinthians 6:11).

The metamorphosis accomplished by the Spirit is known as sanctification—progressively replacing old and broken fixtures, repairing damaged siding and flooring, repainting faded walls, and rewiring all

switches. Inside and out, our old place gets a makeover, including the garden where the Holy Spirit plants and tends an incredible array of fruit trees (Galatians 5:22-23). So, along with the change in our old attitudes, thoughts and behavior, the Spirit of God produces new ones like patience, joy and self-control.

PARTICIPATION WITH THE SPIRIT

Almost everything God does in or through us is done by the Holy Spirit. He does some things completely for us—not requiring active participation on our part—but most of what He does calls for our partnership and cooperation. He doesn't invite us to work with Him because He needs our help, as though He is short of something. He is not stuck in mud along the road somewhere. He doesn't need you to give Him a tow, so He can get on with His work. It is not as though He says, "If you don't do your part, I'm not going to do mine—so there!" He isn't looking for someone to stick with the chores, or to do the prep work before He paints the living room.

Quite the contrary, the Spirit wants to share ministry with us in order to reinforce just how much God loves us. Like a proud father wanting to add His children's names to the family business, He enjoys filling us in on all the details of the whole enterprise. Since you and I are destined for an eternity of working side-by-side with the Lord, cooperation with the Holy Spirit here on Earth is a lot like Driver's Training: the Spirit "talks us through" the ins-and-outs of ministry and life, so we grow familiar with how things work in the kingdom of God.

The Holy Spirit enables us to proclaim the gospel to others with power and anointing. He gives us words to speak, as well as wonders to perform (Mark 13:11). Along with these external, miraculous manifestations, the Holy Spirit accomplishes an internal transformation in our personalities and character so that they, too, bear witness of Jesus (Ephesians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:5). Internal transformations that enable us to live a truly spiritual life, and external manifestations that empower us to minister to others are trademarks of the Holy Spirit at work in someone's life.

For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.
—1 Thessalonians 1:5

Read Hebrews 2:4. Why does God use miracles to bear witness to our words when we speak about the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ? _____

All true ministry is a response to a leading or prompting from God. The Holy Spirit sensitizes us to Jesus' voice, so we can discern it more readily (John 10:27). That is the very nature of what we call inspiration—inspired, in-spirited (lit. God-breathed-into)—being led to say, think, or

do what would otherwise not come into our minds to do. Jesus wants us to receive miraculous capabilities and empowerment to fully carry out His assignments to us for those around us.

But the key to what the Holy Spirit wants to accomplish in our lives has to do with our cooperation with Him and allowing Him to guide our steps. In concert with the Holy Spirit, we receive revelation beyond even the most sincere natural ability—supernaturally knowing and doing things. In a similar fashion to how the Spirit came upon Mary, so that she could give birth to the “Son of God” (Luke 1:35), we are welcomed (of course, not to the same degree, or with the same result) to receive supernatural seeds of revelation and truth from the Spirit. Speaking or doing what the Spirit prompts us to say or do will give life and rescue to other people.

That partnership scenario requires a fundamental willingness to cooperate with the Spirit, and volunteer freely like Mary (Luke 1:38). The centrality (to our whole Christian life) of learning to function in cooperation with the Holy Spirit leads us to one of the earliest, tangible experiences with the Spirit available to a believer in Jesus. That experience is referred to as the baptism in the Holy Spirit.

And Mary said,
“Behold, the
bondslave of the
Lord; may it be done
to me according to
your word
—Luke 1:38

BEING BAPTIZED IN WATER

Before we look at the baptism in the Spirit, let us take a closer look at what it means to be baptized in water. Water baptism is one of the most important steps you can take as a believer in Christ. It not only makes a powerful public statement about your conversion and your decision to live no longer for your own desires (2 Corinthians 5:15; Galatians 2:20), but being baptized in water is a huge step of obedience. Though He was sinless, Jesus, Himself, chose to be baptized in water in order to fully identify with our human need to be washed clean from sin. If He identified with us by being baptized in water, it must be very important.

