THE JOURNEY

TRAVEL REMINDERS

Daniel A. Brown, PhD

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by Daniel A. Brown, PhD

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Contents

INTRODUCTION 1

#1 LOVING AND FORGIVING OTHERS 3

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 21

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 41

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 and to repair devastations caused by evil-spirited beings and forces beyond your natural control.

#4 BEING PART OF THE WHOLE 59

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.

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 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 LOVING AND FORGIVING OTHERS

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL LEARN. . .

- Love distinguishes Jesus-Followers from all others.
- Loving God and loving people is a choice of behaviors, not a feeling.
- What forgiveness is—and is not.
- Why forgiveness is also a choice about people, not a feeling about them.

Life is full of deductions and conclusions we come to based on details we spot in people and things around us. When we notice the droopy, half-mast eyes of a 3-year old and the frozen moments in the midst of her playing, we correctly conclude she needs a nap. The gaggle of geese overhead, heading north, gives us hope for hotter days not too long from now. A photo of a dark-eyed woman in a grass skirt was probably not, we guess, snapped in Iceland. Based on no more than the colors of their clothes, we know whether those three guys a few seats over from us at the football game will root with us or against us.

We can tell a lot from just a little. And we communicate volumes with the smallest snatches of words and actions.

That explains why devotees of most religions express their piety in ways that distinguish them apart from everyone else. The telltale mark could be, for instance, a ritual like daily prayer or repeatedly reciting certain phrases. It may be an article of clothing such as a turban, a hidden garment or a saffron robe, a bodily emblem like a spot of ash or a tattoo or, a strict dietary limitation like avoiding meat, fasting for designated periods, etc. And within religious circles, more advanced and devoted adherents are given special significations like titles, vestments or privileges—something that says to everyone who encounters them, "*Here is a truly spiritual person; ask this one for wisdom.*"

It sounds strange to put it this way, but all gods want to mark their followers. But religious activities and symbols exhibited by a god's followers do more than just identify those people with their god. The identifying indicators of the world's religions also declare something about the nature of their god, in terms of which attributes it prizes most highly. Since a god can ask anything of its devotees, what it wants of them, and how it wants them identified to the world around them, it is a clue to what the god is really like. Generally speaking, what is most true of a god is what the god longs to have be most true of its followers; gods decree, "*You shall be like me.*"

So what marks a believer in Jesus Christ? What signals does He want in us to alert strangers and co-workers that we have surrendered our life to Him? Is it an article we put on, like a cross? An item to carry wherever we go, like our Bible? A regular exercise, like attending church each week? How will any, except our closest friends and family, know that we are disciples of Jesus? What is the most meaningful attribute that communicates not just the reality of our journeying relationship with Him, but also what is most true of Him? What sets our Savior apart from

all other gods? What does He want us to display to the world as His defining and distinctive trait?

Jesus gave His followers a very simple answer: "*Love others like you have been loved by Me*" (John 15:12)—because "*all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another*" (John 13:35). Not surprisingly, He wants us distinguished by exactly the same quality that most characterizes God Himself.

As we have learned, God is love (1 John 4:16), and love is the key to all of His thoughts, words and actions throughout all time. He created love (1 John 4:7). Since love is God's most prominent feature, His children will bear His resemblance and be loving like Him. He set His affections on us, and He wants us to do the same toward others.

We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.
—1 John 4:16

"IN-YOU-THROUGH-YOU" PATTERN

On your journey with God, you will discover several patterns for how He accomplishes His will, and how things work in His Kingdom (i.e., the invisible realm where His will is done). Of course, God can do whatever He wants, whenever He wants. But since He wants us to learn His ways (Psalm 25:4), He repeats certain patterns for us to observe. One of His most consistent ways of doing things on earth is to involve His people. He works *in* people what He plans to work *through* them to others. Jesus is a perfect example of that pattern.

Jesus was like His Father in all ways; He manifested the glory and radiance of God, so when people saw Jesus, they could see the Father (John 1:14; Hebrews 1:3). The miracles Jesus performed and the teachings He shared did not originate with Him (John 5:30; 8:28; 12:49); the Father abiding in Him took the initiative and worked through Jesus (John 14:10). God spoke and worked through His Son. Jesus simply allowed God's work in Him, then transmitted and communicated that same work to His disciples.

Jesus cherished His disciples. They felt it and believed it. His love for them perfectly copied the love He received from His Father (John 15:9). In the same way that Jesus "passed on" words and works He received from His Father, so He lived out the very patterns of grace, mercy and kindness—and desire for restored relationship—that were true of God's love for all mankind (Titus 3:4-5). Jesus reflected the Father's love like a mirror. Even more than the miracles or the teachings, the primary reflection of God through Jesus was (and is) love. This simple truth

Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.
—John 15:9

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

Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works.
—John 14:10

has profound implications for each of us on our journey because the one true mark of a believer is an overflowing love for others.

Sounds nearly impossible, huh? As with all other aspects of our walk with Him, even His command to love others is fulfilled by His grace doing the work. God wants to shine through us; He simply wants us to hold the mirror of our life up to Him, so that it angles a clear reflection of His love to everyone around us. Mirrors are not pictures; they are incapable of projecting an image of their own. But when held at the right angle, they effortlessly reflect someone's face. So, one of the first secrets we learn about loving others like Jesus "first loved us" (1 John 4:19), is not to try doing it on our own. Jesus' disciples—then or now—cannot muster enough capacity within ourselves to love others like God does.

QUESTIONS: When you imagine a truly spiritual person, do you think of a kind, gentle, loving individual—or something else? Why do people equate "being godly" with "being morally good," but not necessarily being very loving? Read these verses and answer the questions that follow.

Read 1 John 4:20-21. Is it sometimes easier to be "good" than it is to love people who are not necessarily loveable? Why does it seem easier to love God than to love people? _____

_____

Read 1 John 4:9, 16. What is it about God's love for you that enables you to believe it? How has He shown "proof" of His love? Is it possible for us to "prove" our love for others in a similar way? _____

_____

LOVING OTHERS WITH JESUS' LOVE

It can be difficult to love the people around us: individuals get on our nerves; they do foolish and hurtful things to us; they get in our way; they act boorish, selfish and clueless. What's more, they have tempers, fears, lusts, agendas and hurts (just like us). That is an explosive combination—like nitro and glycerin, people's stuff and ours do not mix well. So, how are we to love unlovable people who, like ourselves, have a great many rough edges and, as yet, unrefined qualities?

Natural love is generally a response to something *about* someone else—the way they laugh, how thoughtful or clever they are, etc. Their attractiveness attracts us, and we want to be with them because we want to be close to what we like about them. Conversely, if something about them bothers us—the nasal whine in their voice or the suffocating conceit of their self-centeredness—we do not want to be around them. The more things we don't like about someone, the less we like them—and the harder it is to love them!

But that is not the way God loves; God loves us because of what is true about Him, not what is true about us. If His desire to be with us was based on how desirable we were (while locked in our sin), we would still

be estranged from Him. He didn't wait for us to be rid of all our bad things before He loved us (Romans 5:8). No, He loved us by looking beyond our stuff—not at it. He differentiated between us and our evil deeds. He didn't lump us together with our wrongs. Separating us from our sin enabled God to remove what was separating us from Him.

> But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. —Romans 5:8

As you personally experience His gracious love again and again, it imprints itself on your soul. I'm not just speaking metaphorically. What He does *to* you leads to what He does *through* you. His love shapes you like a template, and adjusts the matters of your heart, so you become better and better able to love others His way. The healing you receive from God, and the acceptance He shows you, change your response to people. Your heart becomes like tracing paper laid down over the portrait of God's heart. The Holy Spirit pencil-marks its dimensions and outline onto your heart, and the sketch gets "filled in" a bit more each day. Increasingly, your heart resembles His, and you relate to people the way He does, instead of how you naturally would.

Few experiences on your journey with God are more exciting and satisfying than finding yourself reacting in supernatural love toward people from whom you would naturally recoil. The *after-the-fact* recognition of what just happened (or, even better, the *right-in-the-middle-of-it-happening* realization) will cause you to celebrate—far more than you used to rejoice when those people left the room. It is a taste of the victory and transformation God works in your soul. Nothing tastes quite as good as love. Thanks to God's love "poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5), you will find yourself full of love and "rich in mercy" toward others (Ephesians 2:4).

EXERCISES: Although it takes practice, the principle for loving others like God loves us is fairly simple. When you find Bible verses that describe attributes of God's love, begin to copy the pattern to and for others. The qualities and patterns of God's love are like steps to follow when you're learning a new computer program or how to install a new light fixture.

Deuteronomy 7:7. What sort of people ought to draw your attention, and whom should you pick out in a group—the most or the least "popular"?_____

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17. Can you see the specific acts of love in this passage? What practical ways can you do those things to/for others? _____

1 John 3:18. Love acts and does things. Our actions toward others prove the nature and depth of our love. You will love people more like God loves them if you keep answering a simple question for the people in your life: *"What can I do for…"* _____

Ephesians 4:32. Read the verse in your own Bible, then read it here with some of the words' expanded meaning: "And be kind (usefully employed) to one another, tender-hearted (sympathetic, compassionate), forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." What acts of love do you find in this verse; can you put them in your own words? _____

_____

1 John 4:10, 19. Does God's love initiate, or respond? Can you think of simple ways that you can "take the first step" toward people, rather than waiting to respond to what they do? _____

_____

WHAT'S WRONG?

The thought of loving certain people makes us recoil. Our natural reflex is to draw back, perhaps politely and without drawing attention to our social snub, but determinedly. We want to remove ourselves from having to be gracious, loving and kind to people we cannot tolerate. Our justification is simple: "No one could like the person—he or she is obnoxious or bossy or strange." We might even feel a bit discerning, able to spot the wrongs and distortions in the person's personality, character or lifestyle.

The catch is that God, who sees more than we do, has no difficulty whatsoever loving that person. Does He see the person's issues, and the way he or she behaves? Absolutely. So, what enables Jesus to love the person in spite of the person? The answer is a bit unsettling because it is so contrary to how we think. God can easily love people (like us) with major issues and personality quirks—broken, malformed humans—because He, Himself, has no such issues.

"God is One," we are told, meaning that He is complete, perfect, self-contained and whole—without any missing parts (Deuteronomy 6:4; Mark 12:29). In other words, there is nothing wrong with Him; He is absolutely righteous (2 Chronicles 12:6). That is why He can love anyone and everyone—there isn't anything wrong in Him to react unjustly to what's wrong in people.

He will judge the world, and He does set Himself in opposition to pride, sin and evil in the world. But that judgment is not unloving. He never loses sight of His affectionate interest in any person.

Would it surprise you to learn that the main reason we struggle with loving others is not so much because of the things that are wrong in them, as much as with what is carnal in us? Trusting them is another issue, so is foolishly ignoring toxic elements in their personality. But being able to love others comes mostly from rightness in us, rather than rightness in them.

To put this in more practical terms—how we love others reflects what we have come to know about God's comforting and hope-giving love for us (2 Thessalonians 2:16). The more whole you become as a child of God, the better able you will be to love unlovable people. Look at these verses, and see the way they connect righteousness with spiritual attitudes of love.

"Gracious is God, and righteous; yes, our God is compassionate" (Psalm 116:5). "God is righteous in all His ways, and kind in all His deeds" (Psalm 145:17).

If you ask God to help you love people like He does, He will get to work almost immediately—adjusting your heart, mind, will and perspective.

THE NEW COMMANDMENT

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."
—John 14:6

If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.
—Mark 8:34-35

Jesus spoke a great deal about a "new" commandment for His followers. Like all His words of instruction and counsel, the New Commandment guides us on our journey. We don't walk with Jesus on a paved roadway or on a well-worn, obvious trail. Though countless others have walked His way before us, their footsteps leave no discernable trace to follow—without keeping our eye on God. The way we go isn't clearly marked. It has no painted lines to follow on the ground, no arrow signs indicating which turns to take, and no signal beacons. The journey goes through wilderness, open fields, stands of tall trees, as well as scrublands, across rocky patches, rain-drenched bogs and non-descript deserts.

Jesus says, "Follow Me. The way isn't obvious, so take the way I take, and listen carefully when I tell you when and where to step." Remember, no one reaches the journey's end except by following Him (John 14:6). Along the way, He provides insights and clear directions that make finding your way less difficult. Your natural sense of direction will often urge you the wrong way, and if you want to trail Him, you will have to "deny" natural tendencies frequently. On the path He leads you to go, the last, not the first, finish first; trying to save your life ends up costing it; you grow in authority the more you surrender and serve; etc. (Mark 8:34-35).

Along with specific direction God's Spirit will give you, God's word outlines several all-purpose, general guidelines (like "*keep to the left*") to help gear you for those ways that go counter to your natural bent. The two most significant of those *keep-to-the-left* kinds of directions center on love. When people asked Jesus to summarize God's longing for us, and what walking the journey really entails, He boiled it down to two basic instructions (see Mark 12:30-31):

1. Love God with all of your being, and
2. Love other people as yourself.

God wants love to be a big deal in our lives because it is such a big deal in His! God loves love. It is more important to Him than almost everything else. Because of love, He created the world—and us in it. Because of love, He redeemed us (see John 3:16). Everything about everything in the Kingdom

of God comes down to one tremendous truth: God wants His children to enjoy a fulfilling eternity, forever reconnected to His limitless love.

You cannot separate the truth of God from the love of God because He intends them as one. That is why the apostle Paul would later write about what it really means to be a significant spiritual person—that whatever else you may know, say or do, God says if you do not have agape-love (welcoming and honoring others), your words, actions and knowledge are "nothing" but the clang-clang-clang of a dead-metal "gong" (1 Corinthians 13:1-2). On your journey, you will speak in language(s) unknown to your natural mind, exercise miraculous faith, engage in countless charitable deeds and pass along deep truth. But without love, those activities are spiritually bankrupt. Greater than faith and hope, is love (see 1 Corinthians 13).

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.
—-John 3:16

"'And you shall love God your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."
—-Mark 12:30-31

Jesus ties the love of God and of others directly together, so much so that, as we have seen, no one can say they love God if they do not love other people. The real test of just how much we love God is in how able we are to love people. Why does He link our love for Him with our love for others? Is He exasperated like a carpool mom on a congested drive home with squirrelly children fighting in the back of the van: "*Can't you kids just get along?*" Or does He know something about what it really means to love Him—something that we forget or overlook?

When you love God with your total being, you live differently. Love recalibrates and realigns your inner-being (i.e., thoughts, feelings and choices), as well as your physical desires. Loving God changes you and provides you with a spiritual sense of direction.

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.
—Romans 13:8

Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.
—Romans 13:10

So, Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you" (John 13:34). This simple teaching was a fresh beginning place for all the things that the disciples would come to learn, a new foundation upon which all other spiritual truth would be based. It was a way to encapsulate the essence of maturity in His kingdom—the understanding that was to precede all knowledge, all ministry and all true significance on their journey of faith.

The "New Commandment" summarizes our calling as believers. In the midst of this broken world, if we love others like Jesus loves us, we will fulfill the Law (Romans 13:8). In other words, our personal experience with Jesus' grace and love now enables us to live a "better way." Instead of following a long list of specific *Do's* and *Don'ts*, we can

follow love's example that "does no wrong" to a neighbor (Romans 13:9-10). Love-like-Jesus-loves keeps us from losing our way on the journey. In fact, the best way to mark progress following Jesus is to see the changes in us that enable us to love more. Loving God with your whole self and loving others like yourself gives you excellent direction.

LOVE IN ACTION

Love, then, marks our spirituality. If such a love differentiates us from other people in the world and classifies us as Jesus' disciples, it cannot be an invisible quality, like an emotion or a feeling. Otherwise, no one could see it. And this fact, along with the relative impossibility of forcing ourselves to generate loving feelings for people whom we find unsavory, gives us a clue that God is not talking about love as an internal emotional response, but as something outward and visible.

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.
—1 John 3:18

…and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,
—Hebrews 10:24

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.
—John 3:16

Loving others Jesus' way means *doing* things for them, more than *feeling* things about them. Spiritual love is a choice of actions, not the whim of emotions; it is how we deal with people, not how we feel toward them. Love expresses itself in deeds, not words (1 John 3:18). Spiritual love triggers "good deeds" and very particular behavior toward others (Hebrews 10:24). Jesus loved by laying down His life for us (John 3:16). If He had only loved us from afar, with hopeful thoughts for our future, we would never have known it. He made His love real through action, and we are to do the same—acting out our love.

For instance, when we put others' needs or concerns above our own, we love them (Romans 12:9-10). Love may be as simple as choosing to go to the end of the potluck line, or becoming known at your work as the one person who willingly fills in for someone when they have a family crisis or a need to switch days. Such behavior gets noticed. Putting up with somebody's stinky attitude—long after everybody else has given up on them—is another example of love in action (Ephesians 4:2). So are decisions to disadvantage yourself for the sake of others—like selecting the smallest piece of pie, offering to stay after the event to clean up, or volunteering to drive someone home even though they live out of your way (Ephesians 5:2).

…with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,
—Ephesians 4:2

…and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.
—Ephesians 5:2

Not all love actions are sacrificial in nature. Think of ways God acts out His love, and you begin to get an idea of how joyous and fulfilling it is to love others. If you follow His example, you will have a simple but profound guide for your journey. It will prompt you to:

- Extend mercy to people who do not deserve it (Ephesians 2:4).
- Create a place that meets the needs and aspirations of others (Genesis 1).
- Treat strangers like they're part of the family (1 John 3:1).
- Perform acts of kindness (Titus 3:4).
- Rescue others out of tight or awkward situations (Deuteronomy 7:8).
- Promote and believe in others—even when they are untried (2 Chronicles 9:8).
- Be invitingly kind, and thereby draw people in from a distance (Jeremiah 31:3).

QUESTIONS: Love does stuff. It accomplishes things in our life and in the lives of others; it is active, resourceful and spiritually strong. What do these verses tell you about loving others?

Romans 13:8. What debt do we owe to everyone? _____

_____

1 Corinthians 8:1. What affects people most (for good), love or knowledge?

_____

1 Corinthians 13. Select one quality of love, and share how you can go about your regular daily life—but doing that act of love more intentionally and regularly. _____

_____

1 Corinthians 16:14. What is the motive for everything we do in ministry?

_____

1 Timothy 1:5. What is the goal of all teaching and doctrine? Is it fair to evaluate the quality of someone's teaching on the basis of how it helped us to love other people more? _____

Treating others the way God treats us reflects His love to them in tangible ways. Our love-actions give them a beginning understanding of how God truly feels about them. As an invisible God, who shuns any idol or any attempt by His followers to create a material image of Him in stone, wood or precious metal, God relies on us to portray Him to a lost world. How grievous it must be to have His followers known throughout the world mostly as the people who tell everyone how bad they are. The church sometimes stands closer to Pharisees than it does to sinners.

When we become more feared as confronters than sought out as consolers—known as finger-pointers, instead of hand-holders—then we have given the name of God a bum rap (see John 3:17).

> For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.
> —John 3:17

Such an understanding leads us to one of the most essential ingredients in our love for others—the aspect of God's love that is the most responsible for securing our

relationship with Him. In the mirror of our life, our friends and acquaintances are supposed to see *loving forgiveness*. It should be the single most prominent feature of our dealings with all other human beings. Without that feature, we present a distorted message to the world—a message that is exactly opposite to the one we cherish so dearly for ourselves.

A UNIFORM STANDARD

When it comes to the really big stuff we do wrong, or when we visualize ourselves brought before the court of heaven, we realize we cannot fix our indiscretions as though they are parking violations in a small town where the clerk is an old school buddy. When a severe sentence for our guilt stares us in the face, we drop all strategies for defense, and frantically put our hope in mercy. When nothing can change our guilt, asking for and receiving forgiveness can change "guilty" to "forgiven" and reverse our sentence.

