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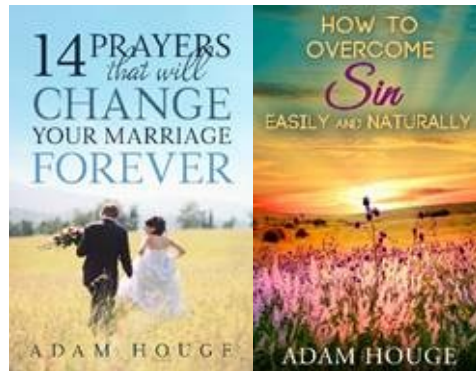
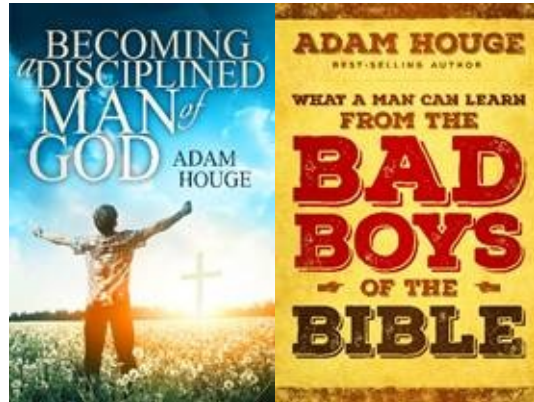
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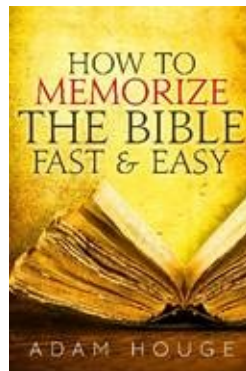


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Introduction

The Nature of Godly Discipline

Becoming a Christian can be likened to becoming an Olympic athlete. In order to be called an Olympic athlete, one needs to reach the pinnacle of self-discipline or else all hope of winning will be lost. Likewise, a believer cannot step into the race of God without counting the cost first. Even as Jesus exhorted us through the parable,

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it...” Luke 14:28

The Lord calls us to carry our crosses and deny the desires of the flesh, or else we may not finish the race. Therefore, we must count the cost and remain self-disciplined in all our conduct.

As it is written,

“And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.” 1 Corinthians 9:25

Seeing, then, that we do it for an imperishable crown, let us become temperate in all things as well. We should train our bodies not to rule over us, that we may remain in submission to Christ as Lord. In ancient Greece, the word for training was *gymnos*. This word literally means “naked.” It is in fact from this Greek word we derive the English word “gymnasium.”

In ancient Greek culture they held that, by freeing themselves of everything that could hinder them, they could train to their fullest potential. Hence, they would exercise naked. Similarly, we are called to strip ourselves of the things of the flesh, that we may exercise ourselves toward godliness. As it is written,

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...” Hebrews 12:1

By stripping ourselves of the works of the flesh, we can better discipline ourselves in godliness. Thus, we are clothed with Christ. As it is written,

“For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For

we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.” 2 Corinthians 5:2–4

From this scripture, we understand that God will give us a new spiritual body. Likewise, we are called to clothe ourselves in the things of Christ now, while we wait to be “further clothed” by Him. Seeing that we are not justified by the flesh, we should be diligent to do away the works of the flesh. As it is written,

“And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Galatians 5:24

Therefore, we must strip ourselves of the works of the flesh, that we may clothe ourselves with Christ. In godly discipline we are seeking to establish the works of the Spirit in ourselves so that we may bring glory to the Lord. In the works of the Spirit we are justified because it is no longer we who work but, rather, Christ in us. Seeing that Christ is perfect, when He works through us, we also may become perfect in Him.

Chapter One

Disciplined in Purity

There are many struggles that come with being a man. Particularly, there is the struggle of purity. With our ever-raging hormones, there are times in our life when sexual purity becomes an issue. But God, who is greater than ourselves, is able to help us overcome every obstacle to pleasing Him.

In all things we should have a guarded heart—not a heart with walls around it, but one hedged in by the Holy Spirit. If we allow bad influences in our lives, it's only a matter of time until we succumb to them. In order to maintain purity, we need to be disciplined in our nature.

For example, there are many passionate scenes in movies today. If you find yourself stumbling, then perhaps you should stop watching the movies that contain such scenes. It would be better to be disciplined in committing those two hours to God instead. Then, by resting in His Spirit as you seek Him, you may be edified in His presence.

Stumbling in sexual purity generally occurs when we allow ourselves to become idle-minded. If we are choosing not to be sober-minded, we can easily be influenced to walk down bad paths. Sometimes idle-mindedness occurs when we entertain the flesh. We tend to entertain the flesh through various activities that do not pertain to Christ—activities such as video games, movies, TV shows, and so on. Some of these things can be edifying when they are Christ centered, but there are many such things that are not.

We must have discernment in regard to what points us to Christ and what does not. Whatever does not lead us to Christ should be removed. A little bit of idleness can go a long way.

As it is written,

“A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” Galatians 5:9

And it is further written,

“Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.” 1 Corinthians 5:7

So it is good to eradicate the bad influences and the things that lead us down bad

paths. When you fall into sin, be mindful of what you did before you sinned—not just immediately before but, rather, backtracking everything in your thoughts. What led you to temptation in the first place? Sometimes the source can be surprising. Usually it begins with idleness; and seeing that our guard is down, Satan steps in to slowly steer us into the direction of lust. The source is not the tempting situation halfway through idleness but the first step that caused you to let your guard down. When you discover the source, choose not to walk down that path next time, and continue in the path of Christ.

But removing the object of temptation isn't enough. Yes, we must be disciplined in our conduct in keeping such temptation removed, but this doesn't solve everything. By removing the opportunity for temptation, you will be tempted less. But that doesn't mean you will never be tempted. So in order to truly overcome, we need to focus on overcoming temptation as well. And how do we do that?

What did Jesus say? Did He not teach us to pray? As it is written,

“...And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” Luke 11:4

When you are in the heat of the moment, pray in faith, asking God to deliver you from temptation. This may seem oversimplified, but it's not. It will not work unless you press yourself wholeheartedly into the Lord as you pray. But pray in faith that He will be your strength in your weakness as He promised. As it is written,

“And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’” 2 Corinthians 12:9

Therefore, we should seek the Lord in the heat of the moment, and He will strengthen us. But if you allow your mind to entertain the thoughts of sin, you will fall back into it. If you give your mind to God in that moment and press your thoughts into prayer and the Holy Spirit, you will be delivered by His strength. This is the only way to truly overcome bondage and every man's battle, by applying these things in faith. It is what the Lord teaches us to do to overcome temptation and sin; therefore, we should believe Him and apply it by faith.

By sitting in God's Spirit and meditating on His presence as we pray, worship, and read the word, temptation will be less powerful and easier to brush away. But if we are not disciplined to seek Him continuously throughout the day, we

will succumb to temptation through the weakness of the flesh and be more likely to fall.

Being disciplined to continue in Him and focus on pure things can lessen the amount of temptation we encounter as men. Then, from being faithful to abide continuously in the Spirit, we will be strengthened to overcome always. Temptation will become less and less until it fizzles out altogether. Yes, it will come back from time to time, but due to the strength of God compensating for our weaknesses, temptation will not be so tempting unless you entertain the thoughts in your mind.

So in being disciplined to be pure, we must be disciplined both in the internal person and the external person. By removing bad influences, we can be tempted less. Also, by changing our thoughts, we can change our lives.

If you allow your mind to rest on holiness at all times, then you will become what you think. I'm not saying you'll become who you think yourself to be; rather, I am saying that cleaning the inside will make the outside clean. If you think of evil things, you will be evil. If you think of godly things, you will be godly.

Therefore, we must make it our aim to maintain godliness within our minds. This is loving the Lord our God with all our minds. We must continuously meditate on the Lord in our thoughts and refrain from idle-mindedness.

So it is up to us, then, to recognize when our mind is drifting from God and to catch this immediately so that we can refocus on Him. The faster you catch it, the longer you will abide. If you do not catch it right away, you will drift off for long periods of time. So make it your aim to catch your wandering thoughts immediately.

No matter how hard you focus on the Lord, however, your mind will drift off. We are human and inherently weak toward God. But if we are being mindful of what we are thinking, then we will be able to catch ourselves and repent when we are entertaining thoughts that we shouldn't.

Generally, an evil thought doesn't start out evil. It begins as an idle thought; and then slowly, as that idle thought is entertained, Satan jumps in and correlates temptation to our desires. Satan does have an idea of where your thoughts are going. This is how he is able to tempt you in relation to what you're thinking in the first place.

The Scriptures tell us that men do not know each other's thoughts:

“For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?” 1 Corinthians 2:11

But nowhere does it say that the enemy doesn't know. How else would he be able to tempt you in your mind, if he couldn't perceive what you're thinking? But the secret places of our hearts are not so secret in the heavenly places. Even so, God will have all of our deeds shouted from the rooftops in heaven. As it is written,

“For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.” Luke 12:2–3

In the end, God will reveal all things, and even now some things are already known. As it is also written,

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...” Hebrews 12:1

We should therefore be disciplined in regard to the inward person as well as the outward, knowing that we are being watched. Our actions and thoughts are being weighed in the balance, and the secret places of our hearts are being laid up for judgment. If we guard our hearts and minds and discipline ourselves to reflect our thoughts on Christ, we will become more like Christ. Thus, the judgment we shall have is not to be that of condemnation but of salvation.

But just thinking about Him isn't enough. We need to interact directly with Him. This is a relationship, and in treating it as such, we will grow to be strengthened to overcome. If we pray and worship while continuously focusing on the presence and words of His Holy Spirit, then we will be empowered in a victory walk with Christ.

As men of God, we need to be disciplined continually to be pure. Disciplining ourselves inwardly can help us with many sins and forms of impurity in life. By disciplining ourselves to remove the things that influence us into temptation, we can have greater strength to overcome.

Chapter Two

Disciplined in Righteousness

Righteousness is hearing the word of God and applying it. Therefore, we must first focus on hearing it, that we may obey. Being His children, we inherently desire to obey God. The flesh battles with us in the inward person, but our true desire is to be well-pleasing to Him in all things.

Yet sometimes His will isn't always so clear. It doesn't have to be that way, however, and by growing in our understanding of His speech, we will automatically know His will by discernment in the Spirit. The methods God uses to talk to us can vary. It may be through a situation, through the Holy Spirit, or through fruit in life.

It is good to look at the fruit of a situation that God is granting us. Sometimes God speaks inwardly to us, in the inward person through the Holy Spirit. At other times He speaks to us through the circumstances of life. Logic and previous experiences may not apply to the current situation, but if we seek the Lord in prayer and wait for His answer, we will know His will in all things.

There was a time I was driving from Madison, Wisconsin, to Cedar Rapids, Iowa. I was with my wife, who was pregnant at that time. The sun had set, and we were driving in the dark. As we approached Dubuque, on the edge of Iowa, a blizzard unexpectedly came upon us. I wanted to press farther, to Cedar Rapids, but the storm was intensifying. The weather reports hadn't mentioned the possibility of snow, so I hoped that it would let up and the roads would be cleared.

While I waited, I decided to sit at the last gas station on the edge of Dubuque before leaving the city. But the storm slowly grew worse and worse until it was a white-out. That's when I decided to ask God what He wanted me to do. Usually I hear God pulling at me one way or another to do this or that. But for whatever reason, I couldn't hear Him, and His will wasn't clear to me. Would the storm stop and the roads be cleared? Or was God guiding me with His hand through the unpredicted storm He had created?

So I asked Him, "Lord do you want me to press on to Cedar Rapids? Or will the storm let up? What should I do?" Before I could get the prayer off my lips, He answered, "What do you think you should do? I'm not going to stop the storm, and your wife is pregnant." He had already laid it in my heart, through the fruit

He was producing, to do what He wanted me to do.

Sometimes He puts fruit in our lives to steer us in the direction He wants us to go. I was new to Dubuque at the time, so I didn't know where to get a hotel. I continued to pray, "Lord, if you want me here, then please lead me to a hotel. Will you send me someone who will take me to one? I don't know my way around here, and I need help." I walked inside the gas station to ask for directions when a woman in line stopped me and asked, "Do you know your way around town? Or are you new here?" It was a rather rhetorical question since she could tell I was from out of town with my thick Northern accent.

"I'm from out of town, ma'am," I replied. Then, without another word from me, she continued, "Well, I'm headed up to such and such a place, and there are a lot of hotels over there. It is a bit out of my way, but kind of on the way, so I'll take you there, anyway." And just as I had prayed seconds earlier, she led me to the hotels. By this God confirmed His will, so that night I proceeded to pray over which hotel to stay at.

When the Lord led me to a hotel, He blessed that night exceedingly. We were given the highest-end luxury hotel room for free, for His Spirit was upon the room. It offered much-needed rest at the time for my overworked, very pregnant wife.

God led me to the hotel, then paid for everything for me. If I had not been led by the Lord that night, circumstances would not have worked out for the better. It is good to seek God in everything, no matter how small or silly it may seem. God has plans for us, sometimes even in the little things of life.

We must be led by the Lord in all we do. This is having righteousness: hearing His word and obeying. Could staying at a hotel be righteous? Yes, if God told you to stay there and you obeyed. Righteousness is faith in motion, and faith comes from hearing His word. As it is written,

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10:17

If you pay attention to the Holy Spirit, you will see that God is speaking to you always. This is how He leads us daily in the faith, that we can put our trust in the leading of the Spirit. As it is written,

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." Romans 8:14

No matter what His word is for you, if the Holy Spirit is speaking, just obey Him without question. He is your Lord and Master, and He owns you. It is our reasonable service to obey Him and believe Him. Even if His word doesn't make much sense to us, as long as we know it's from the Lord, we should obey, having blind faith. And there are many times His words won't make sense to us. But if we know God is speaking to us, then we should be disciplined to obey blindly. It is good to remember this scripture:

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” Isaiah 55:9

There are times we will find ourselves questioning God, even subtly. Sometimes this happens when we hear His voice, gentle and quiet, and know it is Him but brush it off because it doesn't make sense to us. “Why would God say this or that?” we may respond, or “Why wouldn't God want this or that?” Rather than asking ourselves “Why?” and justifying our own plans or ideas by logic, we should be disciplined to ask God directly for His will. If it doesn't make sense to us, we should confirm His will, even as Gideon did:

“So Gideon said to God, ‘If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said—look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said.’ And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowlful of water.

“Then Gideon said to God, ‘Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew.’ And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground. When we have confirmed what God wants then we must be disciplined to obey.” Judges 6:36–40

Even though Gideon asked for a sign, God doesn't always work by the signs we request. Sometimes He is already telling us what we need to know in another way, in which case we need to grow in discernment.

This is why He spoke against the Pharisees. It was obvious to them that He was the Christ, but because they were having a difficult time accepting the will of God, they would ask for a sign. As we read,

“But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks

after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.” Matthew 12:39

If God has already given us something by which to confirm His will, then we need to accept it. As with His statement about “the sign of Jonah,” it is up to us to discern what He is telling us.

We’re like small children learning to talk. When we’re infants, we hear the voices of our parents but don’t understand them. Then, after a while, we pick up on a few words. From there our parents compare what we know with what we don’t know to expand our vocabulary. Even so, the Lord does this with us spiritually. As it is written,

“These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” 1 Corinthians 2:13

As the Holy Spirit teaches us, He expands our understanding of Him and His way of communicating through previous spiritual knowledge or experiences we have.

If you are having a difficult time understanding the Lord’s will, pray and seek with all your heart to grow in spiritual discernment. God will answer you and teach you what you need to know. But if you’re not sitting on the edge of your seat, trying to learn from God, life will be a cycle of difficulty and failure to understand the Lord.

Sometimes we already know God’s will, but it can be difficult for us to accept it in certain circumstances of life. Not that we are like the example of the Pharisees, by any means, but in some cases it can be too hard for us to understand why God has willed what He has. Nevertheless, if we know the will of God, then it is good for us to obey Him blindly whether we understand or not. His ways are higher than our ways, and His plans are beyond our comprehension.