It is not correct to say that a person cannot go to Heaven unless he or she has been baptized. Baptism represents what happens to us when we accept Jesus’ death as payment for our sins. But water baptism is supposed to follow closely on the heels of a person’s decision to die to him or herself, and live for God. In the Bible and its journey accounts of travelers before you, the act of being baptized follows the intentional choice to start the journey with Jesus. While the sacrament of baptism will always be a bit of a (wonder-full) mystery, it is safe to say that every believer ought to follow the Lord in obedience into the waters of baptism.

Read Romans 6:4. Though baptism is symbolic, what does this verse suggest the act of baptism gives us power to do? _____

1 Peter 3:21. Being baptized does not save anyone who has not received the forgiveness of God extended in Jesus Christ. But for those who do believe in Jesus, baptism acts like a huge eraser, wiping away what? _____

Being baptized in water is a symbolic expression of being buried in dirt (the grave). By dying, Jesus paid the penalty for our sins once-for-all time (Colossians 2:12-13), so we are baptized into Jesus' death and burial. The old nature, with its carnal desires and separation from God, is pronounced dead—and buried. When kids float along in a river, the real force propelling them and carrying them is the river; that's the whole point—letting the river do the work. Likewise, Jesus' death is the real power that transports us to a sinless condition; the river of His life and His death, not our swimming, has enabled us to enter the presence of God free from our sin.

BEING BAPTIZED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Do you see, again, the grace factor—God doing for us what we cannot do on our own? Being baptized in the Spirit follows the same pattern of supernatural enablement by grace. Whereas fellow believers can baptize us in water in Jesus' Name, only Jesus baptizes us in His Spirit (Luke 3:16). Unfortunately, just as some controversy arises among sincere believers about the exact role and nature and manner and timing of water baptism, so there has come some confusion about the appropriate role and purpose of being baptized in the Spirit.

KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE

You will often hear fellow travelers talk about “sound doctrine.” The Greek word for doctrine simply means instruction and teaching. Good, healthy doctrine teaches people the ways of God, and it informs them of His purposes and His truth. Doctrines are the path markers on your journey. Without sound doctrine, Christ-followers can be led astray by false but impressive people (Ephesians 4:14), and by their own desires (2 Timothy 4:3).

Sound doctrine nourishes the church and provides a basis for correcting people who get “off-base” about the truth (1 Timothy 4:6; Titus 1:9-11).

The only source of good doctrine is the Bible (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

Good doctrine is very important, but there is always a danger of letting our sincere beliefs become dogmas that divide the Body of Christ, rather than develop it. Remember, our journey is a walk of faith. We all see dimly into the realm of the Kingdom, and we live in a broken world. Since we are still learning along the way—we always ought to maintain a posture of graciousness and love toward others in

the family of God who do not see things exactly as we do.

In fact, the Bible tells us that if we think that we know anything (conclusively) to such a degree that our knowledge places us above others, then “we have not yet known as we ought to know” (1 Corinthians 8:1-2). Why? Because knowledge tends to make people arrogant (self-assured, superior feeling), whereas, love edifies and encourages others. That is why Paul says, “The goal of our instruction is love. . .” (1 Timothy 1:5).

Therefore, regardless of the issue we’re discussing with fellow believers in Christ, our primary interest ought always to be to preserve the unity in the Body by actively “putting on” love instead of our debating clothes (Ephesians 4:3; Colossians 3:14).

Being *baptized* literally means being *immersed or submerged*. Floating down a river is the perfect picture of being baptized because when you are in the river, you take on its qualities as though they were your own, and you end up where it takes you. You do not actually become water by being submerged. You are still flesh, but you take on the river’s speed, course, view, etc. Unless you swim against its current, you follow its course and go where it flows. You become one with the river, not in any mystical sense, but simply by virtue of its activity and your willingness to “go along with it.”

Looking at the baptism in the Spirit from another angle, think of it as that river overflowing its banks. The land surrounding the river submerges beneath the flood waters, and consequently, the soil is enriched with silt from far upriver containing nutrients and minerals not found in the pre-flood ground. The Earth is fertilized in a unique way. The flood waters soften the ground, depositing soil and seed for a richer harvest. Being baptized in the Spirit is like the Spirit overflowing the banks of our spirit, inundating our soul—our mind, will, emotions and conscience—with rich, heavenly silt. That is why being baptized in the Spirit is sometimes referred to as being filled with the Spirit.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT INTO YOUR LIFE AND BEING BAPTIZED IN HIM.