We judge other people much like we judge ourselves—however, it's interesting how our personal justifications for wrongdoing rarely extend to people who offend us. Being officer, judge, jury and warden in our own cases means that we tolerate far more in ourselves than we do in others. We treat ourselves with a mixture of familiarity, disgust and pity, much like the town drunk everyone knows. Owing lots of money is very different than being owed lots of money.

To illustrate how forgiveness works in the spiritual dimension, Jesus told a story of a worker who owed his boss over 10 million dollars, and who pleaded for more time in which to pay it off (see Matthew 18:23-35). Instead of merely granting an extension on the loan, the boss wiped it off the books—completely. Shortly after this, the worker considered his new financial situation, realized a co-worker owed him just under 10 thousand dollars, and demanded instant repayment. All the other workers, who had been so amazed and happy for their friend when he had told them of the forgiven $10 million, were even more shocked by his unforgiveness toward $10 thousand. They informed the boss, who changed his earlier decision to eliminate the debt, in order to match the worker's decision not to eliminate debt

And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.
—Luke 11:4

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned.
—Luke 6:36-37

What is Jesus' point? We cannot have one attitude when we need forgiveness, and an opposite attitude when others need it from us. That is why He teaches us to pray, "Forgive us as we forgive others" (Luke 11:4); and why He urges us to be merciful, just as God is merciful (Luke 6:36-37). Instead of allowing us to be thrown into debtors' prison, Jesus paid our debts on the Cross, and the Father considers our debt paid in full. "Thank God," we exclaim, "for forgiveness!" Without it all would be lost.

CHOOSING TO FORGIVE

God's love-in-action sent His Son to secure our forgiveness (John 3:16). He is a righteous, perfectly 'right' God, but if He simply maintained His 'rightness' and pointed out our wrongness, without doing anything to forgive us, He would spend eternity alone, without us. That was the heartbreak of Adam's sin—introducing into God's creation the polar opposite of "right." God knew from that point on, that wrong choices of humanity would be a constant variable in the world. Having a choice between good and evil, our species chooses poorly. That left God with but one choice: forgive our sin or end our relationship.

In our dealings with other people, we have the same choice. It doesn't work to have a relationship with someone and with his or her sin. We relate either (1) to who they are, or (2) to what they did. If not taken out of the picture, their wrongdoing soon becomes the focus of our attention. We aren't able to think about them without remembering what they did, and inadvertently transfer our relationship from the person to the offense they committed against us. We might not even intend to cut off relationship with the person when we focus on the wrong done to us, but it happens.

Offenses against us lock up our relationship with those who offended us. The more significant and painful their deeds or the remarks were, the more those jabbing, devastating words and actions overshadow our entire picture of those people. They consume our thoughts with an incredible, almost irresistible magnetism. Like a giant black hole in space, the gravity of the transgression against us sucks everything into itself.

That is why forgiveness is one of the most significant action statements love ever makes. Forgiveness is the only force powerful enough to counteract the offensive gravity and collapse the black hole. Whereas our culture views forgiveness as a meek, though noble, afterthought to some terrible happening in your life, it is actually one of the most potent and impressive powers in all creation. It can lift victims above and beyond what was done to them, and it amazes their offenders. God created the cosmos in such a way that love and forgiveness could always outweigh the heaviness of sin; mercy could always triumph over guilt. He did not want to surrender His loving intentions for us, by allowing our sins to have the ultimate and determining influence in the cosmos.

Forgiveness was His provision to assure that love could always have the final word. Forgiveness is extraordinary and striking, and it leaves an unmistakably God-like imprint on others. Because we live among people broken by sin, we will have many occasions on which to display this incredible characteristic of God. Intentionally and unintentionally, people hurt us with their words and actions. They disappoint us, betray us, oppose us, take us for granted, slander us and forget us.

When the inevitable happens on your journey, what will you do? God's antidote to offense can work for you, too, if you choose to do what He chose to do—forgive.

FORGIVENESS IN ACTION

Until we understand what forgiveness is—and is not—it is very hard to decide whether or not we want to forgive others. In fact, our misunderstanding about forgiveness makes it harder to want to forgive. Forgiveness is a hard choice. It goes against our natural sense of direction. But God's Spirit moves us steadily in that direction, miraculously and wondrously. He says, "This is the right way to walk."

Like we have seen several times already, our cultural concept of many Kingdom words is slightly off. God usually means something different than we do. Such is the case with forgiveness. Because it has been poorly defined—at least in practical terms—most of us struggle unnecessarily with what it means to forgive. After choosing to forgive, we get confused by lingering feelings of hurt, and wrongly conclude that we must not have really forgiven—or we wouldn't still ache inside.

Forgiveness, like real love, chooses how to behave toward and relate to someone who has offended you. It doesn't choose how to feel as a result of what was done: long before the throbbing in your fingers subsides, you can forgive a friend who accidentally slammed the car door on them. Forgiving your friend will not reduce the swelling or the pain in your hand. The damage done is its own reality, and forgiveness doesn't require that you pretend your hand doesn't hurt!

Forgiveness is not a feeling, nor is it necessarily tied to your feelings. Instead, it is a decision about what you want to happen to someone who hurt you: do you want them to pay a penalty—of the same magnitude as your pain—or not? If you choose to release them from the consequences they justly deserve, you forgive them. Forgiveness is a decision for no payback.

Excercise: Sometimes, the best way to understand the meaning of a spiritual term is to see it used in a non-religious context, then transfer the word-picture back into your spiritual vocabulary. The word, *Aphiemi*, forgiveness (*leaving or discharging something, cutting it loose*) is used in the following verses (underscored). Using your own words, explain what each verse tells you about what it means to forgive others' sins.

Mark 1:18. *"And they immediately left the nets and followed Him."* _____

_____

Mark 14:6. *"But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you bother her? She has done a good deed to Me."* _____

Luke 4:39. *"And standing over her, He rebuked the fever, and it left her; and she immediately arose and waited on them."* _____

_____

John 11:44. *"He who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings; and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'"* _____

_____

1 Corinthians 7:13. *"And a woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, let her not send her husband away."*

The New Testament term for forgiveness essentially means to separate yourself from something by: 1) sending it away—like deleting (send to the trash) an unwanted email offer, or shooting an arrow; or, 2) leaving it behind—like passing a slow-moving car, or disconnecting a caboose from a train. Forgiveness separates a guilty person from the punishment their guilt deserves. Unforgiveness shouts, "I want you to suffer and pay for what you did." Forgiveness, on the other hand, simply says, "I won't insist on your punishment; I release you from your debt (to me)."

Though we all protest our innocence, we know we are guilty of mistreating, betraying and violating others. We know what punishment our guilt deserves, so we try to convince everyone (especially ourselves) that we are not guilty. We deny. We defend. We blame. We cover over. We forget. But deep down we all understand one cosmic truth: guilt is the centerpiece of what's wrong with the world—and with us. That is why forgiveness is so striking, why it stands out in such relief against the natural backdrop, why it marks us as Jesus' followers.

FORGIVENESS UNDEFINED

Forgiveness is profoundly spiritual. Its invisible, unheralded power moves things in our world like wind or gravity. Natural understanding sees forgiveness as something small, unfulfilling—even pathetic; it is for powerless people who have no choice because they have no control over what happens to them. The world of fittest-survivors trumpets forgiveness as defeat on the way to extinction. Jesus proclaims forgiveness as the greatest and most remarkable powers on earth (Matthew 9:6). As wrong as it feels to our normal sense of direction that the meek "inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5), so it seems backwards that forgiveness frees us far better than revenge. But it is true!

> "But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—then He said to the paralytic, "Get up, pick up your bed and go home."
> —Matthew 9:6
>
> Those who were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this man who even forgives sins?"
> —Luke 7:49

By calling us to forgive those who have hurt us, God is not trying to disadvantage His kids, but to advantage them. He does not want us to be taken advantage of or endangered by others. He does not want us to prove something—like we really are sincere Christians—by being willing to go through a terrible, nearly impossible experience. He wants us to forgive because it is so life-giving and liberating for everyone involved.

The natural world does not understand the nature of true forgiveness, so it has come up with counterfeits to true forgiveness—ways of handling

wrongs committed against us. But they do not work. They do not let us experience the total release God has in mind for us when we forgive those who have violated us. Those false concepts of forgiveness, what we call pseudo-forgiveness, make it very hard for us to want to forgive because they make us feel unsafe—or crazy.

COUNTERFEIT FORGIVENESS SUGGESTS THAT YOU MUST REMAIN VULNERABLE TO REPEATED OFFENSES

"If you really forgive someone, you should be willing to forget the past, wipe the slate clean, and not try to protect yourself against further abuse." That is a classic line used by (to name just a few) abusive husbands, unrepentant substance-abusers and other individuals who want to put a legalistic load on the very people they have violated. True forgiveness releases the violator from punishment, but it does not put the violated person under bondage to remain vulnerable in the future.

> You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.
> —Matthew 5:38-39

Jesus tells us to "turn the other cheek"—not as a command to keep being taken advantage of by the same person, over and over—but as a command to not try balancing the scales of justice ("an eye for an eye") by seeking our own revenge (Matthew 5:38-39). Remember, David fled from Saul's presence after being abused and threatened by the 'rightful' authority in his life—the King (see 1 Samuel 18-28). David refused to take his own revenge when Saul fell into his hand; David forgave the King, but stayed away from him for the rest of Saul's life. God doesn't tell us to place ourselves in abusive situations; He tells us not to seek revenge (remain unforgiving) against those who hurt us.

PSEUDO-FORGIVENESS SUGGESTS YOU SHOULD NOT BE AS HURT AS YOU ARE BY WHAT WAS DONE

"Can't you just forgive and forget, and get past what happened; why is it (still) such a big deal to you?" Once again, this puts the burden back onto the violated individuals, and questions their integrity or their character, as though they are making too big of a deal over such a small offense. God never tells us not to be hurt; He doesn't tell us to pretend the pain is inconsequential. People do not need your pardon unless they committed an offense against you. Anything that underrates the severity of the offense, or tries to minimize its grievous aftermath in your life, is not forgiveness.

WHAT FORGIVENESS IS NOT

Our willingness to forgive other people the way God has forgiven us can be stymied by any one of several misconceptions about true forgiveness. The

better you understand the difference between what God longs to have us extend to others, and what our culture and fears offer to us in the name of forgiveness, the easier it will be to manifest this marvelous and life-giving spiritual characteristic. Let me contrast true forgiveness with the world's concepts about it:

- **Forgiveness is not the spiritual version of denial**—claiming that something never occurred (or, at least, not that often), or that what the person did to you was "no big deal." It was a big deal, and that is why you are having such a hard time dealing with it. Trying to convince yourself that their offense was small only succeeds in making you feel petty for being pained by it.
- **Forgiveness is not saying what they did was OK**, or that you brought it on yourself, or that you probably should not have been hurt by it in the first place. To say such things in the name of forgiveness introduces more confusion to an already bewildering turn of events by trying to put the blame on yourself. It won't add up, and you will end up feeling guilty for the hurt you feel.
- **Forgiveness is not justifying, excusing or explaining away an offense** in an unhealthy, co-dependent "covering for" another person. By saying it was not their fault, you are left with a fatalistic sense of helplessness in an impersonal cosmos where "stuff" just happens. If you cannot blame people, you will bitterly or numbly blame fate ("That's life.") or God, ("Why didn't He keep it from happening?").
- **Forgiveness is not "getting beyond" the ache someone caused in your heart.** Equating forgiveness with being over the pain created by what someone did to you adds insult to injury; you cannot dictate the level of pain you feel (that's why we have aspirin for the body), and what makes forgiveness so impressive is the choice to forgive despite the pain that shreds your heart.
- **Forgiveness is not a willingness to keep entrusting yourself to an abusive, untrustworthy person** who has hurt you. David kept away from his abuser, Saul, but chose not to take his own revenge when he could have. Trust is built up over time—and it is earned by what they do; forgiveness is granted in spite of what they have done. Without seeing demonstrated change in their behavior, it is foolishness, not forgiveness, to put ourselves in the hands of those who have a pattern of violating us.

SUPERNATURAL AFTERGLOW

Forgiveness leaves behind the wrongs done against you. The hurt may remain; the consequences might still be in your life. But if you stay focused on the people who committed the wrongs, and how bad they are, and what they deserve to have happen to them ("I wish you could feel what it is

like…"), you have not completely forgiven them. If you feel stuck, and have a hard time forgiving, follow Jesus' pattern—and speak your forgiveness aloud, like He did when He hung on Calvary's tree: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Forgiveness comes after a full and final verdict of "Guilty"; it doesn't make excuses for people or minimize their guilt. Extending forgiveness to an innocent person is like trying to solve a misprinted algebra equation in a high school textbook: you are left feeling something must be wrong with you for not being able to solve it.

Forgiveness is unnatural. Our survival instincts and our sense of justice argue against it. We want our revenge—though we love to camouflage that raw passion in the language of fairness. Letting go of what happened to us feels like letting the person "get away with" what they did. And that doesn't seem right. It doesn't feel like we can be done with what they did to us until we get some guarantee that they will never do it again. We want to settle accounts for our 10 thousand dollars in order to balance the books. We want to make things right.

But God says wrongs cannot be made right through unforgiveness. Look at the cycle of generational wars, and you will understand that revenge never rights anything. When a grieving family member goes to war to avenge the loss of his brother's life, he, in turn, ends up killing the younger brother in an enemy family—what happens? The cycle of revenge rights nothing and wrongs everything. Though God made people upright, we have "sought out many [evil] devices" (Ecclesiastes 7:29). He, like we, wants things made right, so He fashioned forgiveness, a most extraordinary and unnatural power to seek—and extend.

When forgiveness is granted—no matter by whom—it permanently rights a wrong, and breaks the dusky dimness of our planet with a shimmer of brightness in the likeness of the *One True God.*

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

How has your definition of a "truly spiritual" person changed as a result of reading this chapter? _____

_____

_____

Why is "loving people" connected with loving God? Why do we have trouble loving unlovable people? _____

_____

_____

Put into your own words why love is a choice of behaviors and not a feeling. Can you think of some practical ways you can begin to love others?

_____

_____

What is the New Commandment? In what way is it supposed to be the basis for everything we learn on our journey with God? _____

_____

What are some differences between true forgiveness and a few of the world's concepts about it? Which examples of false forgiveness have made you hesitate to forgive others? _____

_____

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

_____

PRAYER:

"I am thankful that You love me, Lord, and that I can express Your love to other people. Because of how You have loved me—and how You do love me—
I want to learn better how to do the same with the people in my life.
My love for others has its very foundation in Your love for me.
With each kind word, with each loving thought,
I am fulfilling a sacred trust to hold others in the light of Your love, reflecting what is true of You. Help me God to see daily opportunities to show love to others.
Thank You that through my actions others can see the love You have for them.
Your love heals my hurt, and urges me to extend forgiveness to others.
Thank You, Father, for the compassion and understanding
to forgive myself and to forgive others.
I acknowledge Your presence within me, and Your claim on my days.
I want to radiate Your love, mercy and forgiveness to others.
Lord, I want to acknowledge how difficult it is sometimes
to love and forgive people. Help with hurt and broken places in me—
both from the things I have done and those that have been done to me.
Heal those areas in my life. Lord, I do not want to hold others bound by not forgiving them. I willingly choose to release them.
In Jesus Name—Amen."

#2 WARRING SPIRITUALLY

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL LEARN. . .

- The spiritual realm presses into the natural world.
- Evil's true nature is loss, emptiness and futility.
- Our enemies have (limited) power—and God gives us tools to withstand them.
- God makes provision to defend and deliver us from evil.

A great many more things affect us than we may realize, and what we pinpointed as the cause of something, often isn't the culprit: some bacteria, not the virus we suspected, created our sore throat. Is a headache from lack of sleep or caffeine, stress, an allergic reaction or the flu? Migraines are anyone's guess. Business leaders may attribute their success to certain factors—in retrospect—but they do not really know how they did it. There are simply too many elements and variables floating around in the world.

Everytime, for instance, you step on the scales and wish you weighed less, converging forces have brought you there: extra afternoon snacks, a too-tightly packed schedule that has made regular exercise nearly impossible, simple heredity, the addition of years and a slowing metabolism, and, of course, gravity. At such times it is comforting to remember that even though you have mass, you actually have no intrinsic weight. Unfortunately, gravity has a hold on you—and won't let up. Travel to the moon, and your weight drops from 165 lbs to a mere 28 lbs. Between here and there, your weight disappears altogether. Weightlessness isn't a change in your fundamental composition; it is caused by loss of gravity, not loss of appetite.

Gravity is an excellent example of the many invisible powers that affect our daily lives. Though it is the main culprit behind the nasty fall you took when you missed the step on the stairs, it is so much a part of the "given" in the world, you hardly think to include it in your explanation to a friend about the bruise on your arm: all you think to say is, "I wasn't paying attention to where I stepped." Your friend will accept that incomplete explanation, but try telling him the whole truth, "I took one misstep, and gravity grabbed and slammed me against the ground."

There is a lot going on in life. And, not all of it is going our way.

Because of your earnest desire to please God (Colossians 1:10), you want to embrace everything He wants for you. You will want to prosper spiritually (3 John 1:2-3), and be a good "example" of a journey-walker (1 Timothy 4:12). At times, though, you will puzzle over why you cannot make the progress on your journey you want to make. You will find yourself stymied and bogged down, like someone dragging an iron ball on a chain. Obeying Him will sometimes feel like swimming against the current of a mighty river, you will even question your sincerity and faith when you seem unable to stop doing stuff that you know is wrong.

During your journey you will find yourself exclaiming, "This is crazy—what's going on, what's wrong with me?"

The Bible tells us about several specific forces and dynamics in the world that are dead-set against us, and diametrically opposed to God's purposes. We shouldn't give them undue attention, or focus exclusively on them; nor should we fear their existence. God has not given us a spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7), and because of His greatness, we have no need to back down from any kind of opponent (Philippians 1:28). But they do affect life.

> Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.
> —1 Timothy 4:12

Many believers are unaware of contrary spiritual forces that press in on and grab hold of us like gravity weighs down our physical frame. Some Christ-followers discount evil-spirited beings from life's equation. But if you dismiss the reality of demonic powers, you easily fall into one of several traps laid by the hater of your soul. You will have little answer for self-condemnation, and even less of an answer to free other people from what ravages them. If, on the other hand, you attribute every wayward step in your life to forces beyond your control, you land in other snares: self-defensiveness, irresponsible immaturity, spiritual impotence, etc. Your own choices are responsible for much of what you end up with in life—but they are not solely responsible for all the outcomes you face.

THE NATURE OF EVIL

More than you may realize, we are caught in the midst of a great struggle between good and evil, between God's way and all other ways. Our culture has an incomplete and inadequate definition of evil. We tend to think of it primarily in extreme terms—like serial murderers, grotesque satanic rituals, swindlers who prey on the elderly, etc. But evil exhibits itself in many other ways without looking garish or immoral. For instance, cancer is evil. So is bitterness. Even "funny" little remarks that cut and criticize are evil. Evil can be obvious like a violent temper, or invisible like envy and self-pity.

Hollywood misleads our understanding of the evil-spirited by portraying them in horror movies filled with terrifying images of dark-dealings and savage, blood-dripping creatures who stalk human beings. Real evil is not so dramatic—or fascinating. Ghosts, ghouls and goblins are nowhere in Scripture—and nowhere in reality. The true nature of evil has almost nothing to do with the beings and powers suggested by Hollywood. The evil-spirited are unremarkable in themselves—almost as featureless as a virus or some bacterium. Evil, itself, rarely generates Halloween-style horror, though it does drive people to do frightening and horrific things.