Therefore, we must obey and continue to follow Him in the path. If you know God’s will but are having a hard time understanding why, let blind faith enter your heart; then simply obey. We need to be well-disciplined in our walks, which we ought to take seriously. We must do everything He calls us to do. As it is written,

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” James 1:22

Sometimes when people hear a sermon, they say “amen!” in their heart only to forget the lesson when they get home due to the busyness of the day. It is good to be disciplined in remembering and applying the lessons God teaches you through His servants. If you know the Lord has spoken to you, whether through a man or His Spirit, then obey Him diligently. Even though it’s a preacher talking, if the Holy Spirit is stirring your heart to say “amen,” then you know it’s God speaking to you through the man.

As it is written in regard to preachers,

“Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.” Exodus 4:12

And we likewise read,

“And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!’” Romans 10:15

A preacher brings a message to you, having had it laid on his heart from God. Then, being sent by God and compelled in his heart by God, he preaches the message given to him by God for you. As it is also written,

“...but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Peter 1:21

Knowing, then, that men of God are led by the Spirit with words from the Spirit, it is good to put to practice what God is confirming to you in your heart. God will speak to you through the preacher, and thus it is still the word of God. As it is written,

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” John 10:27

And also,

“We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” 1 John 4:6

If you hear Christ speaking through a preacher, then it’s Christ speaking to you and not the man. If you feel the Holy Spirit in a preacher’s words and you’re inclined to say “amen,” then obey those words. At such a time, when you have heard God speak through a man, it is no longer about the man who speaks but about your own relationship with the Lord.

In order to be righteous, we must be disciplined to continue in all the words of

God given to us. If we are found faithful, then we will be called the friends of God. As it is written in regard to Abraham,

“Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to Him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.” James 2:22–24

Therefore, we need to take it to heart to be well-disciplined in obedience. Righteousness is faith in motion. By acting on faith, we are justified because it is the Lord who works in us and through us. By believing, obeying, and practicing God’s word, we will become righteous. If we do not apply His words, then we are in sin. Therefore, beloved, make it your aim to be well-pleasing to God in all things by obeying His word for you.

Chapter Three

Disciplined to Abide

I have been asked by many people, “What does it mean to abide? Don’t we abide in the Spirit once we’re born again?”

When we are born again, the Spirit comes into us; and as Jesus promises, He will never leave us nor forsake us. But God is not a controlling God. Even though He has the power to control us, He chooses not to do so, that we may have free will. God gives us the choice to do what we like throughout the day. We can either choose to seek the Lord or do other things not pertaining to Him.

God always pursues us wildly in His overwhelming love. He can’t help but seek us, as the lover did his beloved Shulamite in the Song of Solomon. The Song of Solomon is talking not only about the intimate details of courtship and marriage but also about the relationship of the church and Christ.

The comparison of a man and wife to Christ and the church has also been drawn in the Book of Ephesians. It was not creating a mere metaphor or parable in comparing them but, rather, stating that God created marriage to mirror our relationship with Christ. What is the purpose of doing this? That through the conduct and course of life, we would better understand our relationship with God, how He loves us, and how He looks at us. We are like a bride to Him.

Likewise, the Song of Solomon was really the song of Christ seeking His church. There are many conclusions that can be drawn for a Christian walk, in terms of how we respond to God, if we compare the lover and the Shulamite with our personal relationships with Christ. Incidentally, Solomon literally means “king peaceable” or “king of peace.” So if we are to translate the title “Song of Solomon” literally, it means “The Song of the King of Peace,” who is Christ.

God came seeking us as Solomon did his lover. He pursues us with a passionate, loving heart, but it is up to us to respond. Even as we read,

“I sleep, but my heart is awake; it is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying, ‘Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.’

“I have taken off my robe; how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I defile them?” Song of Solomon 5:2–3

Sometimes God is reaching for us, but we aren't always reaching back as we should. He seeks to abide in us daily. Likewise, we should seek to abide in Him daily. 'Abide' comes from the Greek word *meno*, which means "to abide" or "to continue." If you abide in a certain path of life, it means that you walk along that path. If you walk along the way of Christ, to abide means to continue this walk. We are called to continue to walk in the Spirit daily. Just because we have the Spirit doesn't mean we walk in Him at all times.

We have two natures to deal with, and as a result we walk either in the flesh or in the Spirit. When we obey the will and lusts of the flesh, we are walking contrary to Christ. Therefore, we are no longer abiding in Him although He abides in us. He will continue in us, but we are not continuing in Him as we are called. But as it is written,

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me." John 15:4

In this statement Jesus has introduced the concept of "double abiding." He isn't the only one abiding; rather, He states that there are two separate "abidings": Jesus abides in us, and we abide in Him. From this concept, then, we learn that we need to abide in Christ.

To abide in Him suggests we are abiding in the way of Christ. We abide in His way when we continue in the Spirit. This is to say, we abide in the narrow way when we continue walking in the Spirit. For as it is also written,

"If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." Galatians 5:25

In this verse we find the suggestion that, although we live in the Spirit, this doesn't always mean that we walk in the Spirit—hence the words of exhortation to continue walking in the Spirit. But what does it mean to walk in the Spirit?

In order to walk in the Spirit, we need to be sensitive to His voice throughout the day. When we obey His voice, we are walking in the Spirit. He is always speaking, but we aren't always listening. Whether due to busyness or to idleness, we aren't always listening for the voice of the Spirit. Yet we should be doing so, seeing that His words are the word of God, which saves us. And if we listen diligently to the Spirit's voice and obey, God has a promise for us. As it is written,

"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine." Exodus 19:5

And also,

“Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God...” Deuteronomy 28:1–2

When we hear God’s voice internally, we are *commanded* to obey it. The Old Testament lays out a difference between two “words of God.” One is the written word, or the law, which for us comprises the New Testament and the Old Testament. The second word of God is His voice through the Holy Spirit. We are commanded by God to obey both. If we love the Lord, we will take the words of the Holy Spirit seriously and live by them as He guides us daily.

In order to better hear His word, we need to make our spiritual ears more sensitive to His voice. As it is written,

“Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you—the sure mercies of David.” Isaiah 55:3

If we incline our ears to obey the voice of the Holy Spirit, we shall be saved. But if not, then we haven’t walked in the Spirit but in the flesh. If we walk in the flesh, then there is a curse for us. As it is also written,

“For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” Romans 8:13

And as the scripture previously said,

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.” Romans 8:5–7

Now, one may contend this point using Romans 8:1, which says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...” However there are three problems with such a counter-argument. The first is that now two scriptures supposedly contradict, which cannot be. If one scripture says you’ll be condemned and the other says you won’t be, don’t brush one verse off in favor of another.

Rather, seek out the full and true meaning of both scriptures as you become

disciplined to seek and understand the truth. There is always a greater picture to be found above the scriptures. Even if they seem to contradict, this is because there's a greater concept that ties it all together above the seeming "contradictions."

The second problem with this counter-argument is that if you have not continued in Christ, then it does not apply to you—since it addresses "those who are in Christ Jesus." Just because you are born again doesn't mean you are continuing to walk in Jesus. You could be walking according to your own heart and flesh and, thus, not be justified.

This brings us to the third and most important problem with the Romans 8:1 contention: Every time people recite this verse, they never seem to finish it, and it ends with a warning. As it is fully written,

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." Romans 8:1

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ, walking in the Spirit. But if you walk in the flesh, this verse does not apply to you. Rather, Romans 8:13 does. Therefore, beloved, be diligent to obey the voice of the Spirit. Seek Him daily and grow in Him. He is already reaching for you; all you have to do is reach back.

He is always speaking to us, but we don't always hear Him. Sometimes this is because we have allowed wax to build in our spiritual ears by being busy or idle. In order to become more sensitive to His voice, we have to pick out the "wax" by sitting in His presence more often. We should be sitting in His presence throughout the day, keeping our minds focused on Him while we busy ourselves about our days.

In order to sit in His presence daily, we should read His word, worship, and pray. As we read the word, we hear Him speak to us and interpret scriptures. The more we listen to Him, the more we will understand His voice. The more we understand His voice, the easier it becomes to follow through with what He says in other areas of life.

By constantly worshipping, we are taking up a heart of gratitude and praise. He will always be with one who worships Him. This is why you feel His presence with you every time you worship from the heart. Also, He exhorts us to be in constant prayer throughout the day. As it is written,

"...pray without ceasing..." 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Whether we pray, worship, or read, we are commanded to seek the Lord at all times and forever. For it is also written,

“Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His face evermore!” Psalm 105:4

When we continually sit in His presence and seek Him, this will help sensitize our ears to His daily speech. As we begin to hear Him more frequently and clearly, we must be diligent to obey, even if His word doesn’t make sense to us. He is our Lord, and a faithful servant obeys his or her master in all things, without question.

Chapter Four

Disciplined in Singleness

There are many struggles that come during singleness that can be overcome by proper self-discipline in approaching God. Purity may be one such struggle that first comes to mind. But as we said in an earlier chapter, if we discipline ourselves to continue in the Spirit daily, these problems will fix themselves through the inward, abiding power of God.

Another issue for single men would be “God, do You want me to remain single or get married?” This struggle happens to some brethren due to this scripture:

“But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife.” 1 Corinthians 7:32–33

While this verse is true, it is not always the calling of everyone to remain single for the Lord. God has a plan for each of us, and for some of us, it is His plan for us to be married.

We are His bondservants, having been paid for with a price. We are no longer our own but Christ’s, and the life we used to live we live no longer. Now it is Christ within us who lives through us.

Therefore, seeing that He purchased you and you have called Him Lord, now submit to His guiding hand. Does He not have a plan for us? As it is written,

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10

God has prepared your life for you since the foundation of the world. If He is your Lord, then let Him rule over you and make the decisions for you as to how you will or will not live life. If God wants you to be married, He will make this evident to you. Do not say in your heart, “I will be married” or “I will be single,” but let God lead you to His plan.

I myself pursued singleness to honor God. I thought that He gave us a choice, seeing that we have free will. But He continually laid it in my heart to have a companion. I thought this was my own desire, so I denied what I thought to be my own heart in an attempt to deny the flesh. Later, however, He reminded me,

“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face

of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.” Acts 17:26–27

God has predetermined where every child will be born and live. If, then, He has determined that certain children will dwell in your house, wouldn’t that mean He has predestined you to become a father? Furthermore, He predestined the salvation of your children, whom He planned for you to have. Doesn’t God predetermine all our lives? Let us see what is written:

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” Romans 8:29

Beloved, God foreknew you before He created time. He also has foreknown who your children will be, what their names will be, how they will live, whom they will marry, and how they will die. He has foreknown all things since before the beginning. If He knows all these things, shouldn’t we let Him lead us in all things? He does know best, after all! So it is better to open our eyes to His will rather than seek our own will. We are His children, after all, and as our Father He has a plan for us.

But just because we have open eyes doesn’t mean we will always see God’s plan. We have to wait for Him to reveal His heart to us. Then we are able to submit to His direction. But does God really direct us to a wife? Or do we have free will?

Both. You can choose your spouse, or you can choose to let God lead you in His plan—even as we read in Acts 17:26 that He “has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings...”

So wouldn’t He pre-appoint His daughter’s dwelling place also, and not yours only? Did you not know that, when you’re married, your home is a family church? You are called to lead your family as one body and as one unit in Christ, being brothers and sisters in Christ with you as the family pastor.

Similarly, this is why a bishop needed his family to be respectable and submissive to his guiding hand. If he couldn’t lead his own family, he couldn’t lead the family of Christ.

Therefore, if it is in your heart to be married, lay the matter before the Lord. Isn’t God wiser than we? Ask Him for an “arranged marriage.” Let God arrange whom you will marry, when, and where, and let Him lead you in all aspects of

this. He knows who would be the best fit for you. He knows who would be the best mother of your children. He has foreknown all of His children. As we have already read,

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” Romans 8:29

So, then, if you are a father, decisions about marriage are no longer about your walk only, but about the walks of your wife and children as well. God has already known and understood who His children would be. He has known whom you would choose as your wife and who is best for you. He knows which woman, as your wife, would best complement your walk, the walks of your children and their spouses to come, and the walks of your grandchildren and their spouses. God knows all these things and has the greater picture in mind.

Therefore, beloved, it is better to pray and ask the Lord to give you one of His daughter’s hands in marriage. Remember the age-old tradition of asking the father for the daughter’s hand in marriage? Has not the Lord become her Father also? So ask her Father in heaven for the hand of one of His daughters in marriage. However, let Him choose who that is. Surrender to Him, and He will guide you the right way.

God will lead you if you seek Him for the answer, rather than seeking it for yourself. As it is written,

“Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife.” 1 Corinthians 7:27

In this scripture, there is an exhortation to remain single and not to seek marriage. And why not? To permit you to be open fully to hearing and heeding God’s will and caring for the things of the Lord. In singleness we are more mindful of the things of God, but in marriage certain distractions arise.

Since the scripture exhorts us, “Do not seek a wife,” pray and let God seek a wife for you. He has a plan for your life, so be submissive to it. If He desires you to be married, it will come to pass in His perfect timing. If He desires you to be single, He will do the work in your heart and give you the same desire.

Then you will be justified in all things because you allowed Christ to be your Lord, leading you in all things and giving you all things. If He is our master, it is best to be submissive to His will while we wait for the redemption in His return.

Therefore, it is good to discipline our hearts to follow after God in all things.

Can we choose a wife? Yes! We have free will. But can God make better decisions than we? That should go without saying. So if we temper our hearts to wait for God, and ask Him what His will is, He will lead us into it. As it is written,

“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Romans 10:17

God leads us into everything in life. It is good to wait for His word, that you can walk by it. Faith comes by hearing His word, and righteousness is faith in motion.

Take the time to seek the Lord for His will in your life. Ask Him for one of His daughters, and in His time He will grant her to you. If you want Him to be the center of your marriage, then let Him be the center before you even meet her. Let God guide you in all things and remain submissive to His hand. He will lead you to His desire and bless it. When He gives you a wife, He will give to you “exceedingly abundantly above all that you ask or think...” Ephesians 3:20

And remember that it is written,

“He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord.” Proverbs 18:22

Chapter Five

Disciplined in Marriage

God created humanity with various elements of His nature. In man we see a dominating, adventurous, protective, powerful, and delivering nature. We were created by God to go and dominate the world, knowing no master (except God) and mastering all creatures of the earth. The adventurous nature of a man takes him to uncharted territories, as when the United States first expanded westward. He seeks to protect and save the damsel in distress and to “wow” her with his masculine power.

But a woman is built differently. She wants to be wooed, romanced, treasured, and cherished. She is tender, meek, emotional, and compassionate. Whenever unconditional love comes to mind, many reflect upon the love of a mother.

A man wants a woman to look at him and think, “Wow! He is powerful, respectable, honorable, and handsome.” And a woman wants a man to look at her and think, “Wow! She is stunning, captivating, amazing, and beautiful! This is someone I need to romance, hold, and cherish.”

God has given us these natures to be reflective of His person, albeit not all-inclusively. In a man, we see His nature to govern, overcome, and save. In a woman, we see His sensitive nature—His love, His beauty, and His desires to captivate and be cherished.

It is important to understand these natures as being the nature of our heavenly Father. Through these natures, we can better understand the character of God. Yet the character of God is best understood as the combination of the two characters, both of men and of women.

Sometimes as men we can become overcharged, overly gruff, and overly grizzly bearish. Just look at a bachelor’s house! Not many men keep their home very well. The way men relate to one another doesn’t require much gentleness and softness of tone. We’re men; we can handle a few jokes and a little roughing up.

But when a woman comes along, it changes everything. Her gentle nature smooths out His rough edges. Suddenly he needs to learn how to handle something gently and with compassion, even if he’s angry. When angered enough, a man can sometimes act more like a grizzly bear than like Christ.

Yet God remains gentle with His children. There are times we may have angered

the Lord in our conduct, but He still gives us opportunity for repentance and grace. He handles us gently and with compassion—as a father toward his son, or a shepherd his sheep.