So what is the difference between receiving the Holy Spirit and being baptized in the Holy Spirit?

If you acknowledge Jesus as your Savior, the Spirit is already present in your life. The Holy Spirit identifies you as a child of God—and someone whom God calls His own (Romans 8:9, 16; Galatians 4:6). The Spirit indwells and possesses your spirit, and He is already at work cleaning in the attic, basement and back shed of your mind, will, emotions and behavior.

He teaches you and reminds you of spiritual truth. Without Him, you have no relationship with the Lord. This may sound a bit redundant to what has been said already, but it cannot be emphasized enough—the Holy Spirit lives within every believer's spirit.

Jesus said to His followers, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22), and they did. But several weeks later, He announced to those same disciples: "You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:5), and so they were on the day we now refer to as Pentecost, when they were manifestly empowered by the Holy Spirit in the upper room (Acts 2:1-4).

From this simple example we see that it is one thing to receive the Spirit in your life, and another to be baptized in Him. While the two happenings can easily occur at the same time, and often do, they are not identical to one another, as we see in some instances in the life of the early church (see Acts 10:47; 19:5-6).

The presence of the Spirit gives you (spiritual) life; the baptism in the Spirit gives you miraculous, available-no-other-way (spiritual) empowerment to share that life with others. This is why Jesus told His disciples to take the gospel into the entire world, but only after they received "[miraculous] power" by being "baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5, 8). Though it is not an exact parallel, it is a bit like the difference between what the Lord wants to do in you, as opposed to what He wants to do through you.

The Holy Spirit in a believer's life is like having a water well on his or her property; being baptized with the Spirit is like having a powerful water pump put in that well, or, due to some seismic shift of the underground water-table, suddenly having that well become a gushing spring, enabling the person to irrigate many more acres of crops.

Or, think of the difference between air and wind: you could not live without air, and there could be no wind without air; but the wind is an additional activity and force by which the air is set in motion to move other things. The Lord wants you to be more than alive in His Spirit; He longs for you to experience His Spirit like a mighty, rushing wind—not just a presence—moving you to mightily impact life around you.

Does that mean that there are now fewer rocks in the soil near the river, or that it has fewer weed-seeds? No. Can people be as carnal—and even more so—than before being baptized in the Spirit? Yes. Being baptized in the Spirit doesn't make you more obedient, more faithful or more special than anyone else. You do not instantly become more than or other than you were. It is not a guarantee of spirituality, or proof against lies of the enemy. Just as we can have a Bible, but not read it or let its words sink into our heart, so, too, can people be filled with the Spirit but not make full use of its provisions and enablements.

CAPACITATED BY THE SPIRIT

So, what does being baptized in the Spirit tool us for? Why does the Lord want us to be baptized in the Spirit? You might say that the baptism with the Holy Spirit “spreads” the Spirit’s presence throughout your natural faculties—just like a water pump spreads water further into the fields than a well alone is able to. As the Spirit overflows us and permeates our conscious thoughts, feelings, impressions, etc., we become more able than we were to receive promptings from Him. It is like having a more powerful radio receiver or a much larger satellite dish; the spiritual reception is vastly improved from what it was before. That is how and why the fullness of the Spirit enables us to more actively participate in the miraculous. It heightens our awareness and sensitizes our soul to His movings and to His whispers.

And that’s the point for being baptized with the Holy Spirit—it is not a point for theological contention with fellow believers, not a point of pride for those travelers who have been filled with the Spirit, but a miraculous ministry point for the sake of other people. It is another reminder that though God can do whatever needs doing without us, He chooses to involve us by His grace and by His Spirit.

As an isolated fact, experience or theology, the baptism in the Spirit cannot be fully appreciated. It is only when we face the real challenges of loving ministry toward other people that the need for additional empowerment becomes apparent. In other words, being baptized in the Holy Spirit only makes sense when you understand that God wants to capacitate you for ministry to other people in ways that go way beyond your natural powers—as sincere as they may be. Jesus baptizes you in the Spirit because of His ever-welcoming, ever-ennobling love, and His ever-active compassion for the broken people of the world (including you).