Instead, evil produces misery, wretchedness, despair, pain and wrongness—like the bleakness of a frail and friendless old man in a dingy convalescent home, strapped to an oxygen mask as he waits out the remaining weeks of his cancer-ridden life. Evil introduces heart-wrenching grief, distress, affliction and sorrow. Forces of evil are less like monsters and

more like unnoticed mosquitoes infecting a child with malaria that wastes away her life, cutting off her smile and her days. Evil is a thing of abject loss, ruin and desolation.

Read 1 Chronicles 29:10-13 and 1 John 4:4. Even though forces of evil sometimes seem powerful, God's might, majesty and dominion are greater. Why do people sometimes lose sight of God's greatness? _____ The sensationalist picture of evil causes people to draw back in dread; a true sense of evil makes people want to intervene. Why do you think that the enemy wants people to have a picture of evil that is scary, creepy, suspenseful, dark and laced with grotesque images of horror? _____ _____

LIFE AND DEATH (RE)DEFINED

> Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.
> —Genesis 2:7

That is because evil opposes everything of God's desire for us, and protests His creative, restorative work. Evil is the lost future and lost relationship that always accompanies death—nothing more but nothing less. When I say death, I'm not speaking of it in natural terms. Once again, I want to introduce you to a spiritual understanding of a commonly used term. Death is not just the end of someone's physical life—when he or she stops breathing and when brain function has stopped completely. For animals and plants, such a definition suffices. But for we who have been animated by the breath of God (Genesis 2:7) death has a far more fundamental and spiritual meaning.

Physical death gives us some clues about spiritual death. Physical death cuts people off from experiences and relationships they would otherwise have enjoyed if alive. It robs people of their connection with others and with their intended future. When spiritual (and physical) death came into the world through sin, Adam and Eve lost their God-intended future (without labor in the Garden), and their closeness to God (see Genesis 3:8, 19, 24). Spiritual death distorts life, emptying it of God and His purposes. Death detaches us from God; it doesn't end our existence. As spirit-beings, people never cease to be.

QUESTIONS: A physical concept of death makes it difficult to understand many Bible verses because they are not talking about the cessation of life, just its distortion. Read these verses and apply the spiritual definition of death to them. Do they make more sense to you now? Explain them in your own words.

Romans 6:23. _____

2 Timothy 1:10. _____

James 1:15. _____

John 3:14. _____

Eternal life is not just life that goes on forever and ever. Rather, it is life without death—life that never suffers the loss of relationship or our God-ordained future. It will be life with nothing missing, nothing wrong. In other words, it will be life as God always intended it to be—full of joy, satisfaction, fulfillment, and, most of all, a fully restored and secured relationship between God and us forever. Can you see why the Bible defines eternal life in terms of relationship with God (John 17:3), and why eternal life is in Jesus (1 John 5:11)?

> This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.
> —John 17:3
>
> And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.
> —1 John 5:11

The Hollywood version of evil prompts us to run in fear; a true realization of evil provokes us to intervene and put an end to the suffering it is creating. A horror flick does nothing but make us jumpy in the dark; a documentary of starving children in Uganda moves us to compassion and action. Hollywood points to garlic and a hand-held cross to ward off evil; God points to sour wine and the Cross-held hands of His Son to destroy it once and for all (John 19:30). The two versions of evil have almost nothing in common.

THE NATURE OF WHAT OPPOSES US

So, what forces of evil sometimes beset us on our journey with God? What opposes us and hinders our walk? The Bible presents us with four general categories of death-dealing, loss-bringing, hope-stealing evil:

THE WORLD

Perhaps most obviously, even to people who do not believe in God, evil resides in the world around us. In fact, one of people's most-asked questions wonders how a good God could create a world filled with so much evil. Of course, God did not make such a world, but the evidence of evil-in-the-world cannot be denied: not like zombies and vampires, but poverty, war, crime and misery. Truly, we live in the midst of a derelict and ailing world filled with every manner of heartache and anxiety. People suffer and die as a matter of this world's present course—a course never intended by God.

> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope.
> —Romans 8:20
>
> We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.
> —1 John 5:19

This diseased atmosphere that surrounds us, this total environment of wrong-ending-up, is what the Bible calls THE WORLD. Long ago, when mankind abnegated their rightful role as stewards of this planet, and gave it into the hands of the devil (see Genesis 3), THE WORLD was captured in futility (Romans 8:20). Now, like a bound hostage, it lies stretched out under the cruel influence of Satan (1 John 5:19). The trajectory of THE WORLD strains against God's way, against everything

that is lasting, good, satisfying and joyful (Ephesians 2:2). Like a stolen car driven by a heedless teen, THE WORLD careens wildly on a ruinous course, plunging toward death and carrying us all with it.

Life on this planet affects us evilly (Ephesians 5:16), and though we do our best to wade against the current of "this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4), THE WORLD affects us and presses against us far more than we realize.

THE WORLD loves to be loved, and it offers things to please our eyes and our ego, so we follow it like fish go after a spinning lure. It boasts of its prowess like a tournament knight, and with bawdy humor and suggestive poses, it promises what it can do for us (too). You may know THE WORLD by its common name, "the good life," the heady sense of an oh-so future, and there is nothing you cannot do if you just put your all into it. THE WORLD dazzles us like an infomercial of a millionaire offering to share secrets for making it big. It is difficult to disbelieve—especially when the backdrop pictures look like everything we ever wanted.

Though THE WORLD lures us to join its impressive course of life with promises of certain satisfaction and bigger-than-life rewards, its path leads surely to destruction (see Psalm 73). Its way may look good to us, and even seem reasonable, but the end "is the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12).

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.
—Ephesians 2:1-2

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil.
—Ephesians 5:15-16

There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.
—Proverbs 14:12

QUESTIONS: In the following verses the word "evil" refers to an influence that affects us. The evil is not intrinsic wickedness, meaning it was not created evil, but in this bent and broken creation, it now produces evil—harmful, vicious, calamitous, hurtful and deadly—effects.

Galatians 1:4. Give some examples of "bad things that happen to good people"; if people do not know about the vicious effects of The World, whom do they usually blame for the bad things that happen in life? _____

Ephesians 5:16. Left to themselves, our days follow the general course of The World away from God's intention. How can we 'turn our days around' to redeem them, and make the most of our time on earth? _____

_____

THE FLESH

Used in the Bible as a metaphor both for (1) physical, non-spiritual earthly body, and (2) our inner sinful nature, THE FLESH sets itself against the Spirit of God and desires exactly the opposite from what He wants (Galatians 5:16-17). The key component of THE FLESH is desire—craving,

longing, lusting—demanding what it wants, when and how it wants, regardless of the consequences. Like a spoiled nine year-old, THE FLESH sets its desire, and reacts with hostility and rebellion if told "No" (Romans 8:6-8). Though it offers to serve us and show us around like a tour-guide or an ever-pleasant host, make no mistake: FLESH likes to be the boss.

> For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.
> —Romans 8:6-8

Like a bratty kid spoiling everything, but with far more developed capabilities, THE FLESH brings corruption and ruin (Galatians 6:7-8). When denied or restrained it throws a tantrum. When allowed and unrestrained, THE FLESH breaks anything it gets its hands on and has its way with. All on its own—and certainly without our permission—THE FLESH generates jealousies, flaming tempers, envies, immoralities, quarrels, etc. (see Galatians 5:19-21). It offers us a tainted picture of reality by rationalizing what it wants (spell that d-e-s-e-r-v-e-s) or by fanaticizing a resistance-free scenario of pure pleasure.

> For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.
> —Galatians 6:8

> Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.
> —Matthew 26:41

Though our spirit is more than willing to follow God, THE FLESH that encases our spirit temporarily is weak and sickly when it comes to spiritual pursuits (Matthew 26:41). Not remarkably, when we deny THE FLESH, like with fasting, it rises up like an angered rhino, and charges right at whatever discipline has dared to cause it discomfort. THE FLESH is like a slave-trader who offered to befriend us, then sold us to sin so that it could have its way with us. Just as people moving past middle-age complain about their bodies "betraying" them—like when a knee gives out—our flesh will inevitably let us down and give out under the weight of temptation.

THE FLESH aka our "Old Nature," was forever sullied and ruined by the Fall. Since then, our constitutional make-up, the way we are now wired, prefers wrong to right, the way that Adam preferred the fruit to obedience. THE FLESH cannot please God because nothing good (as opposed to evil) resides in it (Romans 8:8). It is irredeemably evil—so far beyond reform that God warns us to be ever vigilant against it, and to set up safeguards to control and disable it (1 Corinthians 9:27). Though our FLESH is out on parole, it cannot be trusted or left alone with our valuables.

Read Romans 7:14-15, 18 and ask yourself, "Who is the boss?" _____

THE SIN-FORCE

Most people understand a sin as something we do, think or say that is wrong. Those are sins. But you might be surprised to learn that sin is not

only an act or an episode; it is also a force, like gravity, that does things to us. When we do something against the will of God, it is a sin—a violation, a trespass across boundaries He established to keep us safe and satisfied. We are responsible for having done it; it was our choice like Adam and Eve's. But THE SIN-FORCE, acting like a strong wind, was part of the reason we succumbed to temptation. Aside from any personal choice we make, the Sin-Force wields its own power to blow us off course.

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.
—Romans 5:12

And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.
—Genesis 4:7

God warned humankind that THE SIN-FORCE entered the world when Adam and Eve's disobedience opened the door (Romans 5:12). It is a malignant infection spreading death and misery everywhere. God admonishes us to exercise dominion over it because it seeks to dominate us, waiting in ambush for every opportunity to overwhelm us (Genesis 4:7). Like a giant spider THE SIN-FORCE spins a web across the likely paths of our mind and heart. Knowing our weakness in THE FLESH, and THE WORLD'S allure, THE SIN-FORCE lays the strands of its entanglement where they are most likely to catch hold of our liabilities. It is the ultimate opportunist.

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.
—1 Corinthians 15:56

For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.
—Romans 7:5

...for sin, taking an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.
—Romans 7:11

THE SIN-FORCE easily entangles us because its wrongness and waywardness continually cast our direction like a huge trapper's net (Hebrews 12:1). If we simply let things happen, without actively working to push the netting away from ourselves, the mesh will wrap us round about, holding us until the Spider, whose sting is death, comes to suck our life juices dry (1 Corinthians 15:56).

As proof of its utter evilness, THE SIN-FORCE even takes advantage of the Law of God, using the holy and righteous commandments from God as a means to deceive and kill us (Romans 7:5-17). As soon as we hear of something forbidden—like a sign telling us not to stand too close to a cliff's edge— THE SIN-FORCE pushes us that direction with thoughts like, "Why?"; "I wonder how close I can get"; "It's probably not that dangerous for capable people like me." Even knowing that danger, we still make poor choices that put us more at risk, or under its influence.

Though we each have responsibility and culpability for our sins, the Bible explains that sometimes it is THE SIN-FORCE that convinces us to sin. Additionally, it can cultivate a sort of progressive control in our lives—one that increases with sins we commit (John 8:34). A vicious cycle ensues: a sin puts you somewhat more under the influence of THE SIN-FORCE, which in turn, preys upon the

vulnerability caused by that sin. One bad choice to step off the edge of that snowy mountain creates an avalanche that carries us with it, until it buries us beneath the weight of lots more than we bargained for.

THE EVIL-SPIRITED

Though our western and scientific culture scoffs at the existence of a spiritual reality beyond the limited dimension of physical measurement and observation, we know exactly the opposite. This tangible world was molded into existence out of the spiritual realm (Psalm 33:6; Hebrews 11:3), and the unseen world is more real than what we behold with our eyes (2 Corinthians 4:18). Hence, our primary struggle against evil will not occur in the natural sphere, but in the supernatural. As the Bible says, we wrestle [mostly] against "schemes" and "spiritual forces of wickedness" in the heavenlies (2 Corinthians 2:11; Ephesians 6:12)—what we're referring to as the EVIL-SPIRITED.

By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.
—Hebrews 11:3

…the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.
—2 Corinthians 4:18

God commissions and deploys myriads of angels to minister and "render service" to us (Hebrews 1:14). The Evil One has far fewer because when God swept him from heaven and threw him "to the earth," only "a third of the stars of heaven" were banished with him (Revelation 12:4). Smaller in number and lesser in power than God's "ministering spirits," EVIL-SPIRITED hosts afflict and vex people with sickness, anxiety, unbelief and false beliefs, addiction, depression, and other kinds of mental torment and heartache. Like traces of toxic chemicals seeping from a waste site, causing deformity, disease and death, the EVIL-SPIRITED weave their way into the human psyche and the human condition. They bring emptiness, confusion and sadness.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.
—Ephesians 6:12

"You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord?"
—Acts 13:10

As a creature of death who still wields death's power like a bludgeon, the "serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan" (Revelation 12:9; 20:2), has one agenda: to afflict our life with every possible kind of loss and brokenness (John 10:10-11). His primary activities on earth are deception and accusation (see John 8:44; Acts 13:10; Revelation 12:10). He hates the people of God—we who will occupy a higher place in the cosmic order than the place he abandoned so long ago because of his foolish vanity.

One of the primary proofs Jesus offered about His Kingdom authority was casting out evil spirits, and healing all who were "oppressed" by demonic presences

(Acts 10:38). THE EVIL-SPIRITED are exactly that—beings whose entire identities and assignments are against God's marvelous ways and truth. They are not spooky-scary evil from a Hollywood movie set, but they are like weed-seeds of ruin, grief, adversity, barrenness, disappointment and pain wanting to plant themselves everywhere.

Jesus confronted satanic temptation (Matthew 4:1-11), and since He was "tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15), His temptation by the Adversary signals our own. Being "Christians" means we are Christ-like, and His life is the model for ours. Both sin and Satan sought to draw Jesus away from God's purposes, so it seems silly to imagine that we won't confront both in our life.

LIFE AND DEATH CONTRASTED

On the Cross, Jesus bought our freedom from sin's death-grip, but He also "disarmed" hell's minions and broke up the works of the devil. That was God's plan from before all time began. Eons before coming to earth, Jesus watched Satan "fall from heaven," which is why He can grant authority to His followers "over all the power of the enemy" (Luke 10:18-19). Though the devil has had power over humanity and our world, he never had any power over Jesus (John 14:30). Satan was a completely vanquished foe even before Christ's Incarnation! Since Jesus' resurrection, the devil's temporary hold over the earth has been diminished even more. The waning power of the devil is "death" (Hebrews 2:14).

Remember our earlier discussion of (spiritual) death? Another way to understand the meaning of death is to see it as a destiny, a future end—not a physical type of yet-to-come existence, but a psycho-spiritual condition that never changes. Over and over, God presents people with a choice between life/prosperity [good, bounty, cheer, joy, peace, well-being] and death/adversity [bad, misery, distress, sorrow, trouble, wretchedness] (see Deuteronomy 30:15).

Life, as our future portion, will be full of joy, rest, satisfaction, excitement, peacefulness, comfort, etc. It's life beyond your wildest dreams. Death, on the other hand, strips existence of every trace of life, so joy and satisfaction turn to constant melancholy; rest and peacefulness become agitation, despair and "bewilderment of heart" (Deuteronomy 28:28). Death is life stripped of all well-being.

Each of the forces of evil that oppose us seek to impose a measure of death on our life. None of them has the power to "snatch" us from God's hand and take eternal life away from us (John 10:28-29), but they can interrupt or lessen the flow of true life in our earthly life and ministry. Evil comes to "steal, kill and destroy" portions of life God intends for us, but Jesus comes to make that intended life fully abundant.

Questions: Read these verses with the additional definitions and explanations, and answer the questions.

Colossians 2:15. Upon returning home from war, victorious generals commonly paraded their vanquished foes through the city streets for all to see. In light of that image, put this verse into your own words. _____

_____

Hebrews 2:14. Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless [make entirely idle, bring to naught, make of no consequence] him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. So, what did Jesus' death accomplish with regard to our enemy? _____

_____

1 John 3:8. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy [loosen, break up, dissolve, melt away] the works of the devil. Think of two analogies of substances or things that seem solid and strong, but can be destroyed. Describe Jesus' work using those analogies.

1. _____
2. _____

THE NATURE OF WHAT CHAMPIONS US

In the face of such foes what are we to do? Are there ways to conquer these forces of evil, or must we be their victims as long as we live on earth?

For starters, God is our Champion! He fights for us against too-strong-for-us foes we could otherwise not defeat (Isaiah 19:20). In fact, He is called our "Dread Champion" (Jeremiah 20:11) who will disgrace our persecutors and foil their schemes. When Kind David prayed for God's help against his too-strong enemies, he used imagery that wasn't just poetic—it expressed his understanding of who God is on our behalf. He prayed,

> *Take hold of buckler and shield and rise up for my help. Draw also the spear and the battle-axe to meet those who pursue me; say to my soul, "I am your salvation." —Psalm 35:2-3*

Picture in your mind a parallel image of God who fights for you as the most dreaded of all Champions: He "will go forth like a warrior," raising "a war cry" to "prevail against His enemies" (Isaiah 42:13). Once again, we see grace in action. God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. This is the most important lesson to remember about warring against the unseen enemies in our life: the battle is God's (1 Samuel 17:47; Psalm 62:1-2), and if He is for us, who, really, can be against us (Romans 8:31)?

> ... the LORD does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the LORD'S and He will give you into our hands.
> —1 Samuel 17:47

With that in mind, let's explore what the Bible offers us as antidotes to the influence and effects of the four categories of evil we confront in life:

THE WORLD

Even though THE WORLD has fallen under the sway of the enemy, God has a prior claim to it because He made it (Psalm 89:11). He will judge it in righteousness (Psalm 9:8), and replace it with a new heaven and earth in which no wrongness exists (2 Peter 3:13). In God's eternal plan for His Creation, THE WORLD is "passing away" (1 John 2:17). In the meantime, we will have difficulties in the WORLD, but Jesus promises to give us His peace and His victory through it all (John 14:27; 16:33).

Through the Cross, THE WORLD is crucified in our lives (Galatians 6:14), so He sends us into THE WORLD, not out of it; He calls us to preach, not to hide (see Mark 16:15 and John 17:18).

The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; The world and all it contains, You have founded them.
—Psalm 89:11

... the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.
—2 Peter 3:12-13

QUESTIONS: Read these verses on overcoming THE WORLD, and answer the accompanying questions.

2 Peter 1:4. Where does the "corruption" come from in the WORLD, and what tool helps us escape that corruption? Give an example or two of a corruption God helps you escape. _____

_____

1 John 5:4-5. What weapon is most effective against the WORLD? _____

_____

THE FLESH

Though not inherently evil, THE FLESH is highly susceptible to sin (Romans 6:19), and it rarely is able to keep pace with any spiritual purpose (Mark 14:38). THE FLESH "profits nothing" meaning it has little to offer spiritually (John 6:63) Nevertheless, Jesus came in THE FLESH and lived without sin (John 1:14) because He was so perfectly aligned with His Father. Jesus obeyed His Father completely and in everything. I'll use some almost ridiculous language to explain what happened over the course of His earthly life.

... the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.
—Mark 14:38

Jesus was so potently spiritual, and so absolutely led by the Spirit (even into the wilderness), His spiritual perfection kept His flesh in check. Temptation sought to find a foothold in His flesh, but Jesus turned back all temptation with (1) the word of His Father (spoken to temptation); and (2) complete surrender in obedience to His Father (see Hebrews 10:5-9). We, too, will have more victory over THE FLESH if we clothe ourselves in Him and "make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" (Romans 13:14). If we walk by the Spirit as Jesus did, we will be far less likely to "carry out the desire of THE FLESH" (Galatians 5:16).