The very nature of a woman can teach a man to be more Christ-like in the way he behaves, lives, and approaches others. It is almost as if God made us to need a woman's touch. Even the Lord said,

“...‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.’” Genesis 2:18

But a woman needs a man who can lead her, gently and lovingly. As husbands, it is our responsibility both to lead her and to nurture her in the water of the word. We are given the honor of protecting her from all harm, especially spiritual harm. As the leader in the family, we are meant to be the image of God's love, faithfulness, and truth.

By leading her in the truth of the word and by having the same mind in Christ with her, we can protect her from false doctrines. Her heart is sensitive and has both strengths and weaknesses. This does hold true for men as well, but how a woman is weak is different from how a man is weak.

Looking at her weaknesses, we see that emotion can take a hold of her. As a result, she may make decisions based on emotions, being a naturally emotional creature. The issue with this is that not all of our feelings are from God, though they may appear to be.

But even as the Scriptures say,

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” Jeremiah 17:9

Therefore, living by our own hearts can lead us down bad paths. Being naturally emotional, a woman can easily become misguided by her own heart. We are called, then, to lead her in the Spirit as God leads us. It is easier for us to hear God because the voice of our own heart and emotions isn't yelling as loudly.

This is how God designed men and women, and this is how He determined our roles. He created the roles of marriage, and we are called to take them up in obedience. Seeing that God will always lead a marriage this way, dwell with your wife in love and understanding. As it is written,

“Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that

your prayers may not be hindered.” 1 Peter 3:7

And as we stated before, she is considered the weaker vessel because some of the decisions she makes may be more prone to emotion than a man’s would be. Many of our emotions originate from the flesh. But the flesh is corrupt and desperately in need of a Savior. So if we rely on our inward feelings, then we will struggle in weakness. If we live by what we feel, then we are guided by our own hearts rather than by Christ. But if we learn the voice of God and wait for it, denying our own hearts as we wait for His word, we will find strength.

Due to her particular weaknesses, a woman is more likely to be ensnared by false doctrine. That a woman is easily deceived is evident, for it is written,

“And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.” 1 Timothy 2:14

And also,

“For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” 2 Timothy 3:6–7

Notice how it says “gullible women”? Why doesn’t it say “men and women”? Because women, according to the word of God, are more easily deceived. Therefore, we are called by God to be their protectors. Why? Because there are many who would seek to deceive her, keeping her from the knowledge of truth, as we just read in 2 Timothy 3:7. As God’s chosen leaders, we are called to lead them to the truth constantly.

In today’s culture, it is a difficult and taboo thing to suggest that a man should lead a woman. It is often described by others as a reflection of the culture “back then, but not now.” The issue with this statement is that it suggests people are living according to the culture now, which is the culture of the nation in which they reside rather than the culture of Christ.

More particularly, the cultures of the nations today are secular, unbiblical, unethical, unloving, unforgiving, and unfaithful. These are the attributes of those who live according to the flesh. But we are called to “[c]ome out from among them and be separate,” as we read in 2 Corinthians 6:17. We are the culture of Christ, not the culture of this world. We are of the nation and kingdom of God. Our King is Jesus; our capital city is the New Jerusalem to come; and our culture is defined by the word of God.

Therefore, beloved, be diligent to live according to the culture of Christ and to teach your families to do likewise. We are saved by believing and living out the word of God. By suggesting that Scripture doesn't apply because it is old and outdated, being of another culture, is blasphemous. God commands a woman to be led by a man, and for a man to take the lead. By claiming it is an unbiblical culture and not the word of God that must be obeyed, many people are denying their faith and blaspheming the word of God. As it is written,

"...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10:17

Your faith comes from the word of God. The Scriptures are the perfect, pure, and infallible word of God. Seeing that our faith comes from the word of God and our salvation comes from practicing faith, we cannot be saved if we do not live according to the Scriptures.

Cultures do not change Scripture. Rather, the word of God holds true forever: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." Hebrews 13:8

And the Scriptures are the word of God. As it is written,

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16–17

But is the source of Scripture only godly inspiration? What else do the Scriptures say about those who wrote them?

"...but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." 2 Peter 1:21

So, then, it is the Holy Spirit who wrote the word of God through men. Therefore, beloved, we should be diligent to obey His words, leading our wives with all sincerity. This is biblical, Christ-like, and God-spoken.

Does the word really call us to be leaders? Yes, for as it is written to the wives,

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything." Ephesians 5:22–24

Why would a woman be called to submit to a man as to God Himself? That sounds like a very high calling for men. But when you become married, God immediately steps in to teach you how to lead your wife. He will lay hold of your heart and guide you in the way you should go.

Even Mary, Jesus' mother, was submissive to her husband Joseph. Who did God choose to speak to direct the family? Joseph. God gave Joseph dreams and sent him angels to tell him where to go and when. When Jesus' life was threatened by Rome in Bethlehem, God sent the message to Joseph—not to Mary. God did speak to her; but these messages were not sent to Mary except at the time she conceived, or else it would be written otherwise.

But as a very holy woman of God, she remained submissive to her husband as he led her in a walk with Him. In fact, you never see a time when she questioned Joseph's authority, but rather she followed him in everything. She was the example of what a wife should be, and Joseph was the example of what a husband should be.

God would never call His daughter to submit to a flawed, sinful, weak person unless He intends to take control of situations to lead and deliver His baby girl. We as men need to be disciplined to follow His guiding hand. We are weak and flawed, but when we submit to the Lord, then it is up to her to find the perfect God in an imperfect person. God always knows what is best, and we should pray and inquire of the Lord often for the future and leadership of our families.

But the calling of a husband is much higher than other callings and cannot be taken lightly. Seeing that a husband is to his wife as God is to the church, he is therefore considered the dignitary of his wife. The word 'dignitary,' which appears in the New Testament, comes from the Greek word *doxa*, which means "one who is praise worthy or honorable like God." *Doxa* is where we get the English word 'doxology' from, which is the compilation of worship and praise songs for the Lord.

To put it in layman's terms, a dignitary is a person called to a high office, such as Moses or an Apostle. An angel would never speak against such a person, as the Scriptures tell us, because a dignitary is justified and defended by the Lord. The Apostles were like the continued presence of Christ to the Church. Likewise, Moses was like God to Israel. So for we as husbands to be toward our wives as Christ is toward the church suggests that we are dignitaries toward our wives.

A dignitary does have a high calling, but also a terrifying judgment. You as the leader of your wife must give an account to the face of her Father about how you handled her, loved her, cherished her, nourished her heart, and led her boldly in the Spirit and in truth. If you have slacked in these areas, there is a judgment held against you. If we, by complacency, allow her to go astray, we will be judged. If we don't lead her to truth and she goes astray, or if there is anything

that causes her to sin, we have a judgment. But as it is written,

“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!” Matthew 18:6–7

And also,

“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.” James 3:1

But whether you accept it or not, you are your wife’s teacher. Therefore, beloved, take your walk very seriously. The working of ministry is an overflow of the personal time we spend with God. It is very important to be growing always—both because we love the Lord and want to draw nearer to Him and, also, so that we may lead our wives uprightly.

But how shall we lead our wives, and what does God require of us? This is further expounded upon in Ephesians 5:25–27:

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

Just as Jesus is doing for the Church, so God wants you to do for her. Cleanse your wife in the water of the word of God. Lead her in the Scriptures and teach her, that you may be able to present her to God as a glorious woman. Teach her so that she would not have “spot or wrinkle nor any such thing, but that she would be holy and without blemish.”

Therefore, since you must present her to God as holy, you have an account to give for her. Lead her carefully in the truth, lest you yourself be condemned. As it is written,

“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.” Galatians 1:8

It is imperative to lead her in perfect doctrinal truth, so take this charge seriously. But how do we find the perfect truth?

“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth...” John 16:13

Seek the Holy Spirit, and He will grant it to you. It is already His desire for you to have perfect doctrine. And seeing that He wrote the word of God through men, let Him interpret its meaning to you. That way, by being led in the Holy Spirit, you may find truth and so save your wife. As it is also written,

“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.” 1 Timothy 4:16

Take your doctrine seriously and let the Lord lead you to truth. Then, as the Spirit speaks to you, speak also to her. And how He leads you, lead her also. God will direct your heart and incline you in the things you should do.

But above all, you must lead your wife in a gentle and compassionate way. Remember how Christ is with us: Is He not gentle even when we make mistakes? As we read previously,

“Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding...” 1 Peter 3:7

So be disciplined to cherish your wife, to nurture her, and to be gentle with her. It is easy to become harsh, especially in a fight. Yet do not let anger, but rather Christ, rule in your heart. Be the image and example of His love. Take your walk seriously. You will have to give an account both for how you lived and for how you led. Moreover, as we are further exhorted in Ephesians,

“So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.” Ephesians 5:28–29

Therefore, take her walk seriously and be an encouragement to her to seek the Lord constantly and to grow in Him. Seeing that the Spirit leads us to all truth, you must constantly abide in His presence and encourage her to do likewise.

The closer we get to Jesus, the closer we grow to each other in our marriage. Since we cherish our flesh, we ought also to cherish our wives. Remember to kindle romance often and spend much time with her. Spend time with her in fellowship and in romance. Cherish her and hold her often. Find time to sit alone with her and to embrace her sweetly and softly. A woman is comforted by touch.

So comfort her often. This world is a dark and desperately wicked place. We live amidst a spiritual desert waste land, so it is easy to become emotionally and spiritually dried up through the desert of life.

Give her what she needs to be filled with the Spirit. Give her time alone with God and comfort her often when she’s in your presence. Always have sweet

words for her, and comfort her by saying nice things to her and about her. We should always be filling the emotional tanks of our wives. It is easy to overlook each other's needs when we are stressed and tired after a long day of work, but Christ is never too busy to cherish you. Neither should we be too busy to cherish our wives the way they need.

It is easy for anyone to be dragged down by the things of life. But if you comfort your wife in Christ and encourage her to rest in Him and seek Him daily, she will be able to continue in the Spirit and be strengthened by Him.

Take the time to pray with her often. Sit down with her and write a list of some things that need to be addressed in prayer. Then fellowship with her in prayer and read the word together. Encourage her to read alone, that she may hear from the Lord and be edified by Him, but also have Bible studies with her and teach her as God leads you. It is important for you both to read alone and together.

Take the time to read with her, daily if possible. Fellowship with her often in the word, in prayer, and in worship. You are both heirs of eternal life together; therefore, as brother and sister in Christ, become best friends by fellowshipping often.

Furthermore, treat her to dates once a week. Do something free if you don't have money. If you have young children, set some time aside when they are napping or in bed to be alone with her, romantically, just the two of you. It can be difficult to have romantic dinner dates when you have small children, so adapt to the circumstances and have romance in another way.

Always woo her with your ways. Share a blossoming friendship with her and lead her in the Spirit. Discipline yourself to be an example to her in your conduct, and cherish her in Christ.

Above all, love her tenderly and gently in the Lord.

Chapter Six

Disciplined in Fatherhood

God has created the family as an ultimate means to relate to Him. The way we relate with our children helps us to understand better, by experience, how the Father relates to us. When we learn and grow as fathers, we come to respect the work of the Lord in our lives more.

When hardships come upon us, we realize that the loving hand of God is there to hold us through it all. He teaches us and corrects us in all situations of life, that we may become more like Him. We as fathers likewise train our children to be like us in all that we know.

But when we come to Christ, we have much growth to do before we understand the nature of God. Throughout our early years in Christ, we find ourselves struggling with understanding Him and overcoming weaknesses. But this is reflective also of the nature of children. Then we as fathers have the blessing of guiding our children through life, that they may come to a better understanding of who God is, why we exist, how we should behave, and how to live a wise life in Christ.

Therefore, a man must be disciplined in his approach to parenting. For some, it can be easy to overlook issues with our children due to the busyness of life. Stress can wear on us, and much-needed attention is given to other things. In such cases, we need to prioritize our lives to put our children's spiritual growth above other things. Yes, marriage and God come first, but there are times when children need us to nurture their hearts lovingly—even when it is not convenient for us.

Every father wants to raise his child right. There is no Christian who would consciously ignore his children's needs. But sometimes, due to being overworked, overly busy, and subject to other stresses of life, a child's behavior may go unnoticed. We need to approach parenting with a disciplined and vigilant mind. By having a mind awakened to the conduct of our children, we will see their areas of need for spiritual growth.

As fathers, we always try to provide the best for our families. We understand the importance of proper discipline for behavior. However, Christian parenting is not about behavior modification but, rather, about gently and lovingly leading our children to Christ. Yet many well-meaning Christian parents discipline a child's

behavior while forgetting the need for teaching spiritual discipline.

But as it is written,

“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him.” Proverbs 22:15

In all things, children are creatures of the flesh. They are born into the flesh and know nothing but the behaviors of the flesh. All they know is their own heart and their own desires, and that’s all that matters to them. But by faithful and loving rebuke on which they can depend, we can nurture their hearts to become godly. Then, as they become older, they will display more conviction, having been taught to make the right decisions and having received the Holy Spirit through coming to Christ.

Proper behaviors and a Christian walk are taught to a child simultaneously. A father needs to remain self-disciplined in watching his children and observing their conduct often. By becoming fruit inspectors, we can determine what their actions are, why they are behaving the way they are, and where their behaviors are coming from. Children are tempted just as we are, and it is important to isolate the source of every action of a child. Children will display both conviction and temptation in their behaviors. But we are called to isolate what is good and what is evil and address it through proper parenting.

For example, if you see your child is convicted, support conviction. Stay on God’s side always. When you see that they are tempted and denying conviction, discipline them not only as a consequence for the sinful act but also for correction of it. This is the difference between training and punishment. When children sin, we shouldn’t only discipline and hope they will learn from the consequences of their behavior; we should stay by their side until they repent—every time. The goal of discipline is to train a child to repent from his or her heart.

Giving children discipline doesn’t necessarily teach them godly discipline. But when we see their spiritual needs, we discipline for those and the behavioral needs fall in place. Teach them to obey conviction, and when they don’t, then discipline them accordingly.

For example, if a young child is told not to touch something so he waits for you to look away before touching it anyway, do not discipline for touching but, rather, for not listening to conviction. Then when children are old enough to understand, we teach them to listen to their convictions. Ask them what the right

thing is; then, when they correctly answer, ask them why they chose the wrong thing. Ask them, “Why didn’t you listen to conviction? You should listen to it.” Then make it clear to them that they are being disciplined for not obeying godly conviction. Do not discipline out of anger but, rather, train out of love. If you believe in spanking, then make it your aim to spank lovingly, not angrily.

In all of these things, our goal is to discipline our children in such a way that they are being led to Christ. If your children don’t have Christ, then train them in the things that lead them to Christ. And what leads them to Christ? First, obeying conviction. Secondly, believing God. Thirdly, confessing wrongdoings and repenting from the heart. And lastly, but not least importantly, seeking all truth.

When children listen to conviction, they will be willing to confess their sins and repent of them. If we teach our children to be sorry from their heart, then they will seek change. But they need to obey conviction first. So teach them what conviction is and teach them how to obey it.

Then, when they obey conviction, they will be more likely to receive Christ and walk uprightly with Him. If they always obey conviction and never cast aside the voice of the Spirit, they will naturally experience strong Christian walks.

This is not unlike how we teach our children to ride a bike with training wheels. Eventually we take the wheels off, that they can ride without the need of support. Likewise, we need to train our children to lean on Christ and not on us. Parents are a spiritual crutch to them, or training wheels if you will. By leading them to obey conviction, they will be trained to ride through life without training wheels. Instead, they will rely on Christ for guidance and conviction.

One day, they will not have your mentoring. When you die, they will be left behind to fend for themselves physically and spiritually. Thus, we need to prepare them for a walk with Christ without the need of our counsel. But if we teach them to obey the Holy Spirit, He will be all the counsel they will need.

So it is necessary in our discipline to support the convictions we see God giving our children. As we teach them to obey, they will eventually be able to make the right decisions on their own. Even before they come to Christ, they must be taught to obey conviction, confess sin, and be sorry from their hearts. This is what is necessary for them to come to Christ.

Aside from being the example of God’s love to them in everything, we also need to teach them how to respond properly to God’s love. When they can obey conviction, believe God, repent from their heart, and seek and believe the truth

of their need for a Savior, they will find Christ. But without knowing how to respond to His love, they will never find Christ.