SUPERNATURAL AFTERMATH

Being baptized with the Holy Spirit is like a gently falling leaf suddenly encountering a vast, rushing wind that buoys and propels the leaf in ways it could not do on its own. Though the leaf was already drifting, the rushing wind carries it far beyond the edges of the tree where it would have normally landed. When we are moved upon and baptized in the Spirit, we become like that leaf, wondrously transported to scenic spots of understanding and to revelational places of insight far beyond our natural landing. Like people swimming in a fast flowing river, we are capable of moving in ways that would be impossibly unnatural for anyone just standing on the riverbank. The motions for treading water while drifting down the river are not like mannerisms on dry land. What “works” for walking doesn’t “work” for swimming.

That is why in the Scriptures, we generally see supernatural manifestations accompanying the experience of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. Not weird or spooky or old-fashioned or religious demonstrations, but certainly spiritual ones. The wind carrying the leaf cannot be seen by the natural eye, but its effects on how the leaf moves can be (John 3:8). People in the river can do things that are not possible outside of the river. In like fashion, there are usually indications in a person's life after he or she has been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Probably the most common of the supernatural capabilities that follow in the aftermath of being baptized in the Spirit are:

- The ability to pray in a language unknown to your natural mind.
- The ability to receive (and speak) revelation unknown to your natural mind.

It is unwise and unnecessary to make some kind of hard-and-fast rule about the signs that must accompany the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Our job is not to run a spot test on others to see if they meet our criteria. We are wiser than that when it comes to people's salvation in Christ. When people are first converted, and receive the Holy Spirit as the seal of their redemption, they do not always experience a physical or emotional sensation. They do not all fall to their knees, weep or cry out to the Lord—but many do. Being forgiven and restored back to full relationship with God is the most spiritual and moving experience we will ever have. But that spiritual experience manifests more or less differently in everyone's life. So it is with being baptized in the Spirit. Not everyone will evidence the experience the same.

On the other hand, many journey travelers unknowingly opt out of their rightful inheritance and dismiss a miraculous grace-gift from God. Often it's because they are afraid—and they associate supernatural with strange, weird and uncontrolled. They do not want to risk experiencing anything strangely supernatural. I certainly understand their reluctance because many so-called spiritual people model spirituality as kooky, bizarre and offensive. God is not spooky-strange. The enemy of our soul wants to make us nervous about the things of the Spirit. Though he has lost the war to keep you and me from believing in a miracle-working Savior, he still fights to convince us not to let things get out of (our natural) control. He doesn't want our spiritual life to intersect our daily life.

In a very simple but profound way, the baptism in the Holy Spirit—and the supernatural enablements that come with it—bring us back to the most central themes of our walk with God: Grace (being empowered and

The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.
—John 3:8

enabled by God) and Faith (choosing to act upon the words and promptings of God).

On your journey, you make one decision after another: will you allow Him to lead you, instead of leading yourself? Will you allow Him to accomplish things in your life by His power, instead of your own resourcefulness? When our natural inclination is to go left, His direction is usually to go right; when we think, “No way!” He quietly reminds us that He is the way. What strikes us as foolish and meaningless, He uses to accomplish His great purposes (1 Corinthians 1:27).

God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,
—1 Corinthians 1:27

PRAYING IN THE SPIRIT

One of the best examples of His choice to use nonsensical, counter-intuitive ways to accomplish His purposes is praying in the Spirit. Sometimes known as praying/speaking in tongues, this supernatural ability to pray in a language our natural mind never learned, is usually one of the signs that accompanies the baptism in the Spirit.

Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

—Acts 1:4-5

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

—Acts 2:4

In the Upper Room on the day of Pentecost, the disciples received what Jesus had promised. He said, “You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). He wanted His disciples facilitated and empowered for life and ministry. Only the overflowing work of His Spirit provides that sort of supernatural enablement. The most immediate consequence of being baptized in the Spirit was their sudden ability to speak to God with words that went beyond their understanding (Acts 2:4).