Read Galatians 5:13. As an antidote to serving THE FLESH, what should we do? _____

Read 1 Peter 4:1-2. For what purpose should we "arm ourselves" to counteract THE FLESH in our lives? _____

_____

THE SIN-FORCE

There are several bits of good news for us about this horrific power that led humankind to such wickedness and depravity before the Flood, so much so that God regretted making our race (Genesis 6:5-12). Though it is still deadly contagious, we now have The Law of Moses to identify its particulars. No longer can it lure us unknowingly into death; its points of temptation have been cataloged (Romans 5:13, 20). We can resist the deceitfulness of THE SIN-FORCE by intentionally striving against its particular suggestions.

Like a red warning light accompanied by a blaring buzzer, The Law warns us of danger—and when we have been infected by THE SIN-FORCE, a loud-speaker repeats an announcement: "Guilty. Guilty. Guilty." Additionally, the Holy Spirit works aggressively to convict us of it (John 16:8). The good news, of course, is that Jesus condemned THE SIN-FORCE to the very death penalty it had sought to put on us (Romans 8:3), and since we are born of God, our spirit has already been put completely off limits to the influence and the touch of THE SIN-FORCE (see Romans 7:22 and 1 John 3:9).

> For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,
> —Romans 8:3

> No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.
> —1 John 3:9

Read Romans 6:12-13. What do you think it means to "present" the parts of your life "as instruments of righteousness to God"? _____

Read Hebrews 11:25. What choice can you make that will prevent THE SIN-FORCE from having it reign in your life? _____

_____

THE EVIL-SPIRITED

To begin with, let us remember that God is Lord of the heavens and the earth. He is the Most High God who rules over all (Psalm 97:9), and Jesus His Son (Luke 1:42) is the "appointed heir of all things" (Hebrews 1:2), and the One by whom and through whom "all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities" (Colossians 1:16).

The conflict between good and evil should never be misinterpreted as though it pits two equals—God and Satan—against one another. The devil is not God's counterpart in any manner. He is merely a created

being—made by God—an angel like Michael or Gabriel, who was exiled to earth because he rebelled against God's purposes for him in the court of heaven (see Ezekiel 28:14-17).

Jesus called Satan "the ruler of the world" (John 16:11), who has temporary jurisdiction over the earth and its inhabitants. This was not always the case, nor did God ever intend it to be so. Originally, God gave Adam and Eve complete dominion over the world, equipping His children to steward the creatures and the resources of our planet with wise creativity under His ultimate authority (Genesis 1:28). But Adam and Eve allowed the enemy to lead their thoughts in disbelief and rebellion ("Has God really said…"). When they ate the forbidden fruit, they unknowingly gave up their stewardship authority, surrendering it to the god whose words they believed and followed (Genesis 3:1, 6).

> You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.
> —Acts 10:38

In the Book of Revelation, God outlines His plan for taking back the authority Satan seized in the coup against humanity. God, our Father, is going to (re)create everything without any trace of death, sorrow, pain or unrighteousness. Until that time—after Jesus returns to the earth—we who call Him Lord are commissioned to "occupy" the world like elite Special Forces' operatives. Stationed behind enemy lines, we prepare inroads for His coming kingdom. Like Jesus, we go about doing good, and healing, rescuing and delivering anyone oppressed by evil (Acts 10:38).

When we choose to identify with Jesus in His death, we also receive power to reign in the authority that His new-life has over death and sin. Our spiritual authority over evil rests solely upon Jesus. He, not we, "disarmed the rulers and authorities…triumphing over them" through the Cross (Colossians 2:14-15). Thus, when we, or those we love, are bullied by THE FLESH, THE SIN-FORCE, THE WORLD or by THE EVIL-SPIRITED, we can say, "I may be weak on my own, but in Jesus' Name and authority, I say 'No' to you!" Few other words strike as much fear into the heart of the enemy of our race than Jesus' Name. When we resist the devil in that power, he vanishes from the scene, shunning our presence (James 4:7).

THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE

Before I outline the specific weapons available to us, let me set the broader context in which we use those tools. God commissions and supplies us with spiritual power and with His Spirit. Many fellow travelers call that being *anointed* (2 Corinthians 1:21). Though it is an imposing sounding term, it just means you and I are set apart by God for particular purposes and given job-appropriate tools. Thus equipped, we take the ministry of reconciliation

> Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God,
> —2 Corinthians 1:21

into a dying and desperate world where evil has broken people's lives and stolen their hope (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

Spiritually powerful beyond any natural ability, the "weapons of our warfare" withstand assaults against our soul (2 Corinthians 10:1-6), and counter-attack in the same way that antibiotics attack invading elements in our bodies. Our weapons are both offensive and defensive. Just as a good diet and exercise help prevent some bodily illnesses, so certain activities—like talking to God, reading His word, worshiping, being in fellowship with other believers, repenting, etc.—make us less vulnerable to some ailments caused by THE WORLD, THE FLESH, THE SIN-FORCE or THE EVIL-SPIRITED.

> For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.
> —2 Corinthians 10:4

When we suffer, when our longings go unsatisfied, when our hearts get blown toward wrong choices, when we find ourselves inexplicably bound by compulsions or tumbled in confusions, we know the battle has been joined. Warring spiritually is essentially maintaining firm resolve to keep trusting in God when it seems like life is not working. We do battle by seeking the kingdom of God as our first priority, and resisting the lies that say God does not care, or that He is not able to do anything about our painful places.

Jesus already triumphed over Satan, and in the aftermath of that victory over evil, you and I are already seated "with Him in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 2:6). Our fight with evil is, in many ways, like a video-clip of a past event, and God supplies us with tools to edit it. What tools has God given to us to withstand and push back the powers that assail our friends and us? What are some of the effective counter-measures we have at our disposal?

> Some boast in chariots and some in horses, But we will boast in the name of the LORD, our God.
> —Psalms 20:7

> …let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health.
> —Acts 4:10

THE NAME OF JESUS

His Name is the most powerful name in all Creation. He gave us His Name in order to call upon His authority, His right and capacity to over-rule everything else. THE NAME OF JESUS is so far beyond any other name that it is like having a 4-wheel drive vehicle in a cross-country race against horse-drawn chariots (Psalm 20:7); or like having an industrial strength fire extinguisher to extinguish a candle.

THE NAME OF JESUS enables us to bring healing to the sick (Acts 4:10; James 5:14-15), freedom to the tormented (Acts 16:18), and salvation to any who will believe (Acts 2:22). In THE NAME OF JESUS we perform miracles (Mark 9:39), and experience a steady flow of miraculous capacities (spiritual gifts) to do what is not naturally possible (Mark 16:17-18).

Because we ask the Father for what we need in THE

NAME OF JESUS, He hears us and grants our requests (John 15:16). We become His deputized agents, conducting Kingdom business on His behalf, doing what He did: bringing freedom from the powers of evil (Acts 10:38). God's Name is both an offensive weapon you will be prompted to use to make great headway against evil, and a defensive one in times when you feel discouraged (Proverbs 18:10).

…whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.
—John 15:16

You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.
—Acts 10:38

THE WORD OF GOD

When the devil tempted Jesus in the wilderness, He resisted by quoting scripture, saying, "It is written…" (See Matthew 4:1-11). Jesus used the authority and the truth of His Father's word to turn back the half-truths and lies of the "father of lies." Even though His Father gave all authority to Jesus, He still chose to rely solely on the word of God to turn away temptation. Interesting that the One who is the Word of God made use of the word of God to overcome evil.

The sum of Your word is truth, And every one of Your righteous ordinances is everlasting.
—Psalms 119:160

Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.
—Proverbs 30:5

Indeed, while following the way of Your judgments, O Lord, we have waited for You eagerly.
—Isaiah 26:8

God's word is the everlasting truth upon which Creation is based (Psalm 119:160; John 17:17), and every one of His words is like an already-tested shield that protects us from any evil launched at us like a volley of arrows (Proverbs 30:5). In the face of afflictions, difficulties and fears that confront us on our journey of faith, we can speak the truth of God's word, and confess its reality over and above the natural reality we see.

Spending time regularly in His word keeps us close to God. We can "follow" the truths it quickens to us, and "wait eagerly" for Him to instruct us; it is a way to seek His wisdom for facing the evil at hand (Isaiah 26:8). By holding onto His promises, we have a sure foundation with which to withstand any storm.

THE FEAR OF GOD

To fear does not mean to tremble in dread about what God is going to do to you. His enemies tremble, not His kids (Joel 3:16). THE FEAR OF GOD is remembering that He has the final say in everything, and that all the particulars of life will be judged according to His rules—no one else's; it is realizing that no matter what it seems like, His ways and judgments are totally reliable and correct (Psalm 19:9).

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.
—Psalms 19:9

THE FEAR OF GOD gives us wisdom about what is right, and it gives us the extra incentive we often need

to choose that right when THE FLESH and THE WORLD lure us another direction (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 16:6). Evil forces make things wrong and wretched and empty; THE FEAR OF GOD essentially helps us realize the link between evil forces and the deathly misery they cause.

Even when we are strongly tempted to follow THE WORLD or obey THE FLESH in order to get what we think we want, THE FEAR OF GOD enables us to realize the true outcome of going that way, and we will turn back because of how much we really hate what evil does to ourselves and to others (Proverbs 8:13; 14:26-27). That is how THE FEAR OF GOD keeps us, and makes us less likely to be hassled by evil forces (Proverbs 19:23).

WORSHIP AND PRAISE

Warfare and worship are linked together in the Bible far more than most believers realize. With the high praises of God in our mouths and a sword in our hands, we will bind the very powers of evil that have sought to capture us (see Psalm 149:6-9). When we feel powerless in the face of evil, we get to put our attention on God (instead of the evil), and as we worship Him with song, He sets ambushes against the oncoming powers of wrongness (see 2 Chronicles 20:12, 17-19, 21-22).

In praising and extolling God, we experience an increase of His power brought to bear upon our situation, much in the same way that someone waving their arms and shouting draws the attention of a rescue team (Exodus 15:2; Psalm 21:13). Someone forced at gunpoint to drive past a police checkpoint will try to send little signals that something isn't right; worship acts as that sort of attention-getter. Notice how some praise words, like *magnify* and *extol*, are pictures of increase. Though God is always the same, worship increases our sense of just how big He is in comparison to our foes.

Paul and Silas sang songs of worship to God when they were locked in prison, and as they did, an earthquake shook their cell and set them free (Acts 16:25-26). This and many other examples in the Bible show us that praise has a unique capacity to release people and circumstances from the enslaving grip of evil. Very frequently, as we praise God in the midst of difficult circumstances, He changes them. And even when the situation remains the same, we get changed to His glory.

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.
—1 Peter 5:8

…in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.
—Ephesians 6:16

RESISTING THE DEVIL

Though he wants to fool you into believing otherwise, Satan, the Accuser, the Liar is a finite being who can only be in one place at a time. He "prowls about" searching for prey like a lion (1 Peter 5:8). He and his hordes of emptiness want to devour God's people. When our life circumstances are causing us to suffer, they take aim at our faith with fiery darts of accusation against God's

goodness and power (Ephesians 6:16). The Enemy knows we do not like pain of any sort. We do not want to suffer. And so, after a protracted season of pain, or when our suffering reaches intolerable levels, the devil will try to get us to turn away from God's truth.

Resisting him causes him to flee (James 4:7). We resist the devil by entrusting ourselves to God—realizing that many righteous people suffer along with us (1 Peter 5:9). Bottom line, the devil tries to convince us that God will not or cannot take care of us. Making the choice to keep believing in God's rescue is one of the most powerful weapons in our spiritual arsenal. We do not use garlic or crosses; instead, we kneel at the foot of the Cross, where Jesus suffered, and repeat His words: "Into Your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

> Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.
> —James 4:7

The cultural quip, "The devil made me do it," is spiritual capitulation. But one of the most foe-terrifying spiritual war cries that can ever be uttered is, "Though He [God] slay me, yet will I hope in Him" (Job 13:15).

THE ARMOR OF GOD

Using the imagery of a Roman legionnaire, the scriptures paint a detailed picture of several other implements for our struggle against the schemes and the world forces of evil (Ephesians 6:10-17):

Truth—the way that God has made things, His way, what He decrees about everything. The Truth of God's word sets us free from the lies and temptations of THE WORLD, THE FLESH, THE SIN-FORCE or THE EVIL-SPIRITED (John 8:32, 44). When things seem to be slipping, when aspects of your life are coming undone, call out for God's truth to be a belt holding things up.

Righteousness—the goodness, soundness and exactly-the-way-it's-supposed-to-be-ness of God's life. We have been made eternally righteous through Christ, but the more we line up our daily life with Him, the less vulnerable we will be. Our heart is easily fooled into justifying itself, but when you sense something isn't quite right, ask God to highlight the wrong with His righteousness.

Repentance—acknowledging the wrong direction we've been going, and turning around. By confessing our waywardness, we get cleansed from the easily infected residue that acts like a magnet to draw trouble our way (1 John 1:9). No matter how many times you must turn back around to walk the right way, keep doing so.

Faith—believing whatever God has said to us in His word about our situation. All the forces of evil try to get us to take matters into our own hands, or to listen to words (thoughts, emotions, circumstances) other than God's (Romans 10:17; 2 Corinthians 5:7; 1 Thessalonians 3:5). When you feel hopeless or confused, go back to the last words you heard God speak to you—and hold to them like to a shield.

Salvation—is not only eternal deliverance from the power of sin and the "domain of darkness," but also freedom from evil-spirited bondages in our mind, will and emotions (2 Corinthians 1:10; Colossians 1:13). Miraculous elimination of demonic hindrances, through the ministry of deliverance is an incredible resource in our lives. In those areas of your life where you encounter confusion or compulsion, ask God to deliver your thoughts from evil.

Scripture—specific and timely Bible verses quickened to you through prophetic words, teaching, counsel, reading, etc. God emails His words to us in order to heal and rescue us (Psalm 107:20; Matthew 8:8, 16). If you picture scripture as a sword, you will understand how to use it to parry the thrusts of the enemy—and how to strike down his lies.

Prayer—asking for God's will and the intervention of His kingdom in our life situations (Luke 11:2). Jesus taught us to pray for God's will to be done—not as a fatalistic "Whatever!" but as a resource to call upon in the day of trouble (Psalm 50:15; Nahum 1:7). Very often prayer is a running dialogue with God, whispered throughout the day in moments of challenge or celebration.

Praying in the Spirit—allowing the Holy Spirit to intercede for us when we do not know how to pray (Romans 8:26). A language unknown to our natural minds, and not directed by our empirically oriented senses, is better suited for spiritual warfare than a limited vocabulary of natural words. Both as a regular part of your devotions each day, and in times of focused battle, pray with your spiritual language.

Our planet lives under the control of the evil one (Ephesians 2:2; 1 John 5:19), but he will be brought to final judgment and cast forever into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:10). The ending of the story has already been told. Our struggle on earth merely turns the pages toward that end. There are still casualties, and the overall picture is that of a war fought by a furious and desperate enemy who knows he has but a short time before lasting and total defeat (Revelation 12:12). He will be crushed by God (Romans 16:20) and Jesus, who rendered the devil's power null and void when He died on the Cross, removed our vulnerability to all the barren brokenness of death (Hebrews 2:14-15).

God's plan is to have "all rule and authority and power" subjugated to Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:24-28), when on that final great day, every tongue of every creature will declare Him Lord (Philippians 2:10-11). All human history is heading to an already prepared victory banquet—and life without the slightest vestige of evil or death (John 14:2; Matthew 22:4; Revelation 19:9). Ultimately, and without question, He will help us conquer spirits, powers, death or any other created forces seeking to hinder God's ultimate purposes in our lives (Romans 8:38-39).

As you grow in understanding from what you read in the Bible and what you learn from fellow believers, you will find yourself better able to

discern and detect the nature of what assails you (2 Corinthians 2:11; Hebrews 5:14). Knowing your foe is helpful, but knowing what God has given to you is even more important. God does train us for battle (Psalm 144:1-2), and uses us to bring His kingdom into the immediate experience of people around us (Luke 10:9), but He is always the One who fights for us, rather than vice-versa.

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:

In what ways can the spiritual realm press into the natural world? As a result of reading this chapter, how has your thinking changed in terms of the various causes there are for how life turns out? _____

_____

_____

What is the nature of evil? How does the Bible describe evil, compared with how Hollywood depicts it? _____

_____

_____

What are the four basic categories of death-dealing, loss-bringing, hope-stealing evil the Bible presents us with? _____

_____

_____

We have been given several spiritual weapons with which to resist and defeat the forces of evil. To review some of those powerful tools, answer the following:

What does the name of Jesus enable us to do? _____

_____

Why is quoting scripture so effective in the face of temptation and lies? ____

_____

_____

What does it really mean to "fear God"? _____

_____

How are worship and warfare linked together in the Bible? _____

_____

In what specific way does the Bible encourage us to resist the devil? _____

_____

The enemy tries to trap us with lies to convince us that God is not who He says He is. Are there reoccurring lies or thought patterns that the enemy taunts you with? How can you use the weapons of spiritual warfare described in this chapter to fight against them? _____

_____

_____

PRAYER:

"Lord Jesus, I lift up Your Name in my life.
You are my righteousness and my strength.
In You alone I find salvation and truth.
I invite You to reign and rule in everything that concerns me.
Thank You that in You I can find healing,
provision and freedom from torment.

Father God, thank You that there is nothing in the spiritual or natural
world that is greater or more powerful than You.
You are God most High. You conquer any spiritual force that sets itself against me.
Help me each day to be alert to resisting the enemy's plan
for destruction in my life and the lives of others.
Thank You that knowing You is the most important thing I can do
to fight against the enemy.

Help me Lord to trust You when it seems life is not working.
I choose to keep seeking Your Kingdom
and Your ways as my first priority. Help me to resist the lies
that say You do not care, or that You are not able to do anything
about my painful places. With You, Lord, I am safe no matter
how my flesh may tempt me, how the world may blind or dazzle me,
how the evil-spirited may oppose me, or how sin may crouch at my door.

Keep me, and teach me how to keep Your word and ways.
In Your Name, Jesus, I pray—Amen."

#3 BEING RECOVERED FROM EVIL

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL LEARN . . .

- You are a three-part being: body, soul (mind, will, emotions, conscience) and spirit.
- Like your body, your soul can be afflicted and assaulted by evil.
- Salvation brings you to heaven, but it also brings healing for your body and soul.
- God wants you delivered from every devilish bond—and restored to full-personhood.

Anyone who has had a serious bout with food poisoning can tell you exactly when and where it struck—and their suspicions about which food caused it. The symptoms of food poisoning appear suddenly, unlike those of the flu; the gurgling, protesting stomach unmistakably announces that something is terribly, terribly wrong. While the body concentrates on ridding itself of the poisonous bacteria, the rest of our life gets very small. We lie there like shipwrecked sailors in the surf, waiting for the next wave of nausea (and worse) to toss our frail frame around. Our thoughts turn delirious—having once worried that we might die from the food poisoning, we begin to fear we won't.

Everyone with food poisoning wishes they had never eaten the tainted food: no cream-topped deserts, no canned tomatoes, no beefy burgers are worth what follows if E. coli or salmonella organisms invade our bodies. *Why weren't we more careful in handling the leftovers or identifying the mushrooms? We should have cooked the meat longer.* The list of regrets gets repeated over and over as the one focal point of our tortured awareness. But there is no turning back the clock. Like tourists who accidentally board the wrong bus, we have to ride until it stops.

Living through an assault of botulism is no one's idea of living. A living death can sometimes feel the same as a dying life. Some sicknesses lead to the end of people's lives on earth, but most sickness just makes earthly life more miserable. That is why we can say that sickness is a shade of death—like lilac is of purple—because when our body is sick, something is wrong with the way it is working. In fact, one of the best ways to grasp the full implications of unrighteousness (i.e., evil) is simply to shorten it to *un-rightness*—the symptoms, the early cramping in the stomach, the *uh-oh-I've-got-a-very-bad-feeling* that something is not right.