We need to be the example of the Father's love, but they need to understand how to respond perfectly to it. When they see that we do all things out of love—especially discipline—then they will see Christ in us and desire Him.

If you came to Christ after you had children, then show them how the Lord has made a difference in your life, by becoming the image of His love toward them. Befriend them, lead them, guide them, and nurture them to find Christ.

If your children already have Christ, then lead them tenderly as you would a lamb. Let them see your affection, but also your firmness. They must respect you at all times. And whether your children have Christ or not, they must be trained to respect and listen to your words.

Your words will be life or death to them one day. If they haven't gone through life respecting everything you say, then they will blow off the important message you give them when the day comes—for from your mouth will come the word of God for their salvation. It is you whom the Lord will use to witness to your children.

If they do not respect the words of your mouth, then they will not respect the word of God from your mouth, either. Therefore, put great emphasis on the necessity of listening to and respecting your words as you raise your children. Then, when the time comes for them to receive Christ, they will take you seriously.

When your children have Christ, if they have been taught their whole life to respect, honor, and listen to your words, then it will be easier to shepherd them in Christ. If they are struggling with sin, we can gently lead them to overcome. If they are making a bad decision, then they will listen to correction.

This is where we establish the difference between the rod and the staff. These are the two implements used by a shepherd in guiding his sheep. If a sheep was prone to wandering away often, he would use the rod to rebuke it. A shepherd would search for the missing sheep, and then when he found it, he would break its legs with the rod.

It may seem brutal—and a source of horror to many animal rights activists—but it served a very noble purpose. The shepherd was interested not in harming the sheep but in saving its life. If it continued to wander off alone, it would soon be devoured by the predators that always shadowed the flocks.

How do predators find their prey? They eat the ones that are sick, weak, young, or separated from the flock. Whatever they can isolate they will eat. They drive the rest of the flock away and keep one sheep cornered so it is easier to kill. This is much like what occurs to believers who isolate themselves. By teaching our children to respect our words, and by becoming their friend, we lead them never to isolate themselves.

The shepherd would break the sheep's legs out of love. He would not leave the sheep alone after that but, rather, lovingly and tenderly nurse it back to health. He would keep it by his side and feed it from his hands, that the sheep may form an emotional bond with him. This is what Christ does for us through hardship, that we may see our need for Him. Then, due to its emotional bond with the shepherd, the sheep will no longer want to run away but will instead stay close by the shepherd's side, where he can protect it.

The staff, as we understand it, may have had a hook at its end. A staff would be used not only to ward off predators but also to guide the sheep gently back into the flock. The rod is the physical discipline we use, but the staff is the words we use to corral our children back into God's arms.

By teaching our children through the "rod of correction" to obey the staff, we render discipline less and less necessary until it tapers off altogether. The point behind all discipline is to teach our children to obey conviction. Then, when they obey conviction, all we need to do is speak lovingly and convictingly in Christ, and they will repent.

But we also must form bonds of friendship with our children. God called Abraham His friend, but He was also His Father. Likewise, if we are going to be the example of the Father toward our children, we need to relate to them in a friendship. If our children are connected to us and see that we can understand them, they will have more respect for us. This, in the end, will lead to a more fulfilling relationship with our children.

When children are older, they tend to feel that you're not one of them and that you don't understand them. As a result, when they can think for themselves, they may feel as if they have better ideas than you, rather than listening to your God-given wisdom. But if you form a heartfelt, one-on-one bond with your children, you can do away with these problems altogether. When they feel close and connected to you, it is easier to share the word of God with them and guide them in the Scriptures.

Fathers have been given the privilege of acting as a pastor toward their family.

Your children are Christ's little disciples, placed under your hand. Therefore, let the Lord teach them through you. Seek God with them often. Worship, pray, and read the word. If you set aside some time to pray over the issues of their heart and have them pray over the issues of yours, they will become more connected to you spiritually.

It is imperative for Christian families to be fellowshiping with one another. Unfortunately, this tends to be one of the most overlooked parts of family life. Children do their own thing, and the parents do theirs.

But it is necessary for children to bond with each other in Christ and with you. When they hear God speaking through you, they will perceive the wisdom He's given you and respect you more. When they respect you more, they will be easier to counsel in Christ as they grow in the Lord.

But when you teach your children, do not merely instruct them in what we do as Christians, but also teach them why we do it. Make it real and applicable to them. Show them how Christ leads your life and how this affects you. Then teach them to be led by Christ and show them how He is real and practical for their lives. When they come to Christ, sometimes the influence of friends or unsaved family may turn them away from following the Lord wholeheartedly.

However, if you make a walk with Christ applicable to their daily life, they will see and understand their need for Him daily. Many Christian families struggle to keep their children following the Lord when the children move out. Too often they seem to jump ship, forsaking the faith altogether. Although they believe in God, they won't come to church and they won't walk with Him. But if you raise them to see not only the importance of a daily walk with Christ but also how it applies to their life, they will continue in the Lord.

By disciplining ourselves to see their needs, share a friendship, and lead them gently in Christ, you ensure that they will continue in Him. By becoming their friend and teaching them how to obey conviction, you help lead them to Christ and to a continual walk with Him. Their salvation is in our hands, and we have a very high calling to lead them to Christ. Therefore, it is up to us to have a disciplined heart to lead our children in Christ.

Chapter Seven

Leading a Family in Christ

In everything our families do, we need to keep it Christ-centered. Being our own culture in Christ, we must come out from the world around us and continue in the things of Christ. In this we are called to take the lead and encourage our families to follow after Christ as He leads us.

Your family is the body of Christ and should be treated as a church, making every day a Sunday. Take the time to lead them daily in the Spirit. Pray individually with your wife and children and lead them in the word.

Include them in your daily walk, that when they perceive the grace and power of God in your life, you may be able to encourage them to have a godly walk as well. There are times you should be alone with God, and there are times you should fellowship with your family, that they may see the example of Christ in you.

Your children need your direction and the wisdom God has given you. Without these things, they may have a very difficult time walking in the Lord. But if you make Christ practical to their daily life through your example, they will grow to full stature in Christ. We must make Him practical for their growth and security in Christ.

There are many ways to make God practical to the family. It all starts with a walk with Him, as He reaches out to relate to us. When your children see God relating to them at a personal level, they will want to seek Him more.

Prayer is one of the most powerful ways for them to experience God at an intimate level. Whenever there are family issues that need prayer, include your children in asking of the Lord. For example, if you go through a tight spot financially, have some family prayer time once a week regarding the issue.

Then, when the Lord has delivered you, point out to the children how God delivered you and answered their prayers. Encourage them to pray on their own as well.

Take the time to pray with your children. Let them make a list of the things they would like to pray about, then pray over the issues of their hearts with them. When the Lord answers, point it out to them. When they see God answering them and relating to them at a personal level, they will want to be more personal

with Him. They first need to experience His love, however, in order to desire to love Him back. As it is written,

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

If we take our children by the hand and guide them in a spiritual walk, it will be easier for them to relate to the Lord. They will see firsthand how He works in their lives and how He cherishes them. When they experience His love, they will fall in love with Him.

In doing this, we should make it a priority to fellowship with our children. Create Bible studies for the family in a group setting. Every week, have a day set aside for seeking the Lord together as a family. Make it something everyone can depend on so that everyone can schedule around that day. It must be a priority for everyone to come to a family fellowship night; do not allow any excuses.

When we fellowship, it forms bonds of friendship between us. But by sharing in the Spirit, we create bonds of intimate kinship as well. True fellowship is not characterized by a gathering, for there are many who fellowship around food, movies, games, or other activities. But fellowship is not only the sharing of a friendship. Rather, fellowship has purpose and common cause.

True fellowship, by definition, involves a body of people coming together to share a common goal or interest. As Christians, our goal is to draw nearer to the Lord, and our interest is Christ. Yet some people make fellowship about friendship while forgetting the Lord.

But beloved, do not forget your first love, who is Christ. Remember Him in your fellowship and make seeking Him the center of your family fellowship. The closer we get to Jesus, the closer we will be to each other. When His love works in us and among us, it binds us closer to each other.

Hate is the act of pushing away, but love is the action of pulling near and holding dear. Therefore, if we immerse ourselves and our families more deeply in the love of God, we will draw nearer to one another. So make it your aim to be well-pleasing to the Lord in the conduct of your family.

Encourage your spouse to seek Him daily. If you have younger children who are noisy, then handle them for a while and keep the house quiet for her. Give her time to be alone with God, that she can be refreshed in His presence. Then have her return the favor for you.

Sometimes when we seek the Lord, Satan causes external things around us to

create much noise. This, of course, is to keep us from seeking the Lord. If you pay attention when you are studying or seeking God, you will see that there are times when your environment grows noisy.

There will be times when you sit down and pray, then open the word, and magically one of your children ends up hurt. Or suddenly the baby wakes up out of a dead sleep and starts screaming. Sometimes your neighbor will make noise at precisely the wrong time, revving his car engine or mowing his lawn.

But none of this is coincidence. As often as these distractions happen, the statistical equivalent would be to get struck by lightning and a meteorite, then win the lottery. Therefore, it is obvious in these circumstances that an intelligent force is at work behind the scenes.

Bearing this in mind, we need to be vigilant in our study times and in others' study times. If Satan is rising up to create distractions when you want to seek the Lord, then ask your spouse help you "keep the demons at bay." Quite simply, have her look after the children and keep the house quiet for you while she prays for the peace of the Lord over the house. God will answer and will show up; then there will be peace over the house for you.

Yet keep a vigilant eye also for your wife's sake. When she's seeking the Lord, watch for distractions that may be rising up around her, and help her in keeping them at bay. Be diligent to quiet things down for her, and encourage her to seek the Lord. If either of you ends up not seeking the Lord, you risk working in the flesh.

Rather than "being in the flesh," help her "get in the Spirit." Strengthen her in Christ, and so find yourselves drawing closer to one another. If either you or she is acting in the flesh, it will eventually cause fights and divisions. But if you are acting in the Spirit, you will always have unity, love, peace, and grace. This will only happen if you seek the Lord, both individually and together.

Be sure to seek the Lord with your wife privately on a daily basis. Worship with her, just the two of you, and let the Spirit fall on you together. Be unified in the Holy Spirit and grow in Him continuously. Take time, weekly if possible, to pray with her about the situations in your lives and your family. Read the word with her daily if possible and encourage her to read on her own.

Spend much time with each other in Christ, and fellowship over God rather than over idle activities. Do likewise with your children, and fellowship with them individually. Seek the Lord with them as often as possible in a one-on-one

friendship, and so encourage them to walk with God. But also maintain a family gathering once a week.

I like to call this “family fellowship night.” During this time, we may have pizza, soda, and other things to keep it fun for the children, but we make it about seeking the Lord. We will dig into the word, pray, or worship together. Sometimes, for the children, we may watch a movie pertaining to Christ that teaches them about the Lord. But we still take the time to pray and seek the Lord with them as well.

Engage in whatever activity wherein you feel the Holy Spirit. Wherever you sense the presence of God, be there. Where God is, go there. You will know this by how you feel His presence. If you feel Him in worship, then worship. If you aren’t feeling God with you while you do something, then He doesn’t want you doing it.

This is how He leads and guides us. Although He never leaves nor forsakes us, He doesn’t let us feel His presence sometimes, that we may know what we should do or question what we are currently doing. If we question what we are doing, then we will turn to the Lord and ask Him what we should be doing. This is the logic He uses in approaching us.

So whatever God is blessing, do that for family fellowship night. Make it fun and engaging. If your children see it as something to look forward to, they will enjoy seeking God rather than looking at it grudgingly.

Besides seeking the Lord as a family, it is good to teach the children to seek Him together. Have them pick out a day every week to pray with their sibling. If they become each other’s prayer partners, it will develop long-lasting friendships in the end. Encourage them to read and worship together, but it is especially good that they pray. By actively engaging in a search for the Lord with their brothers and sisters, they are being trained to fellowship with each other when they move out of your home. When they depart your house, try to encourage them to rekindle those bonds and continue seeking the Lord together.

This is how we create a body of Christ out of our families. If everyone in the family seeks the Lord together, one on one and communally, it will produce a beautiful church in your own home. This is how the Lord calls us to lead our families, and it is the prerequisite for pastors.

Pastors should have a family that has been led well in Christ to prove that they can lead the church. As it is written in regard to a bishop, he must be “one who

rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence” (1 Timothy 3:4). Then the scripture goes on to say,

“...for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?...” 1 Timothy 3:5

And why are these things written? Because a bishop, pastor, or anyone else who is over the church must be the ultimate example of a Christian. What is required of them is also required of all Christians. So take note and understand that you will give an account for every deed you have ever done. Therefore, beloved, rule your own household well.

But why are pastors required to demonstrate these things before they rule over the church? To prove that they can lead a body in Christ. With the same measure they lead their own flesh and blood, they will lead others as well. Therefore, as Christians we must lead our families as if they were mini-churches. The entire family in fellowship together is a body in Christ—so treat it as a body and rule your house through the leading of the Holy Spirit.

For indeed, you are training your children to be subject to God. As it is written,

“Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?” Hebrews 12:9

If you lead your children in the Holy Spirit and seek the Spirit with them, your children will be subject to God. Teach them to render their lives to Christ, being obedient to Him as their Father and Lord. Let them see the correlation between you and the Father by being the image of the Father toward them.

Walk in love and lead them well. Lead your wife in gentleness and compassion. Subject yourself to the leading of God in all things and die to yourself. By becoming disciplined in how you govern your family, you will reap a reward.

In all of these respects, as a disciplined man of God, teach your family to be disciplined as you are. Both by being the example and by taking the lead, we can encourage our families in Christ and lead our children to salvation.

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*WHAT A MAN CAN LEARN FROM THE BAD BOYS OF
THE BIBLE*

What a Man Can Learn from the Bad Boys of the Bible™

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What a Man Can Learn from the Bad Boys of the Bible

A man of God must know His Bible, for without wisdom, a man cannot walk uprightly in the Spirit. Yet mere study and knowledge don't make a man spiritual. As the Scriptures attest,

“...Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.” 1 Corinthians 8:1

Obedience to the Spirit through love makes every man spiritual. Those who love God will yearn to know Him more intimately. The more you study your Bible, the more you'll understand the nature of God. A man cannot even begin to understand the love of God without understanding His nature first. Also, when a man is led by the Spirit, everything the Holy Spirit says to him can be backed up by, or exist in harmony with, the Scriptures.

Thus, by knowing your Bible through the wisdom of the Spirit, you will be able to walk uprightly as you are commanded. Yet do not merely study your Bible, but practice it diligently as well. Obedience to the faith justifies a man, and wisdom is determined not by knowledge itself, but by the capacity to execute it appropriately. For knowledge is merely stored information while wisdom is the ability to apply it accurately.

But how can you have accurate application without the pursuit of knowledge first? Therefore, I exhort you, brother, to know your Bible. For in it is contained the wisdom of God. And as it is written,

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” 2 Timothy 2:15

In these pages we will rightly divide the word of truth for daily application. Read the outlined sections in your Bible and be attentive to His voice while He teaches, that you may grow in understanding the voice of God and learn the lesson at hand.

Every book has practical use for a daily walk. From Genesis to Revelation, there is nothing lacking that a man needs. Like milk to a babe, or bread to a starving man, so the word of God nourishes our souls. Yet for every New Testament teaching, there is an Old Testament picture. As it is written,

“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” 1 Corinthians

10:11

In this book we will examine the lives of the men of the Bible. Some of these men were true bad boys, without an ounce of godliness in them, while others were righteous but portrayed a bad boy's heart at some moment in life. Each of these pictures presents a practical lesson so that we can learn from their mistakes.

Rejecting Life's Pleasures to Embrace the Lord

Esau

“Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. And Esau said to Jacob, ‘Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary.’ Therefore his name was called Edom.

“But Jacob said, ‘Sell me your birthright as of this day.’

“And Esau said, ‘Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?’

“Then Jacob said, ‘Swear to me as of this day.’

“So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.” Genesis 25:29–34

“Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.” Hebrews 12:12–17

For a morsel of food, Esau gave up his birthright. While this was a literal, historical situation that occurred, but one can also draw a strong parable from it. Sometimes men do the same as Esau, but in a spiritual sense.