A short while later, they spilled out into the marketplace streets and began to declare “the mighty deeds of God” in languages they did not know or understand (Acts 2:11). When bystanders ridiculed them, Peter explained that this phenomenon was an outpouring of God’s Spirit, as prophesied by Joel (Acts 2:28-29). Isaiah also spoke of how God would one day speak to people, who relied too much on their natural abilities, “through stammering lips and a foreign tongue” (Isaiah 28:11-12).

When you are baptized in the Holy Spirit, you receive a language with which to speak and pray beyond the limits of your natural understanding. The Holy Spirit dwells in your spirit, and though your mind does not know the spiritual language, your spirit does. The Traveler’s Guide even explains that your natural mind does not know what you are praying when

If I speak with the
tongues of men
and of angels, but
do not have love,
I have become a
noisy gong or a
clanging cymbal.
—1 Corinthians
13:1

And how is it that
we each hear
them in our own
language to which
we were born?
Parthians and
Medes and...
—Acts 2:8-9

you pray in the Spirit (1 Corinthians 14:14). In fact, you might react to what you hear come out of your own mouth the same way people reacted to what they heard from those early disciples: *What nonsense is this? What does this mean?* (Acts 2:12).

The words sound strange to you because you did not acquire them the way you learned French or Spanish in school. The “unknown” language makes no sense to your ears, but it does to the people or to the angelic beings whose native language it is (1 Corinthians 13:1). Today, if you heard someone speaking the now-extinct language of the ancient Parthians, you would call it gibberish, but it was one of the tongues employed by the Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:8-11).

Your mind is used to being in charge—or at least consulted when you talk. When you pray with your spiritual language, the Bible says your mind is “unfruitful” (1 Corinthians 14:14). Because the language bypasses your conscious thinking, your mind is a bit offended—

and hyper vigilant to discredit this foreign language. In so many words, your mind protests, *“Those words don’t mean anything (to me), so they don’t mean anything at all.”* Your brain calls the language into question. Most likely, your mind will suggest three possibilities for why it has been passed over, why it does not know what you are saying:

1. “This is not a real language; it is made up—just a bunch of sounds without any real meaning.”
2. “These words copy what someone else said; it mimics another language—just a bunch of empty sounds with no idea what they mean.”
3. “These are silly sounds I made up long ago when I was a kid; I forgot them when I got older—just a bunch of make-believe sounds and childish gibberish.”

Remember one of the keys to spiritual life is that it understands God’s wisdom is a “hidden wisdom” that natural man cannot understand for it is “foolishness” and must be “appraised” spiritually—not naturally (1 Corinthians 2:1-16). Using our native language, we quickly run out of words for expressing praise to God; and, the deep stuff in our lives never seems to get expressed fully enough. That is when it is so wonderful to be able to by-pass the limitations of our natural vocabulary in order to pray and praise with spiritual words “not taught by human wisdom” (1 Corinthians 2:13).

When you pray in the Spirit, you are actively cooperating with the Holy Spirit as He directs and leads your prayers. Frequently, those Spirit-

activated prayers deal with issues or needs in your life that are too profound, or too ill-defined to “put into words” (Romans 8:26). The Bible says that when we pray in the Spirit, we are speaking mysteries—truths that cannot be uttered by naturally taught tongues (1 Corinthians 14:2). Since the Spirit is interceding for us while we pray in the Spirit, He knows how to line up our requests with God’s will, and what sorts of matters need praying about—weaknesses and vulnerabilities about which we are probably unaware (Romans 8:26-27). As a consequence, praying in the Spirit strengthens and develops us (1 Corinthians 14:4); it is one way we can build ourselves up in faith (Jude 1:20). And because our conscious mind is not that engaged in the praying, we can be praying in the Spirit, ongoing, and throughout our daily activities (Ephesians 6:18).