Since that first choice of our race to sin so very long ago, evil has morphed into numerous manifestations of un-rightness. Relationships go wrong; people say and do miscalculated things that have terrible consequences in the lives of others. People suffer breakdowns and psycho/emotive disorders. We lose our health, our business, our friends, our minds, our hope, etc. Like an unpredictable tornado, evil touches down at many points in our lives, leaving a swath of wreckage and confusion.

Regardless of the corrosive form it takes, the unrightness of evil is toxic and destructive to human beings because it erodes God's design for us. It steals away the life He wants us to enjoy (2 Peter 1:4).

GOD'S HEART TO RECOVER US

If you have ever seen a 4 year-old girl in a hospital, strapped down with restraints to keep her from tearing at the tubes coming from her little body, you understand how and why a father silently pleads to be able to change places with his daughter. When her fevered eyes ask, *"Why, daddy?"* he knows she cannot understand what is happening. And nothing matters to him except her recovery. He would do *anything* to make her well.

While the sickness or injury tries to steal her life away, her dad thinks about what might now become lost opportunities with her: flying kites and buying pretty dresses and having her 7th birthday party at the beach. His heart fills with images of her bouncy curls though the strands of her hair now lay matted to her head. Through the long hours of fitful sleep when her tiny lips purse and her brow knits, her father can barely survive the emotion aroused by the contrast between what he sees on her pale, pasty face and the dimply smile her face always wore before she got so sick. That is when he hates the evil of the wrongness that has intruded upon her life.

Exactly so, does God hate the evil that has invaded the lives of His children.

God cannot abide evil; nothing evil comes close to Him because His righteousness is so complete that evil must utterly flee His presence. God is never tempted or fooled by evil (James 1:13). We, on the other hand, are tempted by or unknowingly consume "bad foods" that carry evil, like salmonella. When we eat toxic substances and start to feel bad, we say the food did not "agree with us." Likewise, because we were made in the image of God, and intended, as His offspring, to share His essential makeup (Genesis 1:26-27; Acts 17:28; 2 Peter 1:4), evil does not "agree with us." It always works bad things in us or through us.

God wants us to be holy—not like the Pharisees, so we can be members of a *holier-than-thou* club, but because He longs for us to experience the wholeness that accompanies holiness. God doesn't want to turn us into little religious robots, all lined up and neatly groomed to parade uniformly through the earth. He isn't trying to cram us into a small life outlined by rules and regulations. He just wants us to be well—and to know which mushrooms are poisonous. So, He teaches us to pray, "Deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:13).

Actually, that is the promise of salvation—not just an eternal rescue that begins *after* we leave this planet, but restoration and recovery that begins now: wholeness of body, soul and spirit. God is a God of deliverances—rescues and recoveries—and He has the keys to open all the prison doors behind which we have been trapped (Psalm 68:20). He wants to give us restful peace in the midst of life's turmoil, bounty and blessing in the very presence of our enemies, gladness and joy as the overflowing reality even in desert places. He is very good at restoring our soul (Psalm 23:1-6).

That is the essence of salvation. The Greek word for salvation, *sozo* [pronounced *sode'-zo*], means, *"make whole, make safe, heal, preserve, protect, deliver."* Jesus came to save what was lost to us (Matthew 18:11);

He came not to condemn people, but to *save* them (John 3:17; 12:47), and to *heal* them (Luke 7:3). Jesus is the door through which we enter a place of great safety and peace (John 10:9). He is the rock of our salvation and the One who helps us know where and how to withstand the forces of evil (Matthew 7:24-25).

Read Psalm 107:10-11. Why do people sometimes end up in miserable circumstances? _____

Read 2 Peter 2:19. If someone is constantly overcome by a sin, and it keeps getting worse and worse, what might have happened to him or her?

_____

Read John 10:10. Put into your own words the three telltale indicators of satanic activity in people's lives. _____

_____

The work of God in our lives cannot be properly understood unless we grasp His fundamental purpose—to deliver us and recover us from every kind of evil—so that we can enjoy our life together with Him. Instead of letting the food poisoning run its course to deplete us, our Father in Heaven desires to intervene with a cure. He offers us antidotes for every form of anti-life. He isn't angry with us for being poisoned, like an exasperated mother trying to clean up after her teenaged sons. His wrath is reserved for unrighteousness, that infectious and ruinous virus that suppresses truth and leads us astray (Romans 1:18; 2 Peter 2:15).

He wants to purge its poison from us (1 John 1:9). He wants to cure us and alleviate our misery. God wants to give us something for our stomach because what breaks us, breaks God's heart.

PROMISED RECOVERY

The most significant aspect of our salvation is, of course, our eternal rescue from the power and consequences of sin, and the life-without-death (in any of its manifestations) we will share with God forever in Heaven (Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 21:4). In Heaven the "former things" of loss, pain, sorrow, emptiness and oppression will no longer assail us. But they do now. And the things of death have lain waste our life like locust swarms stripping everything from the fields.

Prayer and laying on of hands in Jesus' Name can heal every kind of sickness (Jeremiah 30:17; Matthew 10:1; 14:14; Mark 3:10; Acts 5:16; James 5:16). In fact, physical healing is one of the visible proofs that the kingdom and power of God is present (Luke 10:9), and that Jesus has the authority to forgive people's sins (see Mark 2:1-12). When sickness seeks to overpower us and to dominate our world, the restorative work of God's salvation can liberate us from the bodily effects and symptoms of ailments. He sends His word to heal us and pull us out of the pit of disease (Psalm 107:20).

QUESTIONS: The Hebrew word for *salvation* is *yeshuw'ah* [pronounced *yesh-oo'-ah*] from which the name of Jesus (*Yesua*') is taken. It means *"deliverance, aid, victory over, health, welfare."* God, our Father, loves to be a Rock of salvation. Read the following verses; what do they tell you about God and His rescue provisions for you?

Deuteronomy 32:4. _____
Psalm 18:2. _____
Psalm 31:2. _____
Psalm 62:6. _____
Psalm 144:1. _____

When we battle an illness like food poisoning, we have much less strength and energy than normal. We don't want to do much—even fun, exciting things—because of how drained we feel. That is an obvious example of the ruinous, burglarizing effects of evil at work in our lives. As Savior and Restorer, God acts as our healer; He says, "I am God your Healer" (Exodus 15:26). Indeed, one of the benefits He offers His children is recovery from physical sickness for ourselves, and through us for others (Mark 16:18). That provision, along with so many others (see sidebar on Isaiah 53), was purchased for us when Jesus died upon the Cross (1 Peter 2:24).

ISAIAH 53: TASTING DEATH FOR US ALL

The most complete prophetic picture of Jesus' sacrificial death on the Cross—why God offered His own Son, and what was accomplished through Jesus' suffering—is found in Isaiah 53. It is very moving to read.

At the core of God's plan to save the world was the need to make Jesus like us in everything, so He could be a truly representative sacrifice. The Father wanted Jesus to experience all the sorts of things we go through—to taste every flavor of death so He could free us from its power (see Hebrews 2:9-18). That is why the Cross is so central to every aspect of recovery and restoration in our lives.

Jesus was...	*Like us...*	*So we could be...*
Despised (v. 3)	Looked down on, made fun of, ridiculed, scorned	Loved, embraced and welcomed (Psalm 22:24; Revelation 3:20).
Forsaken (v. 3)	Rejected, left alone, abandoned, isolated, banished	Brought near to, accompanied by, never forsaken (Deut. 31:6-8; 2 Corinthians 4:9).
Burdened with sorrows (v. 3, 4)	Afflicted, pained, saddened, anguished, distressed, troubled	Relieved from heavy loads, cares and weariness (Isaiah 9:2-6; Matthew 11:28).

Loaded down with grief (v. 3, 4)	Afflicted with chronic sickness of body and heart, worn out by sadness	Healed of physical, mental and spiritual afflictions (Jeremiah 33:6; 1 Peter 2:24)
Wounded (v. 5)	Violated, defiled, stabbed (in the back), cut into	Restored, built up, renewed, repaired (Jeremiah 24:6; Acts 20:32).
Bruised (v. 5)	Broken, crushed, oppressed, smashed to pieces	Made whole and preserved in body, soul and spirit (Isaiah 42:3-4; 1 Peter 5:10).
Scourged (v. 5)	Whipped, lashed at a post, abused by force, unable to escape	Set free, liberated from self-loathing and eternal punishment (Psalm 107:13-16, 39-41; John 8:36).
Oppressed (v. 7)	Tyrannized, driven by outside forces, taxed, harassed, harried	Delivered from and given dominion over circumstances and evil spirits (Psalm 9:9; 144:7-11; Acts 10:38).
Afflicted (v. 7)	Humiliated, defiled, beaten down, mortified, depressed	Raised up, given double portion instead of shame, given joy for our mourning (Isaiah 51:11; John 15:11).
Put to grief (v. 10)	Worn out or weakened by sickness, sorrowed by protracted disease or pain	Renewed in strength and hope, sustained in body, soul and spirit (Isaiah 40:29-31; 2 Thessalonians 3:3).
Anguished of soul (v. 11)	Stressed deeply, sick from worry, ground down physically and mentally	Given peace (shalom)—well-being, inner health, prosperity of heart, and rest (Isaiah 55:12; Philippians 4:7).

BODY, SOUL AND SPIRIT

It is no mere play on words to realize that life and death were never meant to go together. And it is no surprise to you to learn that various kinds of evil have impacted your life. Physical healing is one way God's salvation touches us. When other manners and manifestations of evil plague us, Jesus' victory on the Cross offers life-giving healing that counter-acts those evil touches in other parts of our being.

In order to understand how evil can affect us so deeply and so permanently, we must learn a few facts about who and what we are. In other words, how did God intend us to be? Of what are we comprised? Though our natural language is ill-suited to adequately describe the components of

our person as God created them to function, we can at least get a basic understanding of who we are in God—and how we are assaulted by evil.

Our bodies are rather obvious, and we do not need much additional understanding about them from a biblical point of view—other than to realize that evil forces want to turn our flesh into an instrument of unrighteousness (Romans 6:13). In addition to your body, there are two other parts to who you are as an individual. You are made of body, soul and spirit, and God wants them all guarded from loss or injury (1 Thessalonians 5:23). He longs to restore whatever ruin the forces of evil have already managed to cause in you.

The other two aspects of our being, on the other hand, are less distinct and apparent to us. Even though they are used somewhat interchangeably both in the Scriptures and in our culture, the terms *soul* and *spirit* are not synonymous. Deep in your innermost being, your soul and spirit connect to one another (Hebrews 4:12). Each person has a *soul* and a *spirit*.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.
—John 3:6

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins…
—Ephesians 2:1

Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?
—1 Corinthians 3:16

In both Hebrew (*nepes*) and Greek (*psyche*) [from which we get our word *psychology*] the word *soul* relates to the act of breathing. The Greeks used the word for an abstract concept, our "inner life" that moves us to live as we do—like breathing animates a living body. A body that is not breathing is generally not moving. The *soul* is essentially our consciousness—our mind, will, emotions and basic awareness in the natural world. What we are conscious of when we are conscious of ourselves, is our *soul*. To use an old expression, the soul is the "seat" of our whole being—life as we uniquely live it out.

Spirit [Greek (*pneuma*) used in words like *pneumonia*] is a bit harder to define. Whereas *soul* is like air, *spirit* is like wind that blows. The *spirit* relates to the unseen, spiritual world. Before we came to Christ and were born of the Holy Spirit, our spirits were dead (John 3:5-6 and Ephesians 2:1-2). Now, however, the Holy Spirit takes up His abode in our life in our spirit. (1 Corinthians 3:16 and Ephesians 3:16). Spiritually speaking, our "body is dead because of sin, yet the *spirit* is alive" (Romans 8:10). The physical bodies of people will expire like that of all animals, but the *soul* and *spirit* within us will not. Bodies are physical; *souls* are natural; *spirits* are supernatural.

We have been made in God's image—intimately fashioned by Him personally (see Psalm 139:1-18). We have, therefore, God-given and God-intended attributes that are intended to be part of His assignment and calling in our lives. Contrary to what our culture teaches us, we do not just happen to turn out the way we are—purely as a result of natural heredity, the environment and chance. God formed plans for our life and fashioned us uniquely to fulfill His calling on our life.

> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.
> —1 Corinthians 15:10

We are what we (truly) are by the grace of God (1 Corinthians 15:10). We are His masterpieces—poems rhymed and metered with precise beauty—and long ago He fashioned us with destiny (Ephesians 2:10). Since evil opposes the will of God, forces of evil seek to defy or violate what God penned into us. By erasing lines He composed, or by rewriting stanzas of our being, evil powers supplant the beautiful, lilting words the Creator breathed into our soul, replacing them with choppy, guttural syllables without rhyme or meaning. Instead of being poems of rare beauty and distinction, we end up as cryptic, broken verses that resemble, only faintly, the originals He composed.

QUESTIONS: Read these verses about God's long-formulated plans and purposes for your life. Following each verse, write down the best way for the enemy to ruin or diminish your ability to fulfill God's intended desire for your life—based on the verse.

Jeremiah 1:5. _____

_____

Galatians 1:15. _____

_____

Jeremiah 29:11. _____

_____

BALANCED PERSPECTIVE

THE EVIL-SPIRITED work to cripple our spiritual life, and afflict our inner self with disorder, dismay and despair. We know that THE EVIL-SPIRITED are not the only death-dealing force to reckon with, but demonic forces radically affect our lives—much more than most people choose to believe. God has made provision for us to resist and recover from THE EVIL-SPIRITED and the unique nature of their attack on us from those attacks. Must we wait until we go to heaven before we can be recovered from what the EVIL-SPIRITED have done to us? Or, can God's kingdom come here and now on earth to deliver us from the ravages of the EVIL-SPIRITED, and restore us to our rightful inheritance as unique creations of God?

Because Western, scientific culture argues so strenuously against anything in the spiritual dimension, and because some Christians become overly mystical and sensational in their preoccupation with demonic influences, we don't hear much balanced teaching in the Church at-large about the deliverance Jesus wants us to have from the "rulers and authorities in heavenly places" (Ephesians 3:10). The church tends to give them either too much or too little thought; Christians end up either too fearful of or too fascinated by THE EVIL-SPIRITED.

The Early Church wasn't ignorant of the "schemes" of the devil

(2 Corinthians 2:11), and yet, today, the Body of Christ tends to relegate information about the EVIL-SPIRITED to the periphery of our doctrine. The lack of straightforward teaching on this subject has allowed all sorts of superstition and speculation to obscure the simple, powerful truth of Jesus' triumph on the Cross—and what that can mean to each of us for personal freedom.

…so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes.
—2 Corinthians 2:11

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.
—Romans 13:14

Interestingly, the Bible is fairly matter-of-fact about THE EVIL-SPIRITED—not in terms of the harm they can bring, but in the sense of what they are, what they do and how Jesus has already triumphed over them. Even the most cursory reading of the New Testament, especially the Gospels, reveals that God cures spiritual ailments as frequently as physical illnesses (Matthew 10:1; Luke 7:21; Acts 8:7). Some physical infirmities are actually caused by demonic spirits (Luke 13:11; Acts 19:12).

No discussion of THE EVIL-SPIRITED should ever remove our responsibility to resist the impulses of our own carnal nature. We still "reckon ourselves dead to [the desires of] sin and alive [responsive] to God" (Romans 6:11). We must daily crucify the flesh (Galatians 5:24), and refuse to make provision for its lusts in our life (Romans 13:14). To glibly declare, "The devil made me do it," assigns too little responsibility to us, and too much credit to our enemy. In their zeal or in their foolishness, sincere Christians can blame too many of their conflicts on the unseen, and not take enough personal responsibility for their own behavior.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.
—Ephesians 6:12

Frankly, it is often difficult to identify and isolate a single culprit for the wreckage we find in our lives and in others'. So it behooves us to be gracious and merciful toward people who may become a bit overzealous in their focus on (or avoidance of) forces of evil in the world. The Bible tells us to "cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit" (2 Corinthians 7:1), but it also indicates that most of our struggle will be against "spiritual forces" in the invisible realm (Ephesians 6:12). So, for the remaining portion of this chapter, we will focus on the power of God to deliver us from footholds of THE EVIL-SPIRITED in the human soul.

THE NATURE OF EVIL SPIRITS

We do not want to speculate or become superstitious about THE EVIL-SPIRITED, but to remain sanely spiritual and biblical, learning how to counter demonic influence in our life. What do we know from the Bible about the EVIL-SPIRITED? If we acknowledge that we do not know much with absolute certainty, we can at least

say a few things about evil spirits themselves:

1. They are probably the fallen angels who were cast out of God's presence because they joined Satan's rebellion against God (Revelation 12:4, 7-9); as only a third of the heavenly hosts, they are but half in number compared to angelic spirits who minister to us (Hebrews 1:14).
2. These fallen angels have been defeated twice already—once by Michael and his angels in Heaven, and again when Jesus rose from the dead (Matthew 12:40; Ephesians 1:20-21; 4:9-10). Their eternal doom is already fixed; they are destined for everlasting defeat and torment (Revelation 20:10).
3. Some sort of hierarchy exists within their ranks, as well as different designations that seem to indicate they can have varying influences over situations or people, ranging from some aspect of a person's soul to an entire nation (see Ephesians 6:12; Colossians 1:16 and Daniel 10:13, 20; Mark 5:8-10).
4. As false gods, their primary activity is to distort the truth of the True God—introducing religious heresies (1 Timothy 4:1); afflicting and oppressing people (Mark 1:23-26; Mark 5:5, 15; Acts 16:16-18); and, becoming false focal points (idols) of worship and servitude (Deuteronomy 11:16; Psalm 106:36; Luke 16:13; 1 Thessalonians 1:9).
5. They have no natural bodies, but they find it intolerable to be without a physical body with which to manifest their essential trait (addiction, depression, self-hatred, fear, etc.). That is why the demons entreated Jesus to be cast into the swine (Mark 5:10-12). They want to be spiritually "connected" somehow to people (Matthew 12:43-45).
6. In whatever way they may adhere themselves to the soul—whether they are "in" people, or just "pressing in on" them—they can be removed and dislodged in Jesus' Name (Luke 11:18-20).

Read 2 Kings 6:11-17. Why do you think that people are more impressed with the reality and power of demonic forces than they are with angelic hosts and with the Holy Spirit? What does this imbalance tend to do to our view of the spirit world? _____

_____

Read John 4:3-41. Who is in you? In what way have evil spirits already been conquered? _____

_____

Luke 4:36. Can any demonic power withstand the command of Jesus? ____
Mark 16:17. Why is the NAME of Jesus so important for ridding people of demonic oppression? _____
Luke 9:1. From whom do we have the authority, capacity and privilege to deliver people from the EVIL-SPIRITED? _____

DEMONIC ASSAULT

THE EVIL-SPIRITED act like sudden blasts of wind to knock us off our feet. They can afflict, pressure, propel and manipulate areas of the human soul to respond to their impulses. Just like a rapid heartbeat can be triggered by wayward impulses from our body—causing it to beat out of sync with its intended rhythm—so, too can our soul be driven to move out of step with what God intended for it.

We use the term *bondage* when any part of the human soul (i.e., thoughts, feelings, awareness, choices, memories, perceptions) becomes entangled, constrained, or ravished by the EVIL-SPIRITED. In some specific and particular part of their soul, an afflicted person is not completely free to direct their own choices and follow the course of life they truly want to take. A portion of their thinking, deciding, or feeling is being exercised by a force beyond themselves. Spiritual *bondage* is similar to physical addiction; it is not impossible to withstand the addictive impulse, but it is certainly more difficult to resist than it would be if there were no addiction.