Our birthright is our salvation in Christ. Rather than tending to our relationship with Him as we ought, sometimes we get distracted with the affairs of this life. We make goals and work hard to start families, take care of ourselves and our families, try to make our wives happy, and raise our children; and in the process of this, sometimes we forget the will of God.

We end up feeding our flesh with the desires of its heart, or we feed our families with the desires of their hearts rather than putting God first. So for a “morsel of food,” we forget our birthright in Jesus. Our relationship slowly fades away into

a thirty-minute devotion, a Sunday service, and maybe a Bible study once a week. But the Lord wants much more from us.

Consider your wife for a moment. How would your wife feel if you locked her in a closet and had nothing to do with her emotionally, physically, or spiritually almost every day. Day in and day out, you refuse to communicate with her except for thirty minutes a day, or maybe a few moments in the mornings and evenings.

This is how God feels, if not worse, when we lock Him in the closet of our hearts and give the affairs of this life more attention than we give Him. While a daily devotion is important, if it's all we do, we forget the greater points of a relationship with Him. Don't have a devotion and continue your day afterward.

When you have this mindset, you leave Jesus in the secret place to go about "your" day, forgetting that each of your days belongs to God. Don't continue "your" day when you leave but, rather, continue His day as you surrender daily to the will of God.

Abide and meditate on His presence throughout the day and sensitize yourself to His voice. He has plans for you daily. If you aren't paying attention, you won't be able to fulfill them. So incline your ears, that you can hear His Spirit and obey.

Two of the best ways to do this while you're at work are prayer and worship. The workplace is probably the most difficult environment for abiding. It's a worldly environment, being full of unbelievers who distract you through idle speech, coarse jesting, and persecution. But if you quietly focus on the presence of God through continuous but silent prayer and worship, while ignoring the distractions around you, it will be easier to abide and pay attention to the Holy Spirit's presence and voice.

Continually seek the Lord from this point forward. Grow in your character and your relationship with Him, making each moment a precious moment with His Spirit. The nearer to His Spirit you become, the more like Him you'll be.

When you draw near to the Lord, He conforms your heart to His. Rather than being dragged down by the world, or burdening your relationship with Him through fleshly desires, you'll become a truly spiritual and disciplined man of God.

Balaam

“So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees for divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam and repeated Balak’s words to him. He said to them, ‘Spend the night here, and I will bring word back to you as the LORD may speak to me.’ And the leaders of Moab stayed with Balaam. Then God came to Balaam and said, ‘Who are these men with you?’ Balaam said to God, ‘Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent word to me, “Behold, there is a people who came out of Egypt and they cover the surface of the land; now come, curse them for me; perhaps I may be able to fight against them and drive them out.”’ God said to Balaam, ‘Do not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.’ So Balaam arose in the morning and said to Balak’s leaders, ‘Go back to your land, for the LORD has refused to let me go with you.’ The leaders of Moab arose and went to Balak and said, ‘Balaam refused to come with us.’

“Then Balak again sent leaders, more numerous and more distinguished than the former. They came to Balaam and said to him, ‘Thus says Balak the son of Zippor, “Let nothing, I beg you, hinder you from coming to me; for I will indeed honor you richly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Please come then, curse this people for me.”’ Balaam replied to the servants of Balak, ‘Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, either small or great, contrary to the command of the LORD my God. Now please, you also stay here tonight, and I will find out what else the LORD will speak to me.’ God came to Balaam at night and said to him, ‘If the men have come to call you, rise up and go with them; but only the word which I speak to you shall you do.’

“So Balaam arose in the morning, and saddled his donkey and went with the leaders of Moab.

“But God was angry because he was going, and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the way as an adversary against him. Now he was riding on his donkey and his two servants were with him.” Numbers 22:7–22 NASB

“They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man’s voice restrained the madness of the prophet.” 2 Peter 2:15–16

“Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.” Jude 1:11

Balaam had no interest in cursing the children of God. He refused money and everything they offered. But when God said that he could go if the princes called him, he jumped on his opportunity. If you read carefully, you'll notice that the princes didn't call him to go, yet he saddled his donkey and left.

It was apparent that he was hearing what he wanted to hear and submitted to temptation. God said, "It's okay to go, but only if they call you." But all Balaam heard was, "It's okay to go." In the end he let his temptation for worldly gain get the best of him.

Likewise, the things of this world can tempt us. If we become distracted by them and run after them, we are no better than Balaam. Examine yourself for this. At first thought, you may find nothing, but pray and ask the Lord to reveal your heart to yourself. Maybe you've been saving up for that boat or that vacation but never surrendered the matter to the Lord. Or maybe you've been looking for a new job and aren't letting the Holy Spirit lead you to your workplace. Let God choose what you should or shouldn't do.

It isn't that these things are wrong but, rather, that the Lord will give them to us in His own way and His own timing.

If we don't give God the opportunity to lead, then we're choosing to walk by desire, which is sin. All sin begins with desire, for as it is written,

"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." James 1:14–15

If we live by the desires of the flesh, then we are succumbing to its lusts. Then, when we have the ability to obtain our lusts, we jump on the opportunity, being excited to fulfill our desires while forgetting to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us in each of our steps. And as it is written,

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." 1 John 2:15–17

Examine your own heart right now and determine if you've been living for the will of God. You aren't living for His will if you aren't surrendering to His Holy Spirit's guiding hand. Ask yourself right now if you're being led by the Spirit in each of your steps. If you're not, or aren't certain what it looks like to be led by

the Spirit, then pray right now for wisdom.

We are led by His Spirit when we incline our ears to His voice, hear it, and obey. This isn't an occasional thing we do when we transition from one season to another. Rather, this is daily, and fundamental to a Christian walk.

As a man, you are called to be a leader. If you're not ready to lead right now, God calls you to grow in His Spirit and develop character in Jesus. You must seek the Lord daily and increase in the wisdom of God. Pick up your Bible and take the study of His word seriously. Learn to walk in His Holy Spirit daily.

You can never lead until you learn to be led by the Holy Spirit. You can never be led by the Spirit if you're focusing on your own desires rather than on the voice of God.

Gehazi

“But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, ‘Look, my master has spared Naaman this Syrian, while not receiving from his hands what he brought; but as the LORD lives, I will run after him and take something from him.’ So Gehazi pursued Naaman. When Naaman saw him running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him, and said, ‘Is all well?’

“And he said, ‘All is well. My master has sent me, saying, “Indeed, just now two young men of the sons of the prophets have come to me from the mountains of Ephraim. Please give them a talent of silver and two changes of garments.”’” 2 Kings 5:20–22

Like Balaam, Gehazi greedily ran after the things of this world. In the end he was cursed for his effort. Unlike Gehazi, we should each live earnestly for the will of God, setting aside the desires of the flesh to honor Christ in all things. Even as we read,

“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

“But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.” 1 Timothy 6:9–11

And as it is also written,

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.” 1 John 2:15–17

Set your eyes on Jesus, allowing Him to lead your life. How can you lead your family if Christ doesn’t lead you?

Fatal Presumption

It is written,

“But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the LORD, and he shall be cut off from among his people.” Numbers 15:30

And also,

“Now the man who acts presumptuously and will not heed the priest who stands to minister there before the LORD your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall put away the evil from Israel. And all the people shall hear and fear, and no longer act presumptuously.” Deuteronomy 17:12–13

Presumption is sin, plain and simple. For even David said,

“Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression.” Psalm 19:13

Notice that the scripture finishes with calling presumption a “great transgression.” Presumption may not seem like a big deal, but the Bible calls it one of the great transgressions. So take to heart to wait on the Lord. While this may be difficult, especially if you’re pressed to make a decision or in the midst of a trial, God will always speak in His perfect time. Sometimes, however, He doesn’t speak at first, to test you; so bear this in mind and wait patiently for God, that you may pass the test.

Saul's Blunders

“And some of the Hebrews crossed over the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead.

“As for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. Then he waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. So Saul said, ‘Bring a burnt offering and peace offerings here to me.’ And he offered the burnt offering. Now it happened, as soon as he had finished presenting the burnt offering, that Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might greet him.

“And Samuel said, ‘What have you done?’

“Saul said, ‘When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, then I said, “The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD.” Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering.’

“And Samuel said to Saul, ‘You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.’” 1 Samuel 13:7–14

“Now the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, ‘I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments.’ And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the LORD all night. So when Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, it was told Samuel, saying, ‘Saul went to Carmel, and indeed, he set up a monument for himself; and he has gone on around, passed by, and gone down to Gilgal.’” 1 Samuel 15:10–12

Saul acted hastily rather than waiting patiently for God’s timing. Perhaps Samuel was hindered for this reason, that Saul would be tested. Sometimes when a trial is at our door, we’re tempted to use our own logic or to operate from fear rather than faith. Faith, as the Scriptures tell us, comes by hearing the word of God. If

the Lord hasn't spoken to you to lead you, then you shouldn't step out. Be anxious for nothing but, rather, let God establish His will in His perfect timing.

In Saul's case, he tried to deflect blame and aimed it at Samuel. We as men must resist pride and admit our own faults in order to grow. Saul also may have felt justified in that he was trying to honor the Lord with a sacrifice. There are many in the churches who teach, "If it's a good thing, then just go and do it!" rather than waiting on the will of the Lord to be established. Such people are honoring the Lord through their own works. God is pleased through obedience alone, not by the things we do for Him.

Examine yourself in this. Have you been trying to make God happy while not being led by His voice to do so? Wait patiently for His voice, that you may not operate through assumptions. To work according to an assumption is presumption, which the Bible calls sin. As it is written,

"But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the LORD, and he shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him." Numbers 15:30–31

If we act without the Lord confirming His will to us, then we'll act in our own will. We cannot be justified by living according to our own desires. Justification comes by repenting of this attitude and choosing to obey the Holy Spirit instead.

Notice also that Saul had once walked uprightly; then, as the Lord said according to 1 Samuel 15:10–12, "he has turned back from following me, and has not performed my commandments."

This happens to some men today—not that they intend to do so, as Saul did, yet they choose to be distracted by the scores of things around them rather than taking their relationship with God more seriously. They would rather watch the football game than study the word, or watch a movie than worship. The desires of their own hearts have overtaken them, and it's grieving the Lord.

Examine yourself and be honest. Could this be happening with you? If so, then take God out of the closet of your heart. Stop being self-willed and locking that closet door, thereby keeping His Spirit from communicating the Father's will. Allow God full sovereignty over your life.

For God calls you to obey His commandment to love. And as Jesus said,

“You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.” John 15:14

We aren’t justified by hearing His commandments and the words of the Spirit but, rather, by doing them. As we also read,

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” James 1:22

As we know, Jesus presented us the parable of building a house on the rock or on the sand. Those who obey His voice are the ones who build safely on a foundation of stone. But if we don’t obey the Spirit and, instead, live according to our own hearts, we will be tempted into vain self-glory: “Look what I have achieved for myself!” In truth, when we use such words, we have achieved our lofty goals ourselves—without the help of God—because we have accomplished them outside the will of God. Thus, rather than glorifying God, Saul made a monument to himself.

Examine your own life. Are you creating monuments to yourself? Are you honoring yourself with your words? Sometimes, as men, we become tempted into pridefully declaring our own works or puffing up our achievements rather than glorifying God. Therefore, determine to keep the love of Jesus on your tongue today. Let everything that comes out of your mouth benefit the glory of God. Let the Spirit be with your mouth and with your heart, that you may seek the Father’s glory in all you do. For Jesus said,

“He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him.” John 7:18

Uzziah's Error

“But when he became strong, his heart was so proud that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the LORD his God, for he entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. Then Azariah the priest entered after him and with him eighty priests of the LORD, valiant men. They opposed Uzziah the king and said to him, ‘It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful and will have no honor from the LORD God.’ But Uzziah, with a censer in his hand for burning incense, was enraged; and while he was enraged with the priests, the leprosy broke out on his forehead before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the altar of incense. Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he was leprous on his forehead; and they hurried him out of there, and he himself also hastened to get out because the LORD had smitten him. King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death; and he lived in a separate house, being a leper, for he was cut off from the house of the LORD. And Jotham his son was over the king’s house judging the people of the land.” 2 Chronicles 26:16–21 NASB

Uzziah’s error was when he chose to be a priest even though he wasn’t a Levite. Those who were born into the Levitical line were allowed to be priests while those who weren’t couldn’t serve in that manner before the Lord. The priest’s job represented a good work, but this did not mean that Uzziah’s desire was good. Although he desired a good thing, he didn’t desire God’s will.

This happens often among believers today. “I read that being a bishop is a good work! So I’m going to go be one,” some say in their hearts without being led by God to do so. But this is how false teachers are made. Being a bishop, pastor, priest, or preacher is a gift from God. If God hasn’t called you through the voice of His Holy Spirit to be a minister or join ministry, then you’d be sinning to do it of your own will. A gift suggests that it must be given; otherwise, it wouldn’t be a gift.

Some do not understand this concept, and as a result they steal the gifts of their own will rather than allowing the Spirit of God to lead them into their role. Those who are led by God desire the will of God. Those who take the kingdom by force, through self-will, glorify themselves.

While you as a man are called to lead in Christ, first you must be led to your position as a leader. As we mentioned previously, if you cannot be led by the

Lord, how can you lead others in Christ? Follow behind the Lord, eagerly pursuing the will of God.

The Transgressions

Sin has always been the plague of humanity. By it we fell, and because of it we die. Yet we know that there is hope through Jesus Christ our Lord to be free from sin. In Him we have redemption, and because of Him we have strength to overcome all things.

Although we know this, there are times in the Christian life when we may struggle with overcoming a particular issue. Each of us has our own individual strengths and our individual weaknesses. But it is by the strength of Jesus that we overcome.

There is no true Christian who automatically accepts his or her sin. Before there is any major issue with sin, there is conviction at some point. When convicted, we seek to turn from our own wickedness to honor the Lord. Yet there are sins we commit at times without realizing it.

Every issue of sin is like a cockroach: Whenever one is spotted, there are more lurking behind the walls. Similarly, whenever a sin is noticed, more are always lurking in our hearts whether we see them or not. No matter how old we are in Christ, and no matter how grown we are, we always need more growth. There will always be an area in which we need growth since we're not yet perfect.

Until then, there are always issues in our hearts even if we don't realize them. In order to grow in them, we must train ourselves to look for them with humility. In order to overcome the hidden issues, we must be humble enough to admit our weaknesses when they're brought to our attention.

Sometimes, when we discover our weakness for the first time, we don't want to admit to it. Unfortunately, when we do this, we will never overcome the sin but, instead, will only justify it and hide it. Pride hides sin, but humility before Christ covers it through confession and repentance.

Now, it's not that we want to hide our sins. The statement may sound more sinister than our hearts intend it to be. But Satan subtly tempts us through the hidden issue of pride. When we can't admit a fault, the enemy steps in immediately to cement that sin. Then, when it's cemented, he moves on to cement another. One day, after many sins of which we're unaware have been cemented, we begin to notice one of them.

This one particular issue may have always been there, in some cases, but may have grown worse. Also, in some situations, the issue seems to pop up out of

nowhere, and we struggle with defeating it. When we see our sin, we want to grow, and as a result our search for strength begins. We absorb every bit of material we can in our hunt for wisdom to overcome.

Yet these sins are typically cemented and mortared together by other sins. Therefore, we must have humility to admit our weaknesses when we discover them. There is no measure of learning or wisdom that can help us overcome unless we first prepare ourselves with humility. Sometimes there is a closet full of hidden things, and when Jesus walks in the room and opens that closet, we will be surprised to see the mess that's inside.

When we seek strength to overcome, we begin searching our own hearts to find the root of the issue. When we search our own hearts, we can be sure that a myriad of other issues will be found, of which we were never before aware. Therefore, we must be humble and ready to make confession of our sins before the Lord. Every victory begins with repentance, and every confession begins with humility. In order to overcome perfectly, we must overcome every little issue that is holding the sin in place.

Like a weed, sin must be pulled up by the roots; but sometimes each sin is connected to another. Not unlike a vast root system, sin depends on more sin for balance and support. If, then, there is an issue with sin, there are more likely other sins under the surface, propping up the main issue. In order to overcome, one must pull up all the roots of the weed so that it will not return.