We do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.
—Romans 8:26

SIMPLE AND PRACTICAL HELPS FOR HOW TO BE BAPTIZED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT AND PRAY IN THE SPIRIT:

1. Begin by praising God for your existing relationship with Him, and for the presence of the Holy Spirit in your spirit.
2. Ask Jesus to baptize you in His Spirit. He is very happy to do so.
3. Believe that the instant you ask to be baptized, you are—just like you receive forgiveness the moment you first ask in Jesus’ Name.
4. Accept the reality of a language your spirit now knows—even though your mind will tell you it doesn’t know what you’re talking about.
5. Begin to pray in that unknown language; do not wait for something to happen to you, or for God to make your mouth move involuntarily.
[Note: You may sense, visualize or hear strange words or syllables in your mind; or, you may have an urge to speak an unknown phrase.]
6. Resist the temptation to doubt the validity of what you pray.
[Note: You may think you just “made up” the language, copied the sounds you heard someone else pray, or recalled something you used to say as a kid. The words may sound childish or silly.]
7. Keep praying as the Spirit gives you the words; do not listen to the few words you get first, and then just repeat those words (that your mind has now heard you speak).
8. All of this works much better by having someone lay hands on you and pray for you.

Being able to pray in the Spirit is not a goal to pursue for its own sake, but a kind of gateway through which to move out in more faith. In order to pray in the Spirit, you have to step out and speak with your own lips and vocal cords. The Spirit gives you the words (the utterance), but you have to say them (Acts 2:4). The Spirit does not make your mouth move as though you are in some kind of trance; instead, He invites you to believe that you know a language that your mind says you do not know.

As surely as you speak your native language without thinking ahead of time of the words that will spill from your lips, so He welcomes you to begin praying and speaking in your supernatural, non-native language. Doubts assail us in ministry, and that is one reason why partnering with the Holy Spirit in this most basic way—speaking the words that He gives to you by faith—will prepare you for receiving other words and assignments for the sake of others. Do not be afraid. Speak as the Spirit gives you utterance.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.
—Acts 2:4

NOT ON YOUR OWN

Therefore Jesus answered and was saying to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner.”

—John 5:19

For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak.”

—John 12:49

Spiritual ministry always requires faith—not necessarily because the problems confronting us are so large, but because we must keep following God’s lead. Our role is simply to join what He is doing. God does the work—first. That’s what Jesus meant when He said that He only did or said what He observed His Father do or say (John 5:19 and John 12:49). Apart from the Lord, on our own initiative or in our own wisdom, we can do nothing of any lasting spiritual value (John 15:5). But in concert with the Holy Spirit, who discloses what the Lord is doing, we become (very) junior ministry partners with Him.

That is precisely the pattern Jesus, Himself, followed. Over and over again, He repeated, “I do nothing on My own initiative” (John 8:28; see also John 5:30; 8:42; 10:18; and 14:10). This becomes especially exciting when you see the parallel between the ministry Jesus did—and the “greater works” His Spirit capacitates you to do (John 14:10, 12). Just as the Father abiding in Jesus instructed Him to do and say miraculous things, so the Spirit abiding in you teaches and coaches you to act and speak! Like Jesus, the Spirit does “not speak on His own initiative,” but discloses to you “whatever He hears” (John 16:13).

Can you see how important it is to develop “ears to hear” (Matthew 11:15), and to follow the Spirit’s leading (Romans 8:14)? As you become more and more familiar with the Holy Spirit and His guidance, you will be able to act and speak in ways that powerfully impact other people. The Holy Spirit’s purpose in your life is two-fold: (1) to deepen your intimacy with God the Father and the Son; and, (2) to heighten your capacity for loving ministry to others. That is why being baptized in the Spirit (super)naturally gives place to such exciting not-me-on-my-own spiritual experiences like praying in the Spirit. Spirit-to-spirit communication [(God’s) Spirit to (your) spirit] produces spiritual ministry.

PROPHECYING IN THE SPIRIT

Along with the privilege of praying in the Spirit (tongues) in words beyond our natural understanding, we are also granted the capacity to hear words (in our native language) that inform us about things beyond our natural understanding (Acts 19:6). This is called prophecy—when God gives us revelation about people, situations or future events. Prophecy expresses the heart of God for particular people at specific times in their lives, and draws their attention to what He is doing in them, or what He wants them to do. It should not surprise us to discover that God has lots to say to His kids whom He loves so much. He thinks about us all the time (Psalm 139:17-18); He watches us continually, looking to see what counsel we might need (Psalm 32:8).