Oppression from the EVIL-SPIRITED rarely becomes so overwhelming that a person loses complete jurisdiction over his or her being; people always retain at least some ability to come to Jesus no matter how repressive their captivity may be (see Mark 5:5-9). Before you accepted Jesus as your Savior, your spirit was "dead," i.e. cut off from relationship with God, and cut off from the life He wanted for you (Ephesians 2:1, 5). But since you opened your heart to receive the Holy Spirit, He has come, as the pledge of God's full inheritance, to dwell in your spirit (2 Corinthians 1:21-22; 5:5). It may sound a bit strange to put it this way, but from that moment on, the Holy Spirit has *possessed* your spirit.

Therefore, a Christian cannot be possessed by an evil spirit residing in his or her spirit! We may be oppressed, hassled and assaulted by THE EVIL-SPIRITED, just as much as we can be tempted by the FLESH, the SIN-FORCE and the WORLD. More importantly for us as believers in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, who occupies our spirit, is always "at work" in us, "both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

Spiritual bondage can vary in degree just like any affliction of the body, but the more acute the oppression, the more able those forces are to impose their evil soulish attributes on people's souls. Their evil begins to erode a person's will; their "false" memories flood a person's recollection; their personality traits scratch and scribble themselves like graffiti over someone's true self. In extreme cases, a person begins to see and hear things as a result of the demonic perceptions being pushed into that person's consciousness. Once again, it is important to remember that evil mostly manifests itself in depletion, brokenness, confusion, barrenness and misery—not in grotesque and frightening horrors depicted by Hollywood.

Bound people do not rattle chains or spew fire from their eyes; they live with inner brokenness and skewed perceptions. People who are constrained in their choices by evil spirits do not bite necks and vanish in darkness;

instead, they loathe themselves for not being able to stop drinking or to quit frequenting adult bookstores. When THE EVIL-SPIRITED ravish human beings, they do not empower those people with superhuman energies and magics; rather, they drain away the people's hope and strength and life. Instead of being majestic, created in the image of their Heavenly Father, people end up pathetic, in the likeness of the spirits that assail them.

SOULISH SUSCEPTIBILITIES

How do people come into bondage to THE EVIL-SPIRITED? Do they get ambushed, or catch evil spirits the same way they catch a cold? Do some people just "come down" with THE EVIL-SPIRITED the way that others end up with cancer or high blood pressure? Can we avoid being vexed and held against our will by the EVIL-SPIRITED?

These would not be simple questions to answer even if the subject matter was physical illnesses of the body. Doctors can trace some factors leading, in some cases, to adult-onset diabetes (diet, weight, heredity, stress, etc.), or high blood pressure (same list), but it is never a straightforward cause-effect equation. One type of cancer stems from too much sun, another (perhaps) from too much red meat, still other forms of cancer are associated with (it is too strong to say "are caused by") genetic disorder or chemical exposure. No one can predict who will be struck with appendicitis, and looking back over the life of a woman with Alzheimer's disease will not uncover the exact cause for her nearly erased self-awareness.

And when medical science speaks of stress they are not able to quantify it or identify it as a microbial entity that invades your body. What is stressful to one person is not so to another. What science measures is what that stress is likely to do to the body. They cannot predict with any degree of accuracy what will be affected or how. Nor can science measure pain, and yet doctors do their best to relieve people of it. Sometimes treating the symptoms of an illness completely misses the cause of those symptoms—like aspirin for the fever of strep throat, but we are happy to get some relief, nonetheless.

So it is with spiritual afflictions of the soul. No exact accounting is possible. The root cause of one person's bondage to fear might be the source of another person's partial captivity to a spirit of control. The horrific abuse suffered by one woman at the hands of her father may lead to a nearly overpowering hatred of men; whereas, the same degree of violation done to her sister might make her susceptible to a demonically inspired, *more-than-normal* interest in sexual activity. Why does one brother's personality become nearly overwhelmed by pride, while another's does not? Suffice it to say that the causes of spiritual oppression are at least as difficult to pin down as are the causes of physical ailments; what plagues the body and the soul are not always easy to understand.

But having said that, there are some vulnerabilities that seem to make room for the EVIL-SPIRITED to gain a foothold in people's lives. We

mustn't make too much of them, or read them as rigid rules of thumb, but they can be helpful when it comes time for counseling, prayer and deliverance administered by believers to one another.

This brief list should be amplified, modified and supplemented by leaders in your church with regard to your unique situation. Please do not become a self-styled, self-taught expert about a subject that is fraught with so much uncertainty. At the root of most deception is pride—thinking that we know best. Let's avoid that snare as we look for ways to help each other get free from the other snares of THE EVIL-SPIRITED.

SOULISH VULNERABILITIES TO SPIRITUAL BONDAGE

Here are some of the possible times and ways in which the door to people's souls might be left ajar, thus leaving them more assailable by evil:

1. **Intentional invitations to demonic forces**—offering themselves in worship to evil powers in exchange for what those powers give back, or asking to be used by evil powers (like worshiping Satan or swearing revenge "at all costs").
2. **Binding vows or sworn curses**—invoking the name of false gods, or swearing never to express normal soulish emotions (like "No one will ever make me cry again; I will never trust another leader").
3. **Repeated disobedience to God**—continuing to do over and over what they know is wrong, and daring God to do something about their repeated offenses (like being unforgiving, choosing bitterness or drinking immoderately).
4. **Prolonged participation with occult activity**—getting involved in astrology, tarot cards and any other kind of divination, or being heavily involved taking illicit drugs.
5. **Suffered severe abuse or violation by people in authority**—experiencing betrayal by those who were supposed to protect them, or being used for the authority's selfish pleasure (like sexual abuse, manipulation in a cult).
6. **Life-threatening, traumatic episodes**—being 'shocked' by unexpected, scary events, or going through harrowing chapters in life when one emotion dominated them or the people around (like school shootings and suicides, car accidents).
7. **Duplicating cultural stereotypes**—taking on the caricature of nationality or subculture, or allowing themselves to be defined by 'permissible' gender traits (like violent temper, being angry all the time or 'getting physical').
8. **Life transitions and seasons of great change**—experiencing puberty, mid-life, retirement, pregnancy, the empty nest, or coming under tremendous stress through the loss of a job or spouse, etc.
9. **Inherited generational distortions**—being "genetically" predisposed to dominant (sinful) characteristics of parents or grandparents and "picking up" patterns of thought or behavior that are not just "learned" through observation.

Again, this list is brief and partial, and it cannot be the basis for "distinguishing of spirits" in your life or in anyone else's (1 Corinthians 12:10). The goal for having such a list is not to worry about what might happen the next time you are pregnant, but to offer you a perspective on why your inner self has been somewhat out of sync.

We do not have to be afraid of becoming bound by the EVIL-SPIRITED because we are not yet able to walk in complete victory over a sin, but if we are unable to get the victory over a sinful habit after many weeks, it could be that there is more than our sin at work; the habit may be a manifestation of an evil spirit manipulating or hassling you.

God warns us not to learn the ways of false gods or trust in them (Deuteronomy 11:16; 20:18), and if we do not actively "drive them out" of our land, they will become "snares" to us (Judges 2:3). The practices of demons are not always grossly obvious; they are often just subtle distortions. If the cultures surrounding Israel were dominated by false gods and demonic powers, it only makes sense that the culture surrounding the Church and us believers is permeated with similar spiritual evil. Therefore, what is culturally acceptable may still be devilish.

If we cannot pinpoint the exact cause of evil oppression, can we, at least, spot its symptoms? Again, as is the case with medical science or psychology (the search for natural causes for personality disorders), spiritual discernment is not always a clear-cut diagnosis of what ails someone. That is why God gives His church the spiritual gift *discerning of spirits*, and why we are told to "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1).

DEMONIC MANIFESTATIONS

Spiritual bondage in someone's life shows up in various ways. We cannot possibly cover all the manifestations in this chapter, nor is it possible to offer a foolproof test to differentiate between something demonic in someone's life and the "regular" wear and tear on the soul that comes from living. Nevertheless, if you develop some discernment regarding the trademarks of spiritual oppression, that discernment will grow with practice (Hebrews 5:14).

To begin with, the EVIL-SPIRITED that vex human beings are rarely fantastical or grotesque. Their primary ploy is not to frighten people but to prey upon them unnoticed like parasites. Thus, more than anything else, evil spirits affect and distort individuals' personalities—causing people to act or think in uncharacteristic ways. As false gods, the EVIL-SPIRITED mimic the One True God, offering human beings three life-essentials: protection, provision and purpose. When people begin acting in a way that isn't like themselves, it may be a clue that spiritual forces are at work in addition to whatever else may be going on in their life.

Demonic footholds in the soul mostly show up in subtle ways, like personality characteristics, emotions, dispositions, attitudes or prevailing atmospheres. That is why they so often go undetected—they mask themselves behind "stray thoughts" that "sound" like our own mind; or, emotions that "seem to come out of nowhere." They can be subtle but strong suggestions, persistent points trying to be made, low-grade but definite feelings, inexplainable moods, stubborn states of mind, or single, dominant personality traits.

Demonic beings can also manifest themselves in the guise of compulsions or obsessions—driving and harassing people with uncontrollable thoughts or intense, irresistible feelings and sensitivities. Hormones, stress and fleshiness can be very compelling in their own right; but ritualistic fixations, addictions, and life-limiting coercions (phobias) are often indicators that a person is battling more than just flesh and blood. Likewise, when our minds are bombarded with negative, hopeless conclusions—propelling us toward despair with hateful, belittling remarks about ourselves or frantic, hopeless feelings about our future—it could be the litany of a demon we are hearing, and not just normal insecurity.

Additionally, demonic presences that hover at the edges of people's souls can trouble and oppress them with inexplainable confusion or emptiness—engulfing people with mental and emotional blankness or entangling them with racing thoughts and wildly changing emotions. These are not just the anxious thoughts related to an upcoming responsibility, or to the future, but a preoccupation and/or deadness of mind that virtually incapacitates someone from being able to live his or her life. The unstoppable stream of their consciousness floods all else, and inundates every corner of their life with its preoccupation. They are "driven to distraction"—absolutely overwhelmed by thoughts or feelings that become their only reality.

MINISTRY OF DELIVERANCE

On your journey always remember to keep things in perspective. There are so many manifestations of God's goodness and power, but the most significant are His love and grace that enable us to be forgiven for our sins. The focal point for rejoicing is not that demons are subject to us in Jesus' name—which they are—but that His Name saves us from *eternal death away from God* (Luke 10:17-20). Physical or spiritual healing, being released from the death-grip of disease or demon, is merely an extension of God's great power to release us from our sins.

Jesus is our deliverer. He is our salvation from every manner of evil. In commissioning His disciples, Jesus gave authority and instruction for ministering deliverance from evil spirits (Matthew 10:8; Mark 3:14-15). Obviously then, demons are meant to be reckoned with in a believer's life, and it cannot be that Jesus gave us jurisdiction over something He would prefer that we avoided. He gave us the prerogative and the responsibility to alleviate people from the cruel and debilitating loads that have been forced upon them by their enemies.

As surely as God raised up deliverers (Judges) in ancient Israel to free His people from the hands of their enemies, so He has raised us up with the same assignment. Whether their taskmasters are sinful or satanic, physical or spiritual, past or present, Jesus wants people free—and He kindly entrusts us with the hands-on work to bring that freedom to others.

But how He might lead us to pray for and to counsel with a family on the verge of financial ruin can vary with the spiritual realities behind

where they are. For instance, the money issue may be traced to neglecting to tithe, or to foolish spending sprees, or to an unforeseeable calamity that drained away a hefty savings account, or to a surprise mugging by Mammon, or to a desire to get rich. Biblically, each of these is a possibility. Praying for a financial breakthrough without counseling the couple to tithe, is incomplete ministry; so, too, is it incomplete to avoid the subject of their fleshly desire to get money, or the possible involvement of the god of material confidence. All manner of evil feed off one another, but none are more opportunistic than the EVIL-SPIRITED.

QUESTIONS: Jesus was delivered into the hands of evil men, according to the predetermined plan of God, so that by "tasting death" He could deliver our race from death's tyranny (Hebrews 2:14-15). In each of the following scriptures, God promises deliverance and rescue for us. Read the verses and answer the questions.

Galatians 1:4. What is God's will and desire for us? _____

_____

2 Timothy 4:18. What gives God glory? On what basis does He stake His reputation? _____

2 Corinthians 1:10. Why can we set our hope on God? _____

_____

DELIVERANCE HALLMARKS

Even though most deliverance from evil will be processes—worked out over a period of time—rather than instantaneous events, God's miraculous intervention in our mental/emotional/spiritual condition can bring complete freedom in *moments*. Instead of a *season* of deliverance, we experience a sudden rescue much like the deliverance that came to us when we first opened our hearts to receive Jesus as our Savior.

Such instantaneous deliverances, like sudden healings from bodily afflictions, are miracles. They happen as a result of the power of God, but the triggering event can be a word spoken to the bound person (Matthew 8:16), scripture (Psalm 107:20), revelation of truth (John 8:32), a simple command (Mark 5:8), love (1 John 4:18), prayer and fasting (Matthew 17:21), or, simply as a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit who opens blind eyes.

HALLMARKS OF DELIVERANCE

Whether the freedom comes to us from God *in a moment* or over the course of several weeks, what hallmarks does true, God-worked deliverance have? What are the unmistakable trademarks of genuine spiritual freedom? Although it is nearly impossible to generalize everyone's personal experience, when we have been "delivered from evil," we will usually experience, in the aftermath of the deliverance, several of the following:

1. **A sense of true choice about what we do, say or think**—In stark contrast to what it felt like before, we have well-clarified options for thought and behavior. Wrong thoughts no longer have the power they once did to carry us away. Instead of being "driven" to say, do, think, or have something, we are faced with several small choices about whether or not we want to go down the wrong road.
2. **A sudden, surprising ability to move beyond former "stick points**—Like the drone of a refrigerator that is most noticeable when it stops, the grip of what used to consume us just isn't there, and we notice its absence more than we noticed its presence. It is like awakening from a bad dream, or jerking alert late at night while driving and realizing we cannot remember passing the previous three off-ramps.
3. **A hyper vigilance and awareness of right and wrong**—Far more than just trying harder, we have a deeper, more profound passion for getting things squared away in our life than we did prior to deliverance. Rather than feeling cavalier about our sin, we become more intent than ever to bring every area of our life—not just ones connected with the wrong from which we have been delivered—into submission to righteousness.
4. **A sense that we undeservedly have a "new lease on life"**—We feel strangely favored instead of condemned, much like the Prodigal Son felt. Though we deserve to be stripped of all our birthright, we are, instead, treated like guests of honor. The sense of being covered and forgiven—when we should justly be punished—is so incredibly good that it gives us added incentive to shun the former patterns of bondage in our life.
5. **A deep conviction that we have been answered and led by God**—Unlike we felt before, we no longer feel all alone, crying out for God's word. We know this is His answer in our time of need, and in the immediate aftermath of our deliverance, we hear His voice more clearly than we have in a long time. We receive confirmation about the course He wants us to take and the things He wants us to do.
6. **A strengthened ability to resist temptation**—We experience an undeniable "calling out" from dark places. Points and postures of shadow, gray zones and other areas where we have not been living fully in the light now feel "off-limits" to us. We sense God's support keeping us from succumbing to the very temptation that led us into bondage.
7. **A restoration of our true personhood and spiritual inheritance**—Patterns of life and thought that had been supplanted by the bondage (personality and character traits composed by God as who we are) return to us rapidly as though someone just removed a blanket that had been covering them. Aspects of our ministry, spiritual authority and personality recover as though they were never gone.

Although deliverance can either extricate us from circumstances caused by evil spirits, or free us from the grasp of those spirits themselves, the liberty we experience in deliverance brings us to a very new place. It is like having the wind or current turn around and go the opposite direction—advancing and aiding us—rather than opposing us. That, in turn, increases our desire to celebrate and praise God. Knowing that God has turned our mourning into dancing, our sorrow into joy, we feel like shouting from the rooftops, "Great is God, and greatly to be praised." We know it was God who accomplished this great deliverance for us by His right hand and His mighty power. Somehow we just feel that everything that needs to be said is summarized in "Praise God!"

"The angel of God encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them" (Psalm 34:7). How grateful we are to God who is to us "a God of deliverances," and to whom "belong escapes from death" (Psalm 68:20). One of the testimonies every believer can have during the course of his or her journey is that "He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders in heaven and on earth," and He has also delivered me "from the power of the lions" (Daniel 6:27).

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

In your own words, explain the difference between your soul and spirit. _____

_____

Is it possible for a believer in Jesus to be possessed by the EVIL-SPIRITED? Why not? _____

_____

Why do people have doubts about the existence of the EVIL-SPIRITED? How would you summarize what the Bible says about their nature? ___

_____

Re-read the list regarding possible vulnerabilities to spiritual bondage. Are there points in your life that you may have been vulnerable to assault from THE EVIL-SPIRITED? _____

_____

If so, and you can connect something you struggled with in your life with that vulnerability, you can ask God to deliver you right now. Jesus loves to answer simple prayers for freedom. Depending on which of the vulnerabilities got quickened to your heart, pray a simple prayers like:

"Lord, I acknowledge that I have made vows never to show emotions or cry again. I am sorry for doing this because I know that You created me to feel and to be free to express how I feel. I ask You to break that vow for me, and I pray this in Jesus' Name."

"Lord, I ask that You deliver me from that time/season in my life. I know my life changed then, and I am less of who You want me to be. In Jesus' Name, deliver me from evil and restore me to myself. Amen."

"I see places where the EVIL-SPIRITED rule over places and relationships that You intend to be good. Deliver me from these things and restore to me what has been lost. Free me, Jesus."

"In Jesus' Name, remove from me the fear [or whatever dominant emotion/ attitude you have felt try to hinder your normal responses to things]. "Father, I see in me the very same character traits that are in my [parent or grand parent]—the ones who have hurt and confused so many of us in the family. Thank You for my [parent] and for the righteous qualities they passed on to me. But I ask You to cut off any unrighteous root of the EVIL-SPIRITED that has tormented and oppressed my family for generations. In Jesus' Name—Amen."

We have learned about many possible manifestations of spiritual bondage in someone's life. One of these ways is in a single, dominant personality trait like: he is so angry; she seems so resentful all the time; they

are fearful about everything regarding their children. Is there a negative, but dominant trait in your life? Pray and ask Jesus to deliver you from any spiritual bondage to anger, resentment, fear, or "X". Ask God to show you the situations where this manifests itself. Ask God to teach you how to respond differently in those times.

PRAYER:

Look over the list from Isaiah 53. What stands out to you as a needed area of restoration in your life? Take a moment to thank Jesus for what He did so that you could be restored. For instance:

"Jesus, I come to You needing renewed strength and hope. Thank You that You were put to grief so my hope can be renewed. I ask You to invade my heart and circumstances today and bring hope and strength to me.

Lord, thank You that You want to see me made whole. I believe You have the power to set me free. In Jesus' Name, I recognize a place in my soul in bondage to "X," and in Jesus' Name I ask You to set me free. Show me the ways to live in the freedom You offer, and teach me how to think and respond differently.

Jesus, I celebrate Your victory on the Cross—that gives me forgiveness for my sins, healing for the bodily sicknesses that plague me, and deliverance from evil. Thank You that You have inscribed my name in the book of life. Teach me how to walk in Your provision and authority. Give me good discernment for the sake of others—that I might follow Your example of healing any who are oppressed by the EVIL-SPIRITED. In Jesus' Name—Amen."

#4 BEING PART OF THE WHOLE

IN THIS CHAPTER YOU WILL LEARN . . .

- God gave us the desire to find significant meaning for life.
- True greatness comes through serving others—not ourselves.
- Spiritual ministry is most like waiting tables or running errands.
- Unique ministry GIFT-MIXES, as well as SPIRITUAL GIFTS, empower us in ministry.
- We function best when connected to a group of believers or local church.