Nabal

“David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep. So David sent ten young men. And David said to the young men, ‘Go up to Carmel, and go to Nabal and greet him in my name. And thus you shall greet him: “Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have. I hear that you have shearers. Now your shepherds have been with us, and we did them no harm, and they missed nothing all the time they were in Carmel. Ask your young men, and they will tell you. Therefore let my young men find favor in your eyes, for we come on a feast day. Please give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David.”’”

“When David’s young men came, they said all this to Nabal in the name of David, and then they waited. And Nabal answered David’s servants, ‘Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters. Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers and give it to men who come from I do not know where?’” 1 Samuel 25:4–11 ESV

According to the Law, when a feast celebration comes and your neighbor doesn’t have anything to celebrate the feast to fulfill the law, you are called to give to your neighbor in need and support him in the Lord. Nabal knew the law but chose to favor his family’s wants and needs over his brother in the Lord. David’s dispute with Saul, which Nabal mentioned was really just an excuse to justify abandoning a brother in need.

Gossip in the church can be much like this. When a member has a falling out, there are some who partake in idle chatter about the individual’s possible shortcomings without having genuine knowledge about the situation. The end result is an undeserved judgment of condemnation brought on the person. How is it in keeping with the love of God to judge and condemn what we do not know? For as Jesus said,

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.” Matthew 7:1–5 ESV

Do not judge a brother, lest he be condemned. If you don't know the situation, how can you make a proper discernment regarding it? If the Holy Spirit has been working in the brother whom you are condemning, then you are at risk of condemning the work of the Holy Spirit and judging the Holy Spirit. If you judge the Spirit, then you are not on the Spirit's side but against Him and walking contrary to God. Only the Holy Spirit can confirm innocence or guilt with perfection. So rely on the Spirit for discernment, and do not condemn a brother or judge a situation you do not understand. However, if it is certain that your brother is in sin, you are required by God to rebuke and convict him lovingly for repentance's sake.

We know that Nabal condemned David, and afterward God struck and condemned him. Is this something we should take lightly? Those who become the adversary of a brother in the Lord become the adversary of God. If we condemn and judge a sinning brother how shall we escape His judgment? For you know the Jesus Himself said,

“Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.” (Luke 6:37–38)

And as it is furthermore written,

“For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.” (James 2:13)

The Scriptures are clear. If you do not show mercy, neither will you be shown mercy. But those who lovingly convict a brother and lead him to repentance come into agreement with the Lord that His mercy is perfect. The word does, however, tell us that there is a right time to judge. As we read,

“For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” 1 Corinthians 5:3–5
ESV

When some from among the brethren refuse to repent, they should be handed over for repentance. While this process may appear condemning, it is actually for their benefit, that they can be made right with God. Then, after they repent, we are called to forgive them and overlook their transgression even as Christ does. But those who will not overlook a transgression that God has forgiven

show contempt for the blood of Jesus Christ. How can a man be saved if he lives contrary to the love of God and shows contempt for the blood of Jesus, which saves him? Therefore, those who condemn the repentant find themselves receiving the same judgment from God. For this reason, the Bible says,

“Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!” James 5:9

Another offense Nabal committed was that he withheld food from a needy man on a feast day. David was required by God to celebrate the day in accordance with the law, but was unable to do so due to his circumstances. Likewise, if a brother or sister is trying to fulfill the work of God, being led by God to the work he or she is doing, we are called to support our fellow believer. Should the work of God cease due to money? Let not carnality keep you from supporting the work of Christ.

For if God has put you in the position to help a cause and He has called you to help, then you are required to do so. Yet I have heard some say, “I don’t hear God telling me to help,” when they haven’t even prayed about the situation. Such people haven’t heard the Lord tell them *not* to help, either. God won’t keep silent. They aren’t hearing God because they aren’t giving Him the chance to speak. But in truth, they don’t want to help and hence refuse to pray.

Moreover, if they aren’t being supportive of the kingdom, they are tearing it down to live for themselves. If God is calling them to help and they aren’t hearing Him because they refuse to listen, then the work of God won’t be accomplished due to their sin. God doesn’t need us, and He doesn’t need money; however, as Jesus said,

“...whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.” Mark 9:41

You will be rewarded for supporting the kingdom. If God won’t allow a person’s work in Christ to materialize because you won’t give to them, then it is obvious that the work is not only his or hers but yours also. For their work is to go into the field, and your work is to support them from behind the lines. After all, war is not waged by warriors only. There are also those who cook food, heal the injured, gather information, and so forth. A battle against the forces of darkness requires not only warriors at the front but also supporters who remain at the base.

Therefore, let the warriors march into the field while you help to send them there. That God blesses us for coming alongside the work of the Holy Spirit is obvious. For we also read,

“‘Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.’” Malachi 3:8–10

God intends to bless you for your works in Christ. Don’t rob yourself of a blessing! Give as God leads you, but be earnest about seeking His voice, that you can be led. If there are any in need, regardless of a work they may or may not be doing, it is your responsibility to ease their burdens. As it is written,

“And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.” Titus 3:14

And also,

“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 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. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” Galatians 6:7–10 ESV

Each of us *must* give to our brethren in need. If we have excess, then we can’t let others go without daily necessities. This goes in line with the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. Would you help yourself when you have need? If you didn’t have a home, would you look for one? If you needed a job, would you search for one? If you needed one month of rent money before being homeless and losing everything, would you look for a way to pay rent? Then do these things for your brethren. Do not feed a homeless person a meal but then leave him or her homeless. For the word says,

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So

also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” James 2:14–17 ESV

And as the scripture later says,

“Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.” James 2:20–24 ESV

Let your faith be perfected through practicing the love of God. As we also read,

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love” Galatians 5:6

Faith without works is dead and useless. Now, some argue that works are not necessary due to what they read in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. However, the Epistle to the Ephesians is discussing the uselessness of practicing the law while James is communicating the necessity to obey. Works of obedience are necessary, and if any do not obey the gospel, they cannot be saved. Neither can the man who refuses to walk in love. As Jesus Himself said,

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’

“Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Matthew 25:41–46 ESV

For this reason Jesus previous said,

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of

lawlessness.” Matthew 7:21–23 ESV

Not all who calls the Lord “my Lord” enter the kingdom, but those who walk in the love of God do. What is lawlessness? Disobedience to the Lord. How is the Law fulfilled? By love. Therefore, it is easy to perceive that Matthew 25 goes hand-in-hand with Matthew 7, which tells us that faith working through love is necessary for justification. For if you say, “Faith is enough!” Jesus may ask you, “What did you do with your faith to make it valid?”

So the question becomes “How have you been practicing the love of God lately?” Take it seriously and obey the Spirit. Look into others’ needs and perfectly fill them, even as Jesus would do for you. If you truly desire to become the image of Jesus’ love toward your brethren, then be diligent to apply the love He has for you to nourish and nurture you.

David

“It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem.

“Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king’s house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, ‘Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?’ Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house. And the woman conceived; so she sent and told David, and said, ‘I am with child.’

“Then David sent to Joab, saying, ‘Send me Uriah the Hittite.’ And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah had come to him, David asked how Joab was doing, and how the people were doing, and how the war prospered. And David said to Uriah, ‘Go down to your house and wash your feet.’ So Uriah departed from the king’s house, and a gift of food from the king followed him. But Uriah slept at the door of the king’s house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. So when they told David, saying, ‘Uriah did not go down to his house,’ David said to Uriah, ‘Did you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?’

“And Uriah said to David, ‘The ark and Israel and Judah are dwelling in tents, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamped in the open fields. Shall I then go to my house to eat and drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing.’

“Then David said to Uriah, ‘Wait here today also, and tomorrow I will let you depart.’ So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. Now when David called him, he ate and drank before him; and he made him drunk. And at evening he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house.

“In the morning it happened that David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, ‘Set Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retreat from him, that he may be struck down and die.’ So it was, while Joab besieged the city, that he assigned Uriah to a place where he knew there were valiant men. Then the men of the city came out and fought with

Joab. And some of the people of the servants of David fell; and Uriah the Hittite died also.” 2 Samuel 11:1–17

The first thing to notice is that David was supposed to go out to war. It was the custom of the kings, and had he done so, he would not have sinned. Idle hands lead to sin, but if we keep our hands busy with the work of the Lord, they won’t be doing the works of the enemy. And if your hands are lifted up in praise, how will they stoop down to sin?

The second thing to notice is that God offered David a way out when the men asked, “Isn’t she the wife of Uriah?” They were reminding the king that she was off-limits. But in the end, David succumbed to his temptations.

If we resist the devil, he will flee from us. But the real question is, “When you’re in the heat of the moment, why doesn’t rebuking the devil keep you from sin?” Because when you’re tempted, it’s really your own heart that you’re fighting. If you resist yourself, you’re always going to lose. No measure of strength or resolve can help you win the battle. Remember that it is written,

“And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’...” 2 Corinthians 12:9

It is Jesus who must fight the sin through us. He battled it on the cross, and He should be the one battling it in our hearts. It’s not that we shouldn’t resist sin but, rather, that we should allow Jesus to resist it while we flee from temptations. As it is written,

“Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” 2 Timothy 2:22

The original Greek word for ‘flee’ is pheugō, which literally means “to escape, flee, or run away.” We are called to lock in battle with Satan, but when it comes to temptation, we need to stop fighting and simply run away. But to where do we flee?

This can be answered by another question: What’s the farthest thing from sin? The Lord, no doubt. During times of temptation, we must run from our lustful desires and straight into the arms of God. When we abide in the Spirit and walk in the Spirit, sin is impossible. How so? Because the Holy Spirit doesn’t sin. If people say they are operating in the Spirit yet are sinning at the same time, they are calling the Spirit capable of sin, which is blaspheming the Spirit.

The origin of all sin begins with the desires of our hearts. As it is written,

“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.” James 1:14–15

If we listen to our desires, we will deceive ourselves and sin. As we also read,

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” Jeremiah 17:9

Therefore, we must guard our hearts and our minds and dictate the direction in which they go throughout the day and every day. We should not be slaves to our own hearts and our own thoughts, lest we be given over to idle minds and idle works. When one has an idle mind, Satan is able to step in and offer temptation. But if we keep a focus on the Lord, temptation will be less likely.

Similarly, when in the heat of the moment we can overcome by refocusing on the Lord. We are tempted when we take our eyes off the Lord to desire something else—as David did with Bathsheba. Rather than keeping his eyes fixed on the work of the Lord in the moment when kings were supposed to go to war, he sat on his roof and stared at a woman.

This is similar to Peter, who was able to walk on the water when looking at Jesus but fell in when the noise of the wind and the waves distracted him. Idleness distracted David; something else could be distracting you. Every idol begins as an idle distraction. If you choose to divert your attention from abiding in the Spirit, then you will fall into temptation and lusts.

Peter’s water walk has significant meaning in many aspects of the Christian’s walk, in regard to issues of faith, trials, and also sin. Ultimately, every time we take our eyes off of God, we’ll fall into our circumstances. If you’re being tempted, you’ll take your eyes off of Jesus and fall into temptation. If a circumstance requires you to have faith and you take your eyes off of how God is working in the situation, you will fall into the waves of doubt. If you’re in a trial and take your eyes off of God, how He’s in control, and how He’s working love through the situation, you’ll be overcome by waves of grief, fear, and doubt.

But by keeping our eyes on the Lord and by walking in faith, we can overcome all things. Faith is necessary for overcoming sin. We must have faith not merely in the fact that Jesus saved us but also in the power the Holy Spirit has to overcome sin. Even as it is written,

“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” 1 John 5:4

When in the heat of the moment, stop reflecting on the temptation and force yourself to pray. Focus on the Lord with all your heart. It will be a battle, as temptation always is. Nevertheless, focus hard on the Holy Spirit and pray for strength. Now, as you pray, if you do not have faith that God will give you strength, you will not be given strength. But if you have faith that God will deliver you from your own heart, He will. Therefore, Beloved, pray that God would deliver you from yourself.

Pray also as Jesus exhorted us to pray,

“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one...”
Matthew 6:13

When you’re being tempted, focus on the Lord and pray, “Lord, lead me not into temptation but deliver me from this—be my strength in my weakness”; and have faith that He will be your strength. If you do not have faith, then it will not happen. Furthermore, according to the measure of your faith, so it will be for you.

Continue to pray like this until you feel His strength. Then, when you feel strengthened, move your thoughts away from the tempting thought. Begin to worship and reflect on the Lord’s goodness. Concentrate on the Holy Spirit and stay focused on His presence.

While you do this, Satan will continue to plant seeds of that tempting thought back in your head. For as long as he thinks he can wrangle you back into struggling with sin, he will continue to plant seeds. But if you continue to force yourself to focus on the Holy Spirit and persist in faith, you’ll overcome. Then, as you continue to meditate on the Spirit’s presence, the temptation will fizzle out altogether.

That we should pray for God to be our strength in our weakness is evident. For it is written,

“And he said unto me, ‘My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness...’ 2 Corinthians 12:9

If you do this by faith, the method really is that simple. For God said,

“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:30

Sometimes we make things harder than they need to be. This sounds oversimplified, but rest assured, it’s not. God promised us strength for victory, so our victory comes through approaching God the right way and through faith.

Indeed, our faith is our victory. It is God's immediate desire and will for you to overcome sin. Therefore, have faith that He will give you strength as you pray for it. This is not one of those cases when you need to say, "Your will be done." Beloved, His will was done at Calvary!

When Jesus said, "It is finished," He meant that *it was finished!* God already gave you everything you need to overcome. Every tool and every weapon of war you'll need to win this battle has been laid in your lap already. Therefore, have faith and walk in it. Seek to live in the Holy Spirit and continuously walk in Him. When you are tempted, return your focus to Him and He will give you strength according to your faith.

The last error David committed in this case was to try to hide his sin. We must not cover up our sins but, rather, openly confess them, that they may be covered by the blood of Jesus. If we ignore conviction, then sin will become a pattern, and no one is justified through sin but by repentance.

But God doesn't call us to grace only to stumble and pick ourselves up over and over again. He calls us to more than grace; He calls us to the power of His resurrecting life, which overcomes all sin through the Spirit of Jesus.

Solomon

“For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.

“So the LORD became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the LORD had commanded. Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, ‘Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant.’” 1 Kings 11:4–11

Solomon began as a mighty man of God, only to be turned away by his worldly wives. We already know the peril of being unequally yoked, however there is much that a man of God can learn from Solomon’s mistake.

Firstly, a man should lead his wife by being led by God. That way, both he and his wife will be led by God and not the man himself, nor the woman. How can a man be led if he allows his heart to be distracted? While a husband should please His wife, he should do so with reverence for God’s daily will. Being led by God and pleasing the Lord must come above pleasing your wife. God will lead you in how you should bless her daily, but you must put your relationship with Him first.

It is easy to start out in marriage on fire for God, only to slowly be distracted by pleasing your wife, raising children, working to provide, and other processes of life. Then, after you are being distracted from God, the disagreements and divisions begin. Unfortunately, some Christians learn from popular books to coexist in marriage rather than to surrender the wheel back to the Lord.

Let God drive your marriage. He brought your family together, so now let Him carry it through every moment of life. Center everything you are on Jesus. The nearer you draw to the Lord, the more like Him you’ll become. If God is the

center of your marriage, then the closer to Jesus you are and the closer to each other you'll be.

But if you allow the process of life to distract you, the idols will likely rise up and take over the moments you would normally have given to God. These idols tend to come from unnoticed sins and overindulgences. Solomon had plenty of these with his many wives, and in testing his heart with madness and wine. Even Solomon openly confessed in the Book of Ecclesiastes that he had held nothing back. As we read,

“I said in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure’; but surely, this also was vanity. I said of laughter—‘Madness!’; and of mirth, ‘What does it accomplish?’ I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives.

“I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds.

“So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me.

“Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my reward from all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.” Ecclesiastes 2:1–11

While there is nothing wrong with some entertainment and joy, there is a time to portray godly restraint. Do you know exactly what godly restraint looks like, biblically? Be honest with yourself. If you don't know it perfectly, then there could be an area of life in which you are either over-restraining in self-imposed regulations or under-restraining due to a lack of knowledge.