And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.
—Acts 19:6

Whereas praying in the Spirit edifies and builds us up personally, prophesying edifies and encourages others (1 Corinthians 14:3-4). When we perceive the faint whisper of what the Lord reveals to our understanding, and speak it as a word of prophecy, the people to whom we give the word will be encouraged, built up and drawn closer to Him. That is the goal and

But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.
—1 Corinthians 14:3-4

the point. In a sense, prophesying is like giving others the results of a verse-search God kindly did for them through the Bible: it highlights the key elements of His truth for their situation. And sometimes—especially for people who do not yet acknowledge the reality of God in their lives—a prophecy is so poignant and penetrating it convinces them of God’s present and active existence (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).

Prophets and prophecies let us in on God’s intentions before those intentions are obvious to the natural observer. In effect, God tells people by His Spirit, “This is what I am up to. When you see it happen,

remember that I told you before it was known.” Prophetic words help people understand the plans of God. They proclaim the will and counsel of God for various situations. Prophecies should leave people believing that God knows about their unique situations. And that He cares: “I see where you are. Now look at Me, and listen to what I’m going to do about your situation.”

Prophecy sometimes reveals the secrets of the heart—not to shame us, but to convince us that God is the One who “reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness...” (Daniel 2:22). Prophetic insight is deep and penetrating. It goes beyond what we know with our natural reason, and it surfaces unsearchable truths, applying them to our future days, our present experience or even our past doings. Prophecy helps make sense out of our lives.

By hearing that God is purposefully in control of their lives and situations, people receive great comfort. They are consoled despite the difficult press of their current circumstances by the fact that God’s plans supersede the natural consequences and outcomes of life. And, of course, by learning what God is doing, people are built up and further instructed in His ways.

DISCERNING AND DELIVERING A PROPHECY

Generally, when you are receiving a prophetic word, you will see some picture in your mind—either a static image or a short clip. Additionally, your mind will be alerted to and reminded of at least one verse from the Bible (when you are just beginning to learn how to prophesy, it is always better if two or three verses come to mind). All prophecy must be in line with the Bible, so if a word cannot be supported by scripture, it isn’t a word from God. Most likely, it is born out of someone’s enthusiasm or human spirit.

When you get (1) a picture and (2) a scripture, you should also (3) know instantly what the picture means—or how you can put the picture into non-visual words. It is not wrong to explain the picture, giving its details, etc. But a prophetic picture means something; it is a message from the Lord to someone. It is not just a photo or a painting. True prophecy comes with a “sudden insight,” something that isn’t the result of reasoned thinking or well-intended emotion.

Two last pointers for your ministry journey: Prophetic words require no special tone of voice, added syllables or King James vernacular. And prophecy can always wait to be delivered because “the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not a God of confusion” (1 Corinthians 14:32-33).

NO MEDAL OR BADGE

So much more could be said about prophesying and speaking in tongues as ministry. You will learn so many more truths about them as you continue your journey through the years. But for now, as important path markers, remember that they are purely supernatural capabilities, utterly impossible on your own initiative or by your own skill. They are the work of the Holy Spirit. He invites you to partner with Him in what He is doing, but apart from Jesus and His Spirit, “you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

Every supernatural gift and spiritual capacity we receive on our journey comes from the Holy Spirit. The *Traveler’s Handbook* cautions us against viewing ourselves in any way “superior” to others—to foolishly boast of what we have, as though it is a natural, self-developed talent (1 Corinthians 4:7). Sadly, some of those who have journeyed ahead of you have worn the baptism in the Spirit, speaking in tongues or prophesying like badges or medals on their chests. Supernatural enablements are not decorations for past glories, honors for spirituality or awards for doctrinal correctness. They are (simply and only) amazing tools to be used for the sake of other people.

The glory, the praise, the marvel and the awe that rise in people’s hearts as a result of the tools must always and only be to Jesus. When we pray in the Spirit or prophesy, we are reminded that it is the Lord, not us, who is doing what needs doing by His grace.