Everyone wants an answer to the question, "Who am I?" Some seek solutions as part of a grand quest for understanding the meaning of all things, and their relationship to the whole cosmos. But most of us just want a simple handle on ourselves, to know what sort of people we are—whether we are outspoken or reserved, thoughtful or spontaneous, wise, fun-loving, fastidious, supportive, or anything distinctive enough to have a word attached to us.

In a sense, we want to know what we "look like," not physically, not externally—but on the inside, in a way that shows up on the outside. We want to know what we are like and what, if anything, distinguishes us from everyone else. We wonder if we matter: *has there been, will there be a reason for me?* It isn't as though we insist on (or even hope for) being extraordinary or spectacular. We do not need to stand *above* the crowd—just as long as something prevents us from being completely lost *within* the crowd

Dwarfed and overcome by the vastness of the starry night sky, we want something to challenge the lie that says we count for nothing, and that we have simply evolved as a versatile species. What is the point of it all? When we strip away the petty measures of minutes and days, does life (and our place in it) have any meaning beyond here and now? It is not our biology that preoccupies us when we're in a staring contest with the cosmos, but our destiny and our identity.

For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe.
—Deuteronomy 10:17

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness…"
—Genesis 1:26

For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think.
—Romans 12:3

Such curiosity and hope are not carnal manifestations of human pride; they are a remnant, a reminder of our creation. Wanting to be unique and to count for something is not the fantasy of self-importance. We were made in the image of the one and only God—the One who calls himself, "I AM." He is "great" (see Deuteronomy 10:17 and Psalm 145:3), and His offspring necessarily share some of that greatness because we were made in His "image" (see Genesis 1:26; 5:1 and James 3:9). Human beings can lapse into arrogance, thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to think (Romans 12:3). However, what plagues most of us are not exalted opinions of ourselves, but the nagging doubts about our significance—do we have any at all,

and if so, what, where and how?

God answers with a resounding "Yes." He who calls us by name, who counts the declining number of hairs on our head, who has always loved us says, "Yes, you do" (Isaiah 43:1; Jeremiah 31:3; Luke 12:7). At this point on your journey with God, you shouldn't be surprised that God answers the question of our significance differently than the world tries to resolve it. He ties our significance and identity directly to our destiny—and to others of His children.

But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine!"
—Isaiah 43:1

The LORD appeared to him from afar, saying, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness."
—Jeremiah 31:3

DESTINED FOR GREATNESS

We are not accidents. We were not spawned into the void before God spoke to it (see Genesis 1:1-31). Our loving Father fashioned us—choosing and selecting which attributes to weave together in us—to match the longings already in His heart. He created us according to particular design, and to have a fitting place in His grand purposes for the people of this planet. Innately we know we have higher purpose than a few well-wishes and thanks at a retirement party. We were made for more than continued existence.

God had significance in mind for us when He framed us in the womb, and His onward agenda for our life centers on restoring us to our original condition and constitution. In fact, what some believers refer to as God "preparing them for their future," is simply God reconstituting them, repairing the damage done to His beloved creations. He does that by making us more like Jesus (Romans 8:28-29). While restoring us, He invites us to join Him in re-establishing His Kingdom-rule in all the earth. Hence, the more we allow Him to do His work in us, the more He can do His work through us.

The culture in which we live instructs people to take care of themselves—with little thought of looking to the needs of others, so we grow up spiritually backwards, thinking thoughts like, "I got my own; you get yours." Our culture teaches us to preserve our life, to get everything we can for ourselves in order to assure our own comfort and well-being. The world champions and celebrates those who handle life without anyone's help, so it creates an independence that removes people from close and caring proximity to one another.

As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; for soon it is gone and we fly away.
—Psalm 90:10

God tells us the exact opposite. He wants us to be part of His plan for rescuing people from the death and evil that assails them.

The life cycle of human beings is predictable and short; our brief lifetimes are fleeting moments in eternity (Psalm 90:10), and because of sin's devastating effects, none of

us escape life's labor, sorrow and physical death. These are the givens. So, if we want our life to count for something we must measure it in terms of what we can accomplish, rather than of what we cannot avoid. Meaning and significance will never be found by vainly attempting to conserve our life, but by purposefully thinking how to expend it. Jesus teaches us how to overcome in life—not just by surviving a bit better and more happily than the rest of the world, but rather, by participating in its re-invasion with His Kingdom-come.

Our high calling from God makes us counter-culture people. We live according to backwards-sounding truths like those Jesus taught: "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it"—and, in so doing, find significance (Matthew 16:25). Seeking to save ourselves is absolutely counter-productive. The instinct of self-preservation—wanting to protect, deliver, defend or do well to ourselves—is a good thing when escaping physical danger, but not when seeking meaning and purpose for life. We will never find our intrinsic value in isolation, independence or selfishness.

Read Psalm 90. These words of Moses, spoken near the end of his life, tell us what about the length of our days on earth? And what about the sum total of those days? _____

_____

SERVING OTHERS

In God's eyes, of course, we already have huge value and significance. He is so taken with us that we do not need to do anything or be anything—other than ourselves—to bring pleasure to Him. But as our Father Creator, He wants us to see in ourselves what He sees in us. He wants us to have value and meaning in our own eyes. So, what's the plan? In what ways can we come to appreciate ourselves like He appreciates us?

First of all, we gain meaning by playing a part in others' lives, serving them. That is our primary mission, as it was Jesus' assignment. Though His rightful position was next to His Father in Heaven, He accepted the role God offered Him, to come to the earth as a servant for our sake (see Philippians 2:5-11). The servant garb He elected to wear temporarily hid His true identity, but because He chose to humble Himself, God raised Him up and gave Him the Name (as well as the position) above all others.

Jesus lived one of the most basic Kingdom principles of true identity and significance: come under people to lift them up. Servanthood is the secret to spiritual attainment. That is what Jesus meant when He said, "But the greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matthew 23:11). He contrasted the world's notion of prominence and importance with His Kingdom way, which decrees our place in line is always counted from the rear. It isn't sinful to aspire to greatness, or to want to have our life count for something. The key is understanding the true nature of significance in His Kingdom.

World leaders "lord over" (*control, subjugate*) their subordinates

(Matthew 20:25-26), and mark their importance by corporate posturing and the number who fit under them in the hierarchy. Kingdom leaders turn that upside-down, and mark their spiritual value more like Olympic weightlifting. The winner is the athlete who lifts the most weight above his head—not the one who manages to stand on the most barbells!

Real and lasting blessing—the sort that answers cosmic questions about our place in the universe—comes by serving other people from a lower position than what is ours by rights. Even though it runs counter to what our natural thinking tells us, we gain more by giving than by receiving (Acts 20:35). This explains why many Christians find their walk with God somewhat 'flat' and routine; they have not learned the great secret of true fulfillment and meaning. Serving other people fulfills our sense of destiny as almost nothing else can.

> In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."
> —Acts 20:35

> Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.
> —Colossians 3:23-24

What we do for others varies, corresponding to people's needs and situation, but *why* we do what we do never changes. It's called love. The Bible defines love in terms of "doing unto others." As we receive life, hope and instruction from God, we are privileged to give the same to others. We give what we've been given. What an awesome calling, to help others come into their spiritual inheritance! In fact, as an expression of love (see John 21:15-17), the degree to which we are involved "doing unto others" is the surest way to measure our true spiritual maturity.

Serving others is a way of serving Jesus (Colossians 3:23-24), and thanking Him for all He has done for us. Like waiters and waitresses, we get assigned certain "stations" in a restaurant, and our primary responsibility is to serve the needs of anyone who sits at our tables (see Colossians 1:25-29). Ministry is hard work, but it is marvelously satisfying when God's power works through us to touch people.

And beyond the thrill of being used by God, there is an additional benefit to us that ties back in with discovering who and what we are as unique creations.

QUESTIONS: On your journey, you will hear many believers talk about "ministry" as a special, spiritual activity. Did you know that both expressions come from the Greek root word *diakonos* (*dee-ak'-on-os*) meaning a servant, a waitress or an errand-runner? Read these words of Jesus and answer the questions.

Mark 10:43-45. Why is it tempting for us to have the exact opposite intention for our life than what Jesus had as His intention? What don't we like about serving others? _____

_____

Luke 22:26-27. In what specific ways do you wait for other people to wait on you? Can you think of ways to wait on others in your church? At work?

_____

_____

John 21:15-17. What was Jesus' point to Peter? How does that apply to you? _____

_____

SPECIALLY MADE PEOPLE

Although it is not the *only* way in which God intervenes in the world, His primary means for introducing rescue and blessing to people is through *other* people. God can and does step in supernaturally and sovereignly in the course of human history, but a close reading of the Bible reveals just how much He favors making use of His children to do His work on earth. He opts for us as His tools of choice because He loves people—each of us. His work on earth centers on human beings: what He can do for them, but equally as satisfying to Him (and us), what He can do through them.

Though God's judgment fell upon depraved mankind, He still chose to work through Noah to enable our race to survive the flood. He raised Joseph to go before His people into Egypt to save them during the famine; in the same way, God sent Moses—after teaching him it would not be by means of his natural upbringing, schooling or power—to deliver Israel out from Egyptian captivity. Whether it is Joshua or the Judges, Old Testament prophets or John the Baptist, God gifts His people with people. Most of the miracles in the Bible take place through the prayers, hands or words of men and women of God.

So we should not be surprised when we read Jesus' words about the "greater works" His disciples will do (John 14:12). God, who loves people like you and me, loves to use us to do good to others. Just as Jesus "went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil"(Acts 10:38), so are we intended by God to live our lives doing likewise. The least of us in the kingdom of God has incredible ministry potential (Matthew 11:11). The Holy Spirit transforms us into vessels "useful to the Master" (2 Timothy 2:21). When we cooperate with His design for us, and His power through us, He uses us to change the world.

Read John 14:12. After telling His disciples they should believe because of the miracles they observed Him perform, Jesus switches the emphasis in His next statement. Instead of saying they would see even greater things in the future, Jesus tells His disciples (us) what? What implications does that have for our journey? _____

_____

_____

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

By His Spirit, God capacitates us to do things we otherwise could not do on our own. The Holy Spirit causes us to be born again, so that we are alive to God. The Spirit brings praise to Jesus, and performs miracles to confirm the message of the Good News. We end up being very different than we would have been on our own due to the Holy Spirit working a metamorphosis and transformation in our lives.

The sad reality is that so many believers in Jesus Christ—who have been given the wonderful privilege of the Holy Spirit resident within them—don't always make use of their Spirit-given power to see into the realm of the invisible, to know things, and to say and do things that result in great life happening in other people. Unintentionally, we serve/minister to people out of the limited resources of our natural beings. We do things that won't ultimately accomplish meaningful change because they are not initiated or activated by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The privilege we have is to partner with the Holy Spirit to introduce more of the Kingdom of God in the lives of other people around us. That's why the Apostle Paul told his friends he didn't want them to be ignorant of the spiritually charged tools at our disposal (1 Corinthians 12:1). He begins his exploration of all the *spirituals* available to us in ministry by identifying several "varieties" of giftings and enablements, known as SPIRITUAL GIFTS (see 1 Corinthians 12:4-6). The first of these is the most well-known among Believers—but not necessarily the most well-practiced.

> Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware.
> —1 Corinthians 12:1

> so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.
> —Matthew 5:45

SPIRITUAL GIFTS are not natural talents or skills or aptitudes. They have nothing to do with our personalities, vocational choices, training or native intelligence. Just as God causes the rain to fall on everyone, regardless of their lifestyle (Matthew 5:45), so He indiscriminately fashions every person with qualities and talents suitable for offspring of the Most High. The fact that we have talents and jobs and skills, etc. is not in question; believers and unbelievers alike have such qualities as part of their God-fashioned being.

One person has an eye for detail, and is able to remember what a friend was wearing when the two of them went to dinner three years ago; another individual is incredibly good at translating the most difficult concepts into easily understandable terms. These are wonderful attributes, but they are not spiritual giftings in the sense described in the Bible. Just as no one can truly say, "Jesus is Lord" except through the agency of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3-4, 8), neither can a person have, or exercise SPIRITUAL GIFTS apart from the Holy Spirit. No one has SPIRITUAL GIFTS before being born again.

Like special tools in our hands, SPIRITUAL GIFTS are supernatural empowerments given by the Holy Spirit to accomplish something that natural talent or know-how could not do. They are "grace gifts": think of them as miraculous (*couldn't-do-on-our-own*) gifts *(things-given-to-us-that-we-didn't-have-before-and-can't-earn*).

USING AND RECEIVING SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Beyond the ultimate goal to glorify Jesus, SPIRITUAL GIFTS are given primarily to accomplish three specific purposes. Spiritual Gifts, themselves, are not marks of maturity. How those gifts get used, and how they are manifested in wisdom and grace and good order—that is what displays our maturity.

1. To confirm the truth of the word of God, to bear witness to the Good News (1 Corinthians 2:4-5; Hebrews 2:3-4).
2. To build up members of the Body of Christ, to encourage and mature fellow believers (Romans 1:11; 1 Corinthians 14:3-4, 26).
3. To serve others with instruction, direction, healing and counsel (1 Timothy 1:18; 1 Peter 4:10).

There is no hard and fast rule for receiving a SPIRITUAL GIFT. It can happen sovereignly and suddenly. Or a SPIRITUAL GIFT can emerge in your life slowly; over time you become more aware of its existence, and you become better versed in how it works in ministry situations. But most of the time, at least from what we read in the Bible, SPIRITUAL GIFTS are bestowed on you the same way in which the baptism in the Holy Spirit is usually administered—by the laying on of hands.

One of the most exciting privileges of spiritual leadership is to be able to pray for the impartation of SPIRITUAL GIFTS as directed by the Spirit to those individuals who receive covering and care from those leaders. As your pastors or leaders pray for you, a SPIRITUAL GIFT will often be identified in an accompanying prophecy (1 Timothy 4:14).

We do not know how many SPIRITUAL GIFTS one can receive, but we are told to desire them earnestly—to really ask God for them (1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1). Which GIFTS we end up with, then, is a result both of God's plan and our desire. We don't know for certain if the list of SPIRITUAL GIFTS in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 is exclusive and exhaustive. Because there are so many ways in which SPIRITUAL GIFTS operate (1 Corinthians 12:6),

God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.
—Hebrews 2:4

For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established;
—Romans 1:11

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.
—1 Peter 4:10

Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.
—1 Timothy 4:14

I'm only going to define SPIRITUAL GIFTS in general terms and give the essential characteristic of each.

1. **Word of Wisdom**—reveals the plans and purposes of God for individuals or groups. It makes sense out of several things happening in someone's life by disclosing what God is doing at a deeper level. By alerting individuals to the "spiritual season" they are in, or where they are on the map of God's dealings with them. A word of wisdom orients people to better cooperate with what He is up to in them and through them.

2. **Word of Knowledge**—brings to light facts about people—their past or their present (physical condition or life situation). The one giving the word has no natural knowledge about the fact; it is usually very specific in what it identifies like an illness or an unfulfilled ministry dream, etc. The whole point for God disclosing the detail is so He can answer the need or resolve the problem in a miraculous display of His intervening power.

3. **Faith**—enables people to hold on to what God has promised to do for them even though things do not look very promising. More than just a decision to believe God's words—which every believer exercises—the *gift of faith* acts like an irrepressible buoy that rides above the water no matter how large the waves. When spoken, it creates an atmosphere of expectation, an eager anticipation about what God will surely do soon.

4. **Gifts of Healing**—bring about a dramatic reversal to any condition of the body, mind or heart that has been afflicted by evil or sickness. *Gifts of healings* are somehow more concentrated forms of healing available to every believer through prayer. Whatever form of evil plagues someone, they will recover from the affliction to their health.

5. **Effecting of Miracles**—creates a steady flow of supernatural signs and wonders to be marveled at by all who witness them. Though every believer should expect God's miraculous intervention, God uses this SPIRITUAL GIFT much more frequently and more significantly to introduce His transforming touch to people. Many of the well-known evangelists, who conduct large crusades with many miracles, have this Gifting.

6. **Prophecy**—communicates the heart of God for people in such a way that there is no doubt where they stand with Him, and what He is setting Himself to do. Although prophecy can be predictive, it more often discloses secrets of people's hearts and/or the hidden things in God's heart for them. We can all prophesy (1 Corinthians 14:24, 31), but the SPIRITUAL GIFT seems to be some additional capacity with prophetic insight for people.

7. **Distinguishing of Spirits**—identifies the *Evil-Spirited* oppressing people or their situations. Because the forces of evil can disguise themselves, and because people who appear to be spiritually OK, are not (2 Corinthians

11:14-15)—God gifts some in the Church to be able to spot evil for what it is. All of us are to "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1), but distinguishing of spirits discerns what is resisting God's plan, and how to counteract that resistance.

8. **Kinds of Tongues (Languages)**—gives extraordinary facility in languages (unlearned by the person speaking), so that people can hear the Good News, as well as praise to God, in their native tongue. It is also used to prophesy to people. *Tongues,* as a SPIRITUAL GIFT, is sometimes confused with the "prayer language" we receive when filled with the Spirit. The "unknown language" may be identical, but the *gift of tongues* is a public declaration, not a devotional exercise.

9. **Interpretation of Tongues (Languages)**—translates any message spoken in an unknown language, so that everyone present can benefit from the message. Whether the "unknown tongue" is the *gift of tongues* or devotional "prayer language," *interpretation of tongues* enables everyone to be blessed by what is said because they can hear it put in their own language.

MINISTRY GIFT-MIXES

Our remarkableness, and that of those around us, gets even more exciting when we come to understand another of the ways in which God lavishes us with gifts. Not only can we be endowed with SPIRITUAL GIFTS when we are "born again," but before we were born into this world, God uniquely crafted each of us in the womb. The differences among people bears testimony both to God's endless creativity and to His loving "appetite" for each unique one of us. God is not just a lover of the human race; He loves each particular person. We correspond to an already existing, deep desire in His heart. When we were born, God did not have to learn to love us; He already did!

> For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well.
> —Psalm 139:13-14

The phenomenal and delightful variety we see on the outside of people—their shapes and features—merely hint at the profound differences God puts in place beneath their physical appearances. Coming from the same set of parents, children may resemble one another physically, but they are rarely similar in the hundreds of aspects of their individual personalities. God composed our total being from many distinct components—like our conscience, our personality, our mental and physical talents, and our emotional disposition. He wove us by hand in the womb (Psalm 139:13-14).

He didn't create us just to be idle, purposeless beings. He made us with ministry in His mind, so an integral portion of our make-up as individuals

is a ministry assignment for which He designed us during our pre-birth days (see Jeremiah 1:5; Galatians 1:15). His glorious intentions for our earthly life include a pre-arranged, but little-known, element of our being. God empowered us with an essential enablement that I refer to as our ministry GIFT-MIX. It causes us to live our life, and think in a way that is slightly different than other members of Jesus' Church.

The easiest way to explain GIFT-MIXES is to use the simple, biblical analogy of the parts of a body (see 1 Corinthians 12:14-27). Ears and eyes serve different purposes, and they work differently. Therefore, they are designed differently: eyes to see and ears to hear. Our ministry GIFT-MIX is the combination of aptitudes, features, burdens and functions that correspond to special parts in the Body of Christ. GIFT-MIXES boldly declare God's personal and intimate connection with us. They are covered with His fingerprints, and GIFT-MIXES only make sense within the context of His intentions for our lives.

> Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.
> —Jeremiah 1:5

GIFT-MIXES are not the same as SPIRITUAL GIFTS, although there is some overlap and similarity between the two different spiritual enablements. God gives us SPIRITUAL GIFTS as specific tools in addition to our ministry GIFT-MIX. Whereas GIFT-MIXES come from Jesus (1 Corinthians 12:4-5), SPIRITUAL GIFTS are given by the Holy Spirit. We obtain SPIRITUAL GIFTS after we receive God and have the Holy Spirit inside of us, but our GIFT-MIX was woven into the very fabric of our soul while we were in the womb.