True godly restraint comes through practicing spiritual soberness. This soberness

is merely learning to abide in the Holy Spirit at all times. Prayer, worship, and meditating on the Spirit's presence are some of the most practical methods during the busy moments of life. If we aren't intentional about reflecting on the Spirit's presence and voice, then the voice of our own hearts will grow louder and more convincing. This will result in unnoticed or unrealized patterns of sin.

Now, some such sins that go unnoticed are idleness, gluttony, pride, complacency in our walks, and living for this life rather than for Christ, among others. Idleness is a sin. If we choose to partake in idle activities not pertaining to the Lord, then we are opening a door for an idol. 'Idol' literally means "thing of nothingness." When we're idle—partaking in nothingness—we will form an idol, or a thing of nothingness.

Also, idleness goes hand-in-hand with gluttony. Most of the time when people think of gluttony, they think of someone overeating. In most cases, such gluttony comes from boredom or idleness. Think of a couch potato sipping his soda and chowing down a bag of chips.

Likewise, idleness can lead to various forms of gluttony and overindulgence in the desires of the flesh. There are, in fact, many other forms of gluttony that take place in the Christian life: gluttony in games, TV, Internet, and all manner of entertainment.

We tend to be gluttonous in our shopping patterns as well. Because of gluttony, compulsive buying is a very lucrative market in today's society. Unfortunately, we're always buying things we don't need and end up having unnecessary excess. Remember that the road to excess is always a gluttonous one.

The flesh constantly desires to be gratified. It wants to be filled with pleasure and so indulges itself in entertainment and everything that brings it joy. God gives us abundantly all things to enjoy, but let our rejoicing be in the Lord, not in the flesh. When the flesh is allowed to have its desires continually, it strengthens itself against the new creation within you.

We only have 24 hours in a day, and either we can spend our time filling the spiritual creation with Jesus, or we can fill the flesh with its desires. You have to pick one or the other, and unfortunately many people, by their conduct, prove that they prefer to gratify the flesh.

Now, there's nothing wrong with a little enjoyment and a little play here and there, with discretion. But there are some people who give themselves over to it daily and constantly. This gives a continual strength to the flesh through

rejoicing in the flesh.

When we gratify the flesh with its desires, we “feed it,” so to speak. When we feed it, it grows stronger and harder to resist. When we first begin the road to excessiveness and gluttony, our flesh is weak and easy to resist. Then, one day, we notice our sin and can’t figure out why it’s become so hard to resist. Because it’s easy to resist in the beginning, our first nature is to attempt to resist it again, only to find it difficult after we fed the flesh and gave it strength for a long time. When we begin to fail in this, we no longer know how to overcome and to begin our search for wisdom.

Sin would be easier to overcome if we call it what it is and turn from it when it first begins. Although many Christians do this, not all do it in regard to the seemingly “lesser” sins. In God’s eyes, however, all sin is alike. Sin is sin, and Jesus hates it. It was on account of sin that He was crucified and because of your sin that He died. He endured the cross not so you can continue to sin or to justify it. Rather, He died so that you could be free from it forever, having power over it and being justified by His love, grace, and blood.

The reason why these lesser sins are more common is because of modern conveniences and the heart of the believer. They justify themselves in saying, “What’s wrong with a little entertainment?” But a little here and a little there adds up to a whole lot in the end. Now you should ask yourself, “What do I spend more time doing?”

Do you seek to be entertained and buy whatever you feel like just because you can afford it, whether or not you need it? Do you give more time to God or to idle things? How much time do you give to idleness and how much time do you put into seeking the Lord, praying, worshiping, meditating on the Holy Spirit, and reading the word? Seriously, count the amount of time and consider it. Many Christians spend hours every day channel-surfing, surfing the internet, and filling up their flesh to the full while just skidding by in their time with God.

“Well, I give God a twenty-minute devotion every day!” some may offer in rebuttal. “Sometimes twice a day, every morning and evening!” But what defines your relationship with the Lord is not only the morning and evening but also everything you do in-between. We give entertainment hours of our attention, yet God only gets twenty minutes a day?

Whatever you spend more time with is your god. If you’re glorifying the entertainment of the flesh, then you have an idol. Change your heart, and it will transform your life. Learn to spend more time with the Lord than with idle

things. If you don't feel like doing that, then your flesh is attached to your sin and, thus, you're being complacent and justifying it.

Jesus gave up His entire life to save you. Is He asking too much by requiring you to do the same for Him? Whatever happened to carrying our crosses and dying to this life? We *must* die to this life so that we can truly live for Christ.

Because of these sins, people end up living for the here and now in this world rather than for a future and a hope in Christ. They put off in their thoughts the future for which they're reaching in Christ, and they think idly about the next entertaining thing. Such people, without realizing it, begin to live for themselves and their desires rather than for the Lord, in which case they're feeding the flesh and giving sin strength to rule over them.

Because of this state of heart, such believers end up being complacent in their walk, feeling that they "do enough" for God and are "good" with Him. Although God has grace, He isn't pleased when we constantly sin without regard for growth. He doesn't want us continually stumbling in the darkness but, rather, to be filled with the light. When a believer becomes complacent, bondage comes naturally. Then, when we have bondage, sometimes God makes us hate our sin so that we desire to grow.

Yet all of this could be avoided if a believer would grow sensitive to the voice of the Spirit and obey Him. When we sin regularly, we stop feeling conviction, not only in the sins we commit but in other sins as well.

Conviction is the voice of the Spirit. If you drown His voice out, it won't be louder in one area and quieter in another. When some people lose conviction in a particular sin, they feel as if they hear God just fine everywhere else in life. But as when you plug your ears, everything gets harder to hear. When we do this, our flesh begins to rule over us and all we hear are the desires of our own heart as the whisper of the Spirit grows increasingly faint.

Rehoboam

“And Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had gone to Shechem to make him king. So it happened, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard it (he was in Egypt, where he had fled from the presence of King Solomon), that Jeroboam returned from Egypt. Then they sent for him and called him. And Jeroboam and all Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam, saying, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy; now therefore, lighten the burdensome service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you.’

“So he said to them, ‘Come back to me after three days.’ And the people departed.

“Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who stood before his father Solomon while he still lived, saying, ‘How do you advise me to answer these people?’

“And they spoke to him, saying, ‘If you are kind to these people, and please them, and speak good words to them, they will be your servants forever.’

“But he rejected the advice which the elders had given him, and consulted the young men who had grown up with him, who stood before him. And he said to them, ‘What advice do you give? How should we answer this people who have spoken to me, saying, “Lighten the yoke which your father put on us”?’

“Then the young men who had grown up with him spoke to him, saying, ‘Thus you should speak to the people who have spoken to you, saying, “Your father made our yoke heavy, but you make it lighter on us”—thus you shall say to them: “My little finger shall be thicker than my father’s waist! And now, whereas my father put a heavy yoke on you, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!”’” 2 Chronicles 10:1–11

Rehoboam’s mistake was one some Christians commit daily without realizing it. Rather than seeking the wise council of the Holy Spirit daily, they live by opinions. They ask their friends about the proper direction to take in life and the decisions they make rather than going to God in prayer first. This they do in an attempt to confirm their thoughts, but the Lord calls us to confirm all things through the Spirit of Christ.

Also, there may be times when we’re too hard and don’t portray the gentleness of Christ as we ought. Being gentle can go against our nature sometimes,

especially when we're angry. In such moments, we may use choice words we later regret. But if we were to find each of our words in the patient and gentle love of Christ, we would build up rather than break down, edify rather than crush, and heal rather than wound. If we give in to wrath, then we'll cause more damage than good. As it is written,

"So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

"Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." James 1:19–21

Our wrath doesn't produce righteousness. However, if we allow the words of the Spirit to sink into our hearts and spill from our mouths, the love and grace of God will come naturally. So rather than dividing and tearing apart our families as Rehoboam did to his kingdom, we will build up and unify each member through love.

Jeroboam, the Son of Nebat

“And Jeroboam said in his heart, ‘Now the kingdom may return to the house of David: If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah.’

“Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, ‘It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!’ And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi.

“Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, like the feast that was in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places which he had made. So he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart. And he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and offered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense.” 1 Kings 12:26–33

God gave Jeroboam the kingdom he had through prophecy. It was as if he had forgotten this fact, however, and feared the Lord would take it away. But even if God did return the kingdom to Rehoboam, He would have likely given Jeroboam a high position for his loyalty –if he would have chosen to show loyalty. But due to fear, he made the mistake of working things out in his own wisdom.

Sometimes Christians get caught in this mindset as well. Certainly, we wouldn’t fight God as Jeroboam did, but when we fret and work a situation out in our own wisdom, we do walk contrary to Him. But no matter the circumstances of life, we should embrace the Lord’s will. If we can’t hear God, then rather than acting without Him, we should be more earnest about hearing from Him, that we may walk faithfully in His word.

The Old Prophet

“Now an old prophet dwelt in Bethel, and his sons came and told him all the works that the man of God had done that day in Bethel; they also told their father the words which he had spoken to the king. And their father said to them, ‘Which way did he go?’ For his sons had seen which way the man of God went who came from Judah. Then he said to his sons, ‘Saddle the donkey for me.’ So they saddled the donkey for him; and he rode on it, and went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak. Then he said to him, ‘Are you the man of God who came from Judah?’

“And he said, ‘I am.’

“Then he said to him, ‘Come home with me and eat bread.’

“And he said, ‘I cannot return with you nor go in with you; neither can I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place. For I have been told by the word of the LORD, “You shall not eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by going the way you came.”’

“He said to him, ‘I too am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, “Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat bread and drink water.”’ (He was lying to him.)

“So he went back with him, and ate bread in his house, and drank water.

“Now it happened, as they sat at the table, that the word of the LORD came to the prophet who had brought him back; and he cried out to the man of God who came from Judah, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD: “Because you have disobeyed the word of the LORD, and have not kept the commandment which the LORD your God commanded you, but you came back, ate bread, and drank water in the place of which the LORD said to you, ‘Eat no bread and drink no water,’ your corpse shall not come to the tomb of your fathers.”’

“So it was, after he had eaten bread and after he had drunk, that he saddled the donkey for him, the prophet whom he had brought back. When he was gone, a lion met him on the road and killed him. And his corpse was thrown on the road, and the donkey stood by it. The lion also stood by the corpse.” 1 Kings 13:11–24

The man of God was specifically warned by God not to eat food or drink water in the land of Israel. But then an old prophet came and told him to do otherwise. This old man, as a prophet of God, must have been a respected person if he had

been prophesying for a long time. However, this didn't change the fact that he misled his brother regarding the word of the Lord.

This happens often in the church today. When the Lord lays something on certain believers' hearts, rather than going to God in prayer about it, they go to their brothers and sisters at church. Then, after explaining the situation to their friends and what they think God may be calling them to do, they ask, "What do you think?" or "What's your opinion about this?" Then their friend, elder, or pastor gives them exactly that—their opinion or interpretation of the situation, not necessarily the word of the Lord.

If you think God is calling you to do something, then you need to seek confirmation from His Holy Spirit first. As it is written,

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Philippians 4:6 NASB

And also,

"For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." Romans 8:14 NASB

If God tells you to do something and you know better, why would you give others around you the opportunity to persuade you to disobey God? Even as Peter said,

"But Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge...'" Acts 4:19 ESV

Consider this wisdom and examine your own heart. Have you been seeking the opinions of others? You must judge yourself in this! Perhaps you are wondering, "What's wrong with an opinion?" But then I would ask you, "What's wrong with God's opinion?"

While others may be a great source of encouragement, if God has clearly and specifically told you to do something, you don't need to turn around and ask someone else first. God's permission is enough; you don't need theirs.

This concept goes far beyond the interpretation of God's spoken word, however. There are many Christians who ask others for their opinions and interpretations regarding Scripture. "What's your take on this passage?" or "What does this mean to you?" They may ask a friend or acquaintance in Christ.

But God's opinion is all that matters. He has promised to give you wisdom and lead you by His Spirit. As Jesus said,

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”
John 14:26 ESV

And as He also said,

“It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me...” John 6:45 ESV

Since Jesus has said these things, now would be the time for you to ask yourself how you’ve been taught by the Holy Spirit lately. Are you being led by the Spirit on a moment-by-moment basis? Do you know with absolute certainty what it looks like to be led continuously by the Spirit? Be honest with yourself, and if there is even a little bit of uncertainty, then you confess that you must grow in understanding this. But the only way to grow is to search for the appropriate wisdom with all your heart.

But now the question remains: “How does the Spirit lead and teach us, and how can one grow in being taught by Him?” The Spirit teaches us through His voice, and the more you sensitize yourself to it and grow in discerning it, the more you will grow in being led by the Spirit of God.

As a man of God, you are required to grow to the point of being able to lead others diligently in Christ. But if you struggle with discerning God’s voice and being led by Him, how can you possibly lead others through Him? No man can lead in Christ if he doesn’t understand how first to be led by Christ.

Take this to heart and grow always. Do not be like the man of God who was swayed to stop following the voice of the Spirit of God. Rather, chase after the Lord with all your heart, obeying Him always—even if that means making personal sacrifices.

Pharisees and Sadducees

1) “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.” John 5:39

The Pharisees were serious people devoted to the word of God. From youth, a Pharisee would be trained at the feet of an elder, learning the Scriptures until he knew them like the back of his hand. But two of the many things the Pharisees did wrong were misinterpreting the Scriptures and failing to practice them as they ought. Instead, they felt that study in itself would help them attain the righteousness they needed.

There are Christians who do this in their own walks, perhaps without realizing it. They go to Bible study and church every week, but when they get home, they act differently than they would in the presence of brethren. Not only should we study the word until we know it like the back of our hands, but we should also practice it diligently through the love of Christ. Those who love the Lord will take their relationships seriously by being intentional about continually drawing near to Him, both in intimate knowledge and in faithful practice.

Misinterpretations come to Christians also, hence the wide array of doctrines and denominations. Those who adhere to a doctrine or a particular denomination feel in their opinion that they have found the system of belief nearest to the Lord. A faithful Pentecostal will feel his or her doctrine is superior to that of a Baptist, and a Baptist will think his or her church is nearer to truth than a Pentecostal church is. He who goes to Calvary will think his church is better than Willow. And Willow will feel the same about Calvary. Rightly does Paul preach about this when he says,

“Now I say this, that each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ or ‘I am of Apollos,’ or ‘I am of Cephas,’ or ‘I am of Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” 1 Corinthians 1:12–13

Furthermore, he says,

“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not carnal?”

“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.” 1 Corinthians 3:1–7

Christians today say, “I am of the doctrine of Charismatic, or Evangelical, or Southern Baptist,” and forget that their identity is in Christ and that they are called to be like-minded in all things. It’s as if we have forgotten that we are a family, and have become more concerned about opinion and personal thoughts. Even those who are in a particular sect or adhere to a church doctrine still have their own interpretations. Thus, each person follows God in his or her own way, yet the Lord commands that we follow His Holy Spirit. God has not called us to interpretation but to wisdom and truth.

But how do we find the truth? Through total surrender and complete submission to the Holy Spirit. Listen carefully to His voice, and He will explain to you in plain words what the Scriptures mean when you read them.

2) “How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?—but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Matthew 16:11–12

Pharisees veered off-course when they inserted their own thoughts and interpretations into how the word should be practiced. These, over time, were slowly compiled into the Mishnayot and Talmud—the major doctrinal interpretation of modern rabbinical Jews—which was completed in AD 200. These oral interpretations had begun around 200 BC in Alexandria Egypt, with the formation of the first Sanhedrin, and were in full use by the days of Jesus. The Pharisees had been practicing their personal beliefs for over 200 years by the time Jesus came on the scene. So the generations held onto the ideas and beliefs of their parents and elders, rather than allowing the Holy Spirit to direct the process. Thus, false doctrine had overtaken the Jews.