For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

—1 Corinthians 4:7

LET’S TALK ABOUT IT:

How has your thinking changed about the Holy Spirit as a result of reading this chapter? Are you more comfortable with and more open to His work in your life now? _____

What are some trademarks of the Holy Spirit at work in someone’s life? Can you think of areas in your life that have been transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit in you? _____

What is the secret to true ministry? Ask the Lord to open your ears and eyes to what He is doing in your life—and what He wants to do through you by the power of the Holy Spirit. _____

What is the difference between receiving the Holy Spirit into your life and being baptized in Him? _____

Do you have any fears or uneasiness about being baptized in the Spirit? What did this chapter say about that? _____

What are the most common supernatural capabilities that follow being baptized in the Spirit? Must we insist on everyone having them? _____

How does baptism in the Spirit bring us back to the most central themes in our walk with God: grace and faith? _____

What happens when you pray in the Spirit? What are the most common lies that tell you your spiritual language is a counterfeit? Did you hear any of those lies when you were first beginning to pray in the Spirit? _____

What is prophecy and why is it important to share it with others? How do you know that you have a word from the Lord? _____

PRAYER:

“Thank You Lord that You love me, and that I have a relationship with You. Thank You from the moment I invited Jesus into my heart, Your Spirit has been with me. Thank You for all the things Your Spirit has already done to change and transform my life.

Thank You that You give me everything I need in my life to do me good.

Holy Spirit guide my steps. I invite You to have me say, think or do what would otherwise not come into my mind.

Sensitize me to Jesus’ voice, so I can recognize it more readily and be empowered to carry out His assignments to me for those around me.

I confess Jesus as my Savior, and I want to be as fully empowered as I can be by the Holy Spirit to minister to others.

And now, Lord Jesus, I ask that You would baptize me in Your Spirit—that You would overflow my spirit and fill me completely, through and through, with Your Spirit. Sensitize my understanding so that I can “hear” the spiritual language You have given to me.

I will speak what You give.

In Jesus’ Name—Amen.”

The Journey continues...

#1 Getting to Know God Personally

The sovereign One holds you and your future in His hands. He has a personal plan for your life based on His intimate and undying love for you. You are not alone, or on your own; God wants to make Himself known to you deeply and intimately.

#2 Being Loved without End

God wanted you before He made you. You are exactly what He longed for, and He loved you before you existed. Regardless of what you do or what you become, nothing changes His love for you. He never forgets or rejects the real-you.

#3 Being Forgiven

The merciful God forgives and forgets all your bad stuff. He can take away the influence your past mistakes have to determine your future. You can be released from controlling temptations, and their power to ruin you. God separates you from evil.

#1 Experiencing Grace

God does for you what you cannot do for yourself. He guides and provides for you.

He keeps doing good for you all the days of your life—regardless of what you do.

Grace is not deserved or earned. God simply acts in your favor as a gift.

#2 Obeying God

Since God made everything, and Jesus knows everything, it makes sense to listen carefully and pay attention to everything they say to you. When you follow God's instructions and advice, greater good comes your way, and you avoid life's pitfalls.

#3 Changing Perspectives

You don't naturally think the way God thinks, or do what He does. The conclusions life teaches you aren't the same as the ways God wants you to live. Whenever you realize that, God enables you to exchange your thoughts for His—and live differently.

#1 Loving and Forgiving Others

Because of His love, God acts on behalf of people, speaking forgiveness and bringing freedom. His love will infect you and identify you as His follower. Love and forgiveness are two of the most powerful (and hard to master) forces in the universe.

#2 Warring Spiritually

Three kinds of evil will seek influence in your life to lead you astray.

Jesus conquered them, and gives you power to withstand (a) your fleshly nature; (b) the sin-force in this fallen world; and, (c) demonic presences in the spiritual dimension.

#3 Being Recovered from Evil

When evil overwhelms you and leaves its mark in your psyche, it changes you from the person God intended you to be. His great delight is to restore you, to repair devastations caused by evil-spirited beings and forces beyond your natural control.

#4 Being Part of the Whole

You are individually part of God's whole church on Earth, so He wants you to be part of a faith community where you receive instruction from more experienced travelers, and where you discover the unique way in which you were designed to function.

Commended to The Word (CTW) develops resources to help Christ-Followers deepen their relationship with God, increase their willingness to serve others, and develop their ministry understanding. In short, **CTW** trains spiritual leaders.

More information and resources are available at
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