Our GIFT-MIX is not what we do, but part of what we are. It is like a spice or a taste (flavor). Cinnamon does not do a job; instead, its inherent tang affects whatever it touches. Wherever cinnamon goes, whatever it may do, it will always have the qualities and characteristics of cinnamon. So it is with our GIFT-MIX. What we are is far more meaningful than what we do, or perhaps more precisely, what we are will flavor everything we may do.

God wants you to be especially satisfied when you serve His purposes. Other than loving others, nothing is designed to give you more pleasure and satisfaction than serving (i.e., ministering to) others. He created you on purpose, for purpose (see Isaiah 49:5). But there is a caveat. Because of your unique composition, you work best and most effectively in ministry when you function according to your God-intended design.

A PARTIAL LIST OF GIFT-MIXES

Though it is neither wise nor possible to pigeonhole others or ourselves into precisely defined ministry GIFT-MIX categories, it is illuminating to gain a basic understanding of the GIFT-MIXES listed in the New Testament (see Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4). Realizing some of the qualities that set each GIFT-MIX apart from others enables us to better appreciate other people and their giftings—and to function more effectively ourselves.

These brief descriptions of several distinct ministry GIFT-MIXES demonstrate how uniquely and marvelously God created us. [This is not meant to be a complete list. In some cases, newer, more descriptive names have been substituted for more traditional ministry titles.]

1. **Exhorters**—Find it easy to get close to people and their situations—usually by relating a similar personal experience—in order to help them move ahead or break through. Like expert mountain guides, EXHORTERS can point out loose stones and shortcuts. And they make fabulous storytellers.
2. **Teachers**—See lessons to be taught in almost every situation, and they want everyone to be secured and well grounded in truth. As tireless mentors, TEACHERS take special delight when others gain a new or deeper awareness of truth. Their organized touch brings simplicity and beauty to almost anything.
3. **Server-Helpers**—Derive the most satisfaction and fulfillment from being invisible, behind-the-scenes parts of a larger "team effort." Using their know-how, skills, time and talents, SERVER-HELPERS undergird people and churches, relieving them of their burdens and workloads. They toil with eagerness and almost endless stamina.
4. **Mercy-Showers**—See beyond people's sin and move toward their hurt with gracious sensitivity and compassion. Filled with great wisdom and strength, MERCY-SHOWERS believe the best of others, and want the best for them—regardless of what may have caused their present circumstances. They can reach those who are deep in pain or shame.
5. **Apostle-Pioneers**—Lay foundations of truth and understanding upon which others in the church build. As pioneers moving into spiritually uncharted or underdeveloped arenas, APOSTLE-PIONEERS rarely function conventionally or according to the status quo. Their trail blazing tendencies and their keen sense of direction inspire followers.
6. **Givers**—Experience an almost irresistible desire to meet the physical and financial needs of anyone they meet. Compelled by cheerful generosity, GIVERS invest in kingdom enterprises and facilitate others' vision. Having usually suffered several financial reversals, they have little worry about voluntarily parting with more of their money.
7. **Evangelists**—Continually "find themselves" in the middle of incredible opportunities to tell people about Jesus, and they do—with an eagerness to explain how God can make people's life situations so much better. Not easily discouraged by roadblocks in life or in conversations, EVANGELISTS keep pressing ahead as carriers of the "Good News."

8. **Prophets**—Carry messages in their own hearts (like letter pouches) that come from the heart of God about His plans and purposes for people or churches. Wanting to counsel people according to God's revealed word, PROPHETS focus on one question: "What is God saying right now?" They act as excellent compasses in the woods.

9. **Leader-Champions**—Rise up on behalf of people or causes, with a combination of strength and initiative in order to establish lasting change for the better. Stepping up in support or defense of those in need, LEADER-CHAMPIONS assume responsibility for getting things done. They lead by taking care of anything that needs doing.

10. **Pastor-Teachers**—Seek out, gather and watch over other people with a strong desire to see each one of them flourish. Wanting to make sure everyone has whatever they need to grow, PASTOR-TEACHERS "go over" the particulars of people's lives like someone counting loose change in their pocket. They lead and feed their sheep.

PARTIAL REFLECTIONS OF GOD

While it is enjoyable to learn about the various ministry GIFT-MIXES, it can also be a bit puzzling because we see attributes and qualities of more than one that resonate with who we are. Most likely, we are combinations of more than one GIFT-MIX.

Additionally, each of the GIFT-MIXES is an expression of God and His character. He is rich in mercy—hence, the SHOWER OF MERCY. God gives bountifully to us—hence, the GIVER, etc. Also, every one of the ministry GIFT-MIXES has qualities that ought to be developing in every one of us. For instance, we are not all TEACHERS, but all of us are encouraged to teach one another (Colossians 3:16). Not all of us have the GIFT-MIX of the HELPER, but we are called to serve. Thus, the ministry GIFT-MIXES are spiritual qualities of God's heart and of a mature believer's life.

God intends for us to work best in a certain manner and mode. While most of us focus on living according to His plans for our behavior (i.e., not lying, not being resentful), we often neglect His plans for our ministry GIFT-MIX. A foot is designed to do more than merely resist the temptation to kick someone; its purpose is far more meaningful—to support the body in standing, and to carry it throughout the day.

As you journey with God, He will make you increasingly aware of His calling on our life, and His selection of you for a significant part in His kingdom. God does not regret calling and gifting us, even if we choose not to respond carefully to our divinely created composition and capacity (Romans 11:29), but fruitfulness in our spiritual and natural life increases dramatically when we focus on living according to how we were designed.

QUESTIONS: Once you understand the importance of God's pre-selection of your role within His larger plan, you will see examples of it throughout the Scriptures. Read these verses and answer the questions.

Acts 9:15 and Galatians 2:1-9. Even before Paul was saved, he was called to the Gentiles. Was Paul's ministry to the Gentiles his own idea? _____

_____

1 Timothy 2:7. Who appointed Paul—to do what? _____

_____

2 Timothy 4:5. What word in this verse can you substitute with GIFT-MIX? What was Timothy's particular calling? _____

PARTS OF A WHOLE BODY

God has placed each of us in the Body, just as He desires and according to His Master plan for reaching the world (1 Corinthians 12:18). Like members of a World Cup championship team, let us celebrate the uniqueness of those around us, and how they complement our SPIRITUAL GIFTS and ministry GIFT-MIX. Just as our bodies have different parts and organs, so too, does the Body of Christ.

As individual and particular parts of the body, we are designed to do (and not do) certain things. That degree of God-ordained specialization only makes sense if we are connected to other Christians whose uniqueness complements and supplements ours. It is one thing for us to learn how to function as unique ministry parts; unfortunately, that is where many Christians stop. They do not realize that God designed us to discover the wonder of who and what we are by belonging to something bigger than we are and by exploring our connection to others. Not only does God want us to be part of what He is doing in the whole earth, but He also wants us to be part of His whole family on earth, called the Church.

The Scriptures make it clear that the reason we should be "zealous for SPIRITUAL GIFTS" is to edify the rest of the church (1 Corinthians 14:12). While our ministry GIFT-MIXES and SPIRITUAL GIFTS give us extra ability to witness to unsaved people, they are mostly spoken of in the Bible in relationship to the Church. That is why it is so important for you to become part of a local group of believers.

God chooses to accomplish much of His purposes on earth through His special designs for each of us. We should never forget, however, that He is also always at work to reshape and restore us in the process of our journey. We minister to others while getting worked on by God. Remembering this dual purpose will help make more sense out of why God wants each of us to be part of a group of believers where we live.

EXERCISE: Read these verses and put into your own words what they mean for your connection with other Journey-Walkers.

1 Corinthians 12:21. _____

1 Corinthians 12:24. _____

2 Corinthians 8:14. _____

QUESTIONS: The two primary passages that deal with ministry GIFT-MIXES and SPIRITUAL GIFTS in the context of church are 1 Corinthians 12-14 and Ephesians 4. In both cases Paul explains the way things are supposed to work in church. Take time to read both passages, but look at the specific verses that follow to get a feel for what he is saying:

1 Corinthians 12:7. What is the main purpose for our ministry uniqueness? _____

_____

1 Corinthians 14:5. On what basis are spiritual giftings rated—how impressive they seem when delivered, or the extent to which they edify the [local] church? On what basis should people in ministry be evaluated?

_____

_____

1 Corinthians 14:26. When is it that spiritual giftings most seem to manifest themselves? Does it seem like ministry should be more or less connected to a fellowship of believers? _____

_____

Ephesians 4:11-12. These Ministry Gift-Mixes are supposed to equip whom for what? _____

_____

Ephesians 4:16. If everyone is functioning properly in his or her spiritual giftings, what will be happening to your church? _____

_____

THE LOCAL CHURCH

Anywhere, anytime two or three of us gather in Jesus' name, He is in our midst (Matthew 18:20). As temples of the Holy Spirit, we are always in the presence of God (1 Corinthians 6:19). Plus, Jesus promised to be with us always—even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). So why does God set us in a body of believers? Why should we bother being a part of a local church?

To begin with, let's remember that God designs His ways to advantage us, not to take advantage of us. God joins us to other followers to reproduce in them the life-lessons we have learned. God sets the solitary in families (Psalm 68:6), and He urges us to assemble together more and more, rather than less and less (Hebrews 10:25). There is special strength when we congregate with other believers—a strength that comes from unity and spiritual communion. Jesus wanted His disciples through the ages to be one with each other, and with Him (John 17:21).

For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.
—Matthew 18:20

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?
—1 Corinthians 6:19

Church is the perfect setting for us to experience and to offer the love Jesus said characterizes His followers (John 13:34). God, Himself, actively teaches us to love one another (1 Thessalonians 4:9), and that is not always an easy lesson for us to learn. If you do not have much ongoing contact with other believers—week after week—you can be fooled into thinking you love others (because you have little frustration or problem with any of them). But until you spend meaningful time with others, you do not really have much occasion to love them in spite of what they do.

Regular fellowship becomes a proving ground for love and forgiveness between Christ Followers. Let's face it; following God is much easier when we stay so far away from fellow travelers that we're unlikely to be jostled on the journey. We learned earlier that impurities in our own soul are the main culprits making it hard to love others (1 Peter 1:22). Being with other Christians regularly will bring impurities to the surface of our heart.

How sad that some believers imagine all the trouble with people in church is with the people in church. Some Christians are like kids with a splinter in their hands: God asks them to hold still so He can get at the splinter with a pair of tweezers; but they keep pulling away and squirming around, hopping from church to church, getting more and more infected by the very stuff that could be extracted by being in fellowship with others. God uses church to increase our love and to refine us.

Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;
—1 Thessalonians 4:9

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart,
—1 Peter 1:22

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOU HAVE FOUND THE "RIGHT" CHURCH?

There is no such thing as a perfect church. Every church has its strengths and weaknesses, and all of them have problems. No one church is best for everyone, and that is part of why there are so many styles, varieties and denominational groups of churches.

Depending on the doctrinal bent and leadership style of the main leader, churches will emphasize slightly different issues, and no two churches will agree on everything (sounds like people, doesn't it?). But given all the options of what church looks or sounds or feels like, how do you find where God wants you to fellowship? Here are some helpful thoughts:

1. Ask for and expect God to lead you. He does have a home in mind for you—a place of worship where you can grow spiritually, and where you can meaningfully contribute.

2. Look for churches where Jesus is openly worshipped and celebrated. His Name should be praised and called upon frequently, and each time you visit, you should hear Him proclaimed as the Savior, the Son of God.
3. Watch to see what gets studied and quoted: Is the Bible trusted as the word of God for all generations? If any person or book is given an equal or greater weight of authority than God's word, keep looking for a church.
4. Listen to the "voice" of the principle leader (pastor); does it speak to you personally and regularly seem to address the very issues or questions that have been on your heart? The teaching should resonate with your "daily" life.
5. Lastly, do you like going to this church? Do you leave feeling encouraged and built up? Do you look forward to what God will do in your life the next time you gather with the rest of the church? If not, keep looking.

EFFICIENT INCUBATOR

The whole point of church is to make Jesus more meaningful and significant in people's lives: helping those who already know Him become more like Him; and, introducing Him to people who aren't yet aware of His love for them. Church is an ongoing setting God places you in so that you can personally receive from and give to others. Feelings of guilt and rejection cripple ministry. Church provides a sense of belonging. Being accepted by a group and being honestly accountable to them will defeat most lies in your life.

The local church is the most effective environment for growing believers in their walk with Jesus, and for growing Christ-like qualities in them. What they see modeled in the lives of older believers, as well as all the testimonies they hear, speeds up the process of maturity. When the whole church is assembled to receive instruction and teaching, one message gets transmitted to everyone at once, instead of needing to be repeated over and over. Of course, most of what God teaches you will come as a result of your personal Bible reading and through informal conversations with other believers.

But in church you get exposed to perspectives and understandings God has already taught to your spiritual leaders. God is not interested in having each of us reinvent the spiritual wheel. He places ministries and people in each church to train and mend the people of that congregation to be better able to minister to still others (Ephesians 4:11-

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. —Ephesians 4:11-13

13). One-on-one discipleship is more effective than large-group teaching for getting at the specific issues of our lives, but such discipleship is even more effective among an entire group of people who are being led in the same direction and being taught similar truths. People who walk with us closely over time, and who really get to know us, are very helpful in keeping us on track with God.

The local church is much more than a building or a worship service. It is a vital part of the whole growth and development process in your spiritual life. Every church is unique. God gives each church a special collection of people and purposes. God has always dealt with people both directly and indirectly through His dealings with whole groups. Church provides additional confirmation, direction and instruction in your personal search for His will for your life.

The early Church knew the importance of devoting themselves to prayer, teaching and fellowship. Church is the proving grounds for your spirituality. Church is more than the sum of its parts. Not only can you share in the larger joy and accomplishments of the whole congregation, but even the individual part you play has more significance than it would on its own. You will be encouraged not just by conversions, but by the transformations you witness in other people.

Read Philippians 2:17. At the end of Paul's life, his claim to fame is having been expended for others. Why does that give him such satisfaction? ____

_____

Read John 10:17. What did Jesus mean by saying this? From what you have learned, what kind of life do we enjoy after laying down our life for others? _____

_____

Local churches extend an invitation with five parts to it. When looking for a church home, you can see to what extent a body of believers invites you to:

1. **Receive mending and nurturing**—to be valued for who you are, loved for who you are, recovered from where you have been, and challenged to keep growing in God.
2. **Belong to a family**—to be welcomed into a context of loving relationships between individual people who are part of something bigger than themselves, but still cherished as unique children of God.
3. **Embrace a vision**—to be told what God's particular assignment is for that church, and how you personally, with your giftings, can add to the fulfillment of it as a truly contributing part.
4. **Become a discipling disciple**—to be shown how to join the line of spiritual succession among believers, learning from mentors, and then passing along what you learn to others.

5. **Serve as a partner**—to be mobilized for the sake of others, expending yourself and your resources in a way that gets you under people, not just sitting alongside them while you watch a few others perform.

VALUE ADDED TO US

You and I cannot be well known to the entire world; that is reserved for a very few, and almost none of them will be believers in Christ. What impresses God cannot impress the world; what impresses the world does not impress God. But within our local congregations, we can become well-known and well-loved. That is God's intent for us and for church. Through our example and by paying attention to what God teaches us, we have a huge part in affecting the eternity of people around us (1 Timothy 4:16). Nothing has more meaning for our lives than that.

To make a difference in the lives of other people will cost us immeasurably, lots and lots of labor and agony (Colossians 1:29). But the value it gives to our lives is even more boundless. That is why Paul says how gratified he was to be "poured out" and spent on behalf of his friends whom he had mentored (2 Timothy 4:6). He understood that there is no greater love than to willingly lay down our life for other people (John 15:13), and there is no truer way to follow Jesus' example in spending our life for what really counts (1 John 3:16). Jesus poured out His lifeblood as a sacrificial lamb, a servant scorned by the world, and because He did, we have an example to follow (Mark 14:24).

The whole reason God has designed and gifted us as He has is so that we can be equipped for every good work for the sake of others. Nothing we can do—good or otherwise—will change the inestimable value He already places on us; we cannot add to the meaningfulness we already have in His life. Nothing of serving, attending church or ministering to others with our spiritual giftings will increase our standing in His eyes. He has always looked upon us with unparalleled favor and grace.

But if you long to understand yourself better, and to appreciate your value and meaning to God, there is no better way than through serving a group of people with your unique combination of giftings. Being an effective, working, serving part of a local church will revolutionize how you see yourself. Once again, we see that God asks us to obey His counsel for our sakes, not His. That is the wonder of love.

Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.
—1 Timothy 4:16

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.
—2 Timothy 4:6

Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.
—John 15:13

And He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."
—Mark 14:24

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT:

We are made in the image of God—the One who calls himself "I AM." How has your thinking changed about the purpose for which God designed and gifted you? _____

_____

_____

What is our highest calling? Are there mottos, phrases, or principles you were either raised with or cherish that do not line up with the way the Bible instructs us to live in terms of serving or looking to the needs of others? _____

_____

Often, it takes others to help show us really who we are and what attributes and qualities are unique to us. With a friend, look over the list of MINISTRY GIFT-MIXES. Talk about them together. What do you think are the one or two MINISTRY GIFT-MIXES that most describe who you are? _____

_____

What are the three main purposes of Spiritual Gifts? What Spiritual Gift do you think you have? Why? _____

_____

_____

Why does God want us to be part of a local church? Are there specific reasons you may have for not wanting to participate in a local church? Take a moment to ask God to answer any questions you have or speak to any places of fear or hurt in your life. _____

_____

_____

PRAYER:

God wants to use you and fulfill you. Perhaps you can refresh your role as a servant of His purposes by praying about your giftings. Feel free to use these simple prayers as patterns for your own:

"Lord, thank You that You are the giver of all good things. Bless You for creating and designing me the way I am. Alert me and teach me more about Your designs on my life. I want to function according to my GIFT-MIX. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

"Thank You that You want to give me SPIRITUAL GIFTS to use as tools to help other people know You more. I ask that You give me more of Your gifts, and that You teach me more fully how to use them. Amen."

"Show me, Lord, where I have been selfish, seeking from You only for myself, and not for others. As You gift me, give me the attitude of a servant so that I can be more like Jesus. In His Name—Amen."

Since God also wants you to have meaningful connection with a group of believers, why not thank Him for your church? Or, if you are not in a church, ask Him to lead you to the one He has in mind for you:

"Lord, thank You for Your Body here on Earth. I praise You for the way You designed all of us to connect to each other, and I especially want to bless You for how You have blessed me with my church.
Thank You for my leaders who care for me, and for others of Your Followers. Alert me to ways I can serve them more. Amen."

"Father, I trust You and Your plan for me. You have said it is not good for us to be alone, and You intentionally connected me to other Believers—for their sake, and also for mine. Lord, remove from me any fears or pride that keep me disconnected from the rest of the Body.
Set me where and how You think best. In Jesus's 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 Worshiping God
Worship is both an activity and a lifestyle that celebrates the truth about the One who made you (His goodness and power). You were designed to worship with your whole being, and few things align your life more fittingly than declaring God's praise.

#2 Reading the Bible
The Bible contains many examples of God's relationship and dealings with people like you, so it is filled with amazingly helpful understandings and revelations for your life. It also penetrates the deepest places in your heart/mind and changes you from the inside out.

#3 Asking for God's Intervention
Talking with God is personal and powerful. Prayer invites God to get involved in what concerns you, and welcomes Him to turn things around. Need answers for needs, burdens and questions? Talk to God and He'll respond.

#4 Being Baptized with the Spirit
God's Spirit dwells in you, a profound presence in your soul (mind, will and heart, conscience). He enables you to know and do things that are not possible without His power, including being able to pray to God in an unknown language.

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.

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