Now, in this modern era the churches are doing the same by clinging to the beliefs and traditions of former leaders of Christian thought, rather than allowing the Holy Spirit to direct them to truth. We should not be looking back at the interpretations of former leaders and scholars but, rather, clinging to the interpretation the Holy Spirit gives us here and now. For it is written,

“But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me

is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Galatians 1:11–12

Like Paul, the gospel must come to us as the Holy Spirit reveals it. For we must not be the disciples of men but of Jesus. And as Jesus said,

“It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.” John 6:45

Jesus made it clear that we must be taught by God. And how are we taught by Him? Through His Holy Spirit. As it is also written,

“These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” 1 Corinthians 2:13

Does the Spirit lie? Never. Can He be wrong? Never. Always and in everything, the word of the Lord is perfect. Why, then, would we seek others’ opinions of the word and not the Holy Spirit’s? Why would we live according to our own opinions or others’ interpretations and traditions? Let each of us repent of this, remembering that our identity is in Jesus. For the Lord made it clear that the truth can and will be obtained by believers if they become serious about seeking it from the Spirit of God. But does the Spirit really lead us to truth? As Jesus said,

“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.” John 16:13

Examine your own heart at this time. How is the Holy Spirit teaching you and leading you in your own personal journey with Christ? Become sensitive to His voice and let Him determine how your walk with Him should look.

There are many in the church who teach that when you look at a scripture, you must ask yourself, “What does this mean for me?” But this approach opens the door to personal interpretations and allows believers to follow the dictates of their own heart without realizing it. Such people are becoming their own gods by determining for themselves what the will of God should look like. Thus, they are really following their own will, even if they aren’t intending to do so.

It is not your place to determine what the word of God means. When the Lord wrote it, He meant it only one way. It is the Holy Spirit who must interpret the Scriptures to you. He will show you on a moment-by-moment basis how to

apply the word in your life through conviction and His voice. So do not be given over to interpreting the Scripture the way you see fit, but allow the Holy Spirit to communicate the meaning to you.

Grow in sensitivity to His voice and diligently obey Him, no matter how small His whispers may be.

3) “Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, ‘Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?’” Mark 7:5

As we mentioned, the Pharisees were more concerned with the interpretations of their fathers than with living according to the leading of the Spirit of God.

4) “Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue...” John 12:42

The mistake they made was fearing man above God. But as it is written,

“The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe.” Proverbs 29:25

And as Paul said,

“For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.” Galatians 1:10

We likewise must not hide our light just because others may stand against us. It would have been better for them to be dishonored and kicked out of the Sanhedrin yet remain honored by the Lord. Let each of us not care what others think but, rather, continually be the image of God’s love and purity, making confession to Christ in all things.

Peter

“Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house, and Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, ‘This man also was with him.’ But he denied it, saying, ‘Woman, I do not know him.’ And a little later someone else saw him and said, ‘You also are one of them.’ But Peter said, ‘Man, I am not.’ And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, ‘Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.’ But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are talking about.’ And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly.” Luke 22:54–62 ESV

While we may not flat-out deny our Lord, there are some in the Church who hide their light for fear of persecution. Yet Jesus exhorts us to raise His light on high. As we read,

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 5:14–16, ESV

Now, there are still others who hide their light and then justify this, saying, “I am becoming like the world to let the world in.” But I would exhort such people to shine and not burn. Those who are of the world live in destructive, fleshly self-will, and it is easy to be influenced to act like them. You are the temple of God and must remain sanctified and holy. You are commanded to be set apart for Jesus’ purpose, to shine the light of Christ, not to burn yourself—the temple—to the ground with worldly actions. When some claim we must become like the world, they cite scriptures showing that Jesus spent time with sinners and tax collectors. But Jesus didn’t act like those sinners; instead, He said,

“And when the scribes and Pharisees saw Him eating with the tax collectors and sinners, they said to His disciples, ‘How is it that He eats and drinks with tax collectors and sinners?’ When Jesus heard it, He said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call

the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” Mark 2:16–17

Jesus therefore called them to repentance. He showed them the difference between Himself and them, by which they were able to perceive their need for Him. You also show the world the difference between you and them by being like Christ. The Lord and sin cannot occupy the same space. His nature is as far from a sinner as the east is from the west. So show unbelievers the Grand Canyon-sized difference between them and the Lord by being the image of His love.

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.” Ephesians 5:8–13

The original Greek word for ‘expose’ is *elegchō*, which means “to convict, or reprimand severely.” Through the love and kindness of Christ, convict those who walk in darkness. It was His kindness that convicted you and led you to salvation, and it will do the same for others as well.

So rather than becoming like the world, stand up and do as Paul exhorted Timothy:

“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate...” 1 Timothy 6:12–13

As a man of God, stand up for Jesus at all times. Make the good confession!

14 Prayers That Will Change Your Marriage Forever

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Introduction

Welcome to the rich and rewarding blessing of a God-centered marriage. Over the next fourteen days, you will be challenged to the core because you will be forced to examine yourself and your walk in Christ in a new and intense light. As you conform your marriage to God's biblical blueprint, the rewards will be infinite. However, major changes in life can require hard work and persistence, so expect to shed a little elbow grease as you learn to serve the Lord and your spouse with a renewed vitality.

Every change must begin with you. Whether your spouse may need to change more or less than you is irrelevant. God only changes those who are willing to be changed. If you change yourself, your spouse will follow. He or she will see the power of God's love working in you and will be drawn by conviction to change himself or herself as well.

Whether your marriage is struggling or amazing, these prayers will help you to fine-tune your relationship with your spouse. They will help you to get on track with the Lord's blueprint for marriage, which will forever change your life.

Over the next fourteen days, read each prayer and meditate on each study. Each study is your personal challenge to grow. Take the lessons to heart and begin to practice them. Each day, you must practice the concepts not only of that day but of all the previous days as well.

Although this book will take no more than fourteen days to read, the concepts will take a lifetime to master. Remember that it takes months to grow harvestable fruit from a plant. Expect changes in your marriage to take time as you continue in persistence. But stay in the fight, because God will win the battle for you. Self-discipline and faith are all you need.

Lord, Draw Me Nearer to You

The cause of most difficulties in a marriage is spiritual. The further your actions are from the Lord's, the further the wedge is driven into your marriage. But Jesus is the source and center of peace. So if you walk in His Spirit, He has the power to heal and restore your marriage.

He will heal your heart and heal your soul. All you need to do is become a better listener. Listen carefully to the voice of the Spirit and obey Him immediately. If you sensitize yourself to His voice, it will change your life: The more sensitive you are to His convictions, the more you'll walk in the love of God.

If Jesus is the center of your relationship, then the closer to God and the closer to each other you'll be. The more you draw near to the Lord, the more you'll become like Him. If you continually walk in the Spirit, you will bear the fruits of the Spirit. And what is the first fruit? Love.

Love cements every relationship and binds every heart together. If you're walking in the love of God, your marriage will be blessed naturally. But if you're walking in selfish desire or the nature of the flesh, your marriage will be cursed.

Examine your heart and ask yourself how you've been seeking the Lord lately. Have you been growing in Him as you should? Or have you been caught up with living life?

Have you been studying His word and growing in wisdom? Or has the 9 to 5 grind taken your attention away from the daily pursuit of wisdom?

Have you been practicing the love of God toward everyone around you? Or have you only been seeking how to further yourself or your family?

Have you been praying without ceasing as the Bible exhorts you to do? Or have you been satisfying the flesh with continual idle entertainment?

Have you been abiding in the Spirit and lifting up praise continually as the word commands you to do?

Do you know what it means to abide? Do you know when you're abiding and when you're not? If you don't know this, then take it to heart to learn immediately. You abide in the Spirit when you meditate on Him and His presence. This is best done through continual prayer and worship. If you're around a group of people or at work, then it can also be accomplished through godly,

edifying speech—such as a sermon or a conversation at Bible study—as the Holy Spirit guides your conversation.

When you feel the presence of God upon you, you're abiding in the Spirit. But when you don't feel His presence, then you're not abiding and are likely being idle, not focusing on Him, or sinning. All you have to do to remedy this is to refocus your thoughts on the Lord's presence and meditate on Him.

You can't serve God without God working in you and through you. As it is written,

“...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”
Philippians 2:13

If you want to live like Christ, then Jesus must be living not only in you but also through you. While you may have Christ in you, this doesn't mean He is always working through you. Consider sin, for example.

But God will work through you if you connect yourself to His Spirit. The Lord is always there, abiding with us, but we aren't always abiding in Him as we should. There are two types of abiding: Jesus abides in us and will never leave us or forsake us, but we are called to “abide back,” so to speak. As Jesus said,

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.” John 15:4

In this statement, Jesus begins with the call to abide in Him. Then He breaks the concept of abiding into our abidance in Him and His abidance in us. He further says that the branch cannot bear fruit of itself. Having Christ and walking in Christ are two separate things. Just because you're connected to the vine doesn't mean you're opening yourself to the enriching nourishment of the vine.

If you don't continue to walk in the Spirit, you will not bear the fruit of the Spirit. Abiding in the Spirit of Christ isn't something you do naturally even if you're born again. Although the Spirit continuously abides in you, you aren't necessarily allowing the Spirit to work through you. It would be blasphemous to say you are operating in the Spirit during the moments when you're sinning, for example.

Lawrence of Arabia was famous for his exploits against the Turks in the Arab Revolt during World War One. During his campaigns, Lawrence acquired many friends among the leaders of the Arabs. After the war, he invited them to

England, where he wined and dined them and showed them the sights and sounds of the nation. He even introduced them to the queen and Parliament. But out of all the things the Arabs saw, they were most enamored by the faucets in the hotel. In the desert, obtaining water requires a lot of work, but with a faucet, water flows out of the spout at the turn of a knob. They had never seen anything like it!

For this reason, just before they left, they acquired some plumbing tools and tried to steal the faucets. Apparently, they were under the assumption that they would be bringing flowing water to the desert. Lawrence ultimately caught them and had to explain that the faucets were connected to pipes, which were connected to a water main, which led in turn to an already existing water source that England possessed but the desert did not. After a thorough explanation, the Arabs finally understood and aborted their mission.

A Christian who does not abide is no different from these Arabs. Just because God gave you a faucet doesn't mean it will work unless you attach it to the pipes. The works of God will never come from you if the Spirit is not flowing through you.

The water of God is always flowing, but if you're not hooked up to the source, you'll never be able to water the garden of your marriage. It doesn't matter how many times you turn a Christian on or off; unless you are plugged into the Spirit, nothing will work.

But does God really call us to work? Here is what Scripture tells us:

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling...” Philippians 2:12

Furthermore,

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works...” Hebrews 10:24

To this the Scriptures add,

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment...” Philippians 1:9

How can your love abound unless you work toward it? Showing love with a sincere heart isn't legalism. Truly, if there is any work to which a Christian is

called, it is the ongoing work of love. But this work is useless without the Spirit operating through you. We cannot love with the perfect love of God unless God is loving through us. As we also read,

“Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.” 1 John 4:17

So the question is, “How are you practicing the love of God toward your spouse?” How are you allowing God to work through you? How do you know whether God truly has works in store for you?

We know this because it is written,

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10

How do you know what works He’s calling you to do? Through the voice of God. The Holy Spirit is constantly speaking to you, but the question is, “Are you listening?” Obey the Spirit and listen to His voice, and you will walk in Him as you ought. As we also read,

“To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.” Colossians 1:29

Listen to God and take it to heart to strive according to His working. Devoting yourself to the works of Christ is not a call to legalistic practice of the Scriptures. Rather, it is a call to obedience to the Holy Spirit as He teaches you how to apply the Scripture on a moment-by-moment basis.

So abide constantly, that you can hear the voice of God more clearly. Consider taking up the challenge to pray without ceasing. Don’t attempt this only to try it for a short period, but instead prepare yourself to abide continually in the Spirit. That you should pray continually is evident, for as it is written,

“Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving...” Colossians 4:2

And that we should worship continuously is also evident. For it is written,

“I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.” Psalm 34:1

And also,

“...Stand up and bless the LORD your God Forever and ever! Blessed be Your glorious name, Which is exalted above all blessing and praise!” Nehemiah 9:5

God deserves our praises. Why should you give everything else in your life our continual attention while only giving God a few minutes each morning? If anything distracts you from God, then it's an idol. If your life is sold out to Jesus, then why would the activities of life distract you from Him? Those who are sold out for Christ live every moment with Christ and for Christ. But just because Jesus is with you doesn't mean your heart is with Him as it ought to be.

If you're allowing life and entertainment to occupy all your time, then enjoying life is an idol to you. While God did make life so that it may be enjoyed, He didn't make it so it could be enjoyed without Him.

Don't allow the pleasure of your own heart to rule over you but, rather, live for the Lord's purpose. Not everything He calls you to do will be fun, and not everything will be in line with what your heart wants or what you think is right. As it is written,

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” Isaiah 55:8–9

God knows better than we do. Remember that, if you're going to live for Jesus, you are called to carry your cross daily. If you aren't doing this, then you are not living a God-directed life. We all must be led by the Lord. As it is also written,

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” Romans 8:14

Our lives will never please the Lord without Christ at the helm. If you let God direct your life, He'll bring you to places of peace. He'll also create a tightly knit bond between you and your spouse. Marriage is His invention, and if you surrender to His design and His leading, He'll bless it. But if you choose to forge your own path or listen to the advice of those who don't submit to God, it will lead down roads of regret.

Counselors who are not of Christ would tell you to conform your marriage to the American doctrine. In so doing, you may have a good marriage in the world's eyes, but those who counsel you in Christ will counsel you to conform to God's design.

Since God created marriage, wouldn't He know better than anyone else how it works? If you submit to His design, you'll have a marriage that both pleases Him and blesses you.

So learn to be led by the Lord in all you do. If your life isn't surrendered to live for God's purpose, how could your marriage be surrendered to His blueprint?

Take the time to grow in the word as well. Read your Bible and study it diligently. Take the time to read alone and to read together. Pray together also. Be equally serious about your alone time with God and your fellowship time with your spouse. Every night should be fellowship night. If your conversations reflect on the Lord and what He's doing in your life after you get home from work, then your entire night will be fellowship.

The more you fellowship with your spouse, the better your friendship will be with him or her. So take it to heart to draw near to the Lord daily; it will change your marriage.

The Prayer

Lord, I dedicate myself to walking in Your Spirit and abiding in You. I take it to heart to grow in Your word and Your virtues. Help me to practice them as I surrender to Your Spirit's guidance daily. I devote myself to daily fellowship with my spouse. Help us to keep our conversations pure and upon You.

Change My Heart, O God

God gives us certain people and circumstances in life to sharpen us through them. Your spouse is one of those people. In the first few years of marriage, your relationship will always suffer bumps and nicks. But when God heals these minor wounds, He makes you a stronger person in the process.

If you are still experiences any differences in your marriage, expect God to use them to change you. Even if they're not your fault, the Lord may still permit them to change your heart.

But if you're not willing to have your heart changed, then all they will do is create strife. So look for the lesson God may be teaching you in every season of life. If your spouse has wronged you, there are still areas in which you can grow as you wait for God to fix the situation –such as patience for example.

Don't look for ways your spouse can change, but focus on your own heart. Only speak the things they need to hear for necessary edification. If God is calling you to rebuke your spouse so that he or she may walk rightly, then do it. However, don't just look at how your spouse can grow from the situation; instead, examine your own heart.

As it is written,

“And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” Luke 3:9

And the Scriptures also tell us,

“...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.” 2 Peter 3:18

If you aren't bearing the fruits of the Spirit, then you have an account to give. So take the time to ask yourself how you've been growing in the fruits of the Spirit and how you can apply them toward your spouse.

Let's examine these fruits.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” Galatians 5:22–23

Have you been walking in the selfless, serving love of God? How have you served your spouse lately? Have you been rejoicing and worshipping in the Spirit? Have you been trying to keep peace in the home?

As we read,

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” Matthew 5:9

If you keep peace in the house, God will bless you. Peace needs to be kept both spiritually and physically. If your spouse is trying to seek the Lord and abide quietly but the kids are getting in his or her hair, then take control of the situation. Lead the children out of the room and keep them quiet so that your spouse can be intimate with the Lord. If your spouse is frustrated with the kids to the point of yelling, encourage him or her to go rest in the Spirit while you take over watching the kids. Help reduce the stress so your spouse can retain peace of heart. Wouldn't love convict you to do this? If you don't, your spouse may yell at you next.

It's a true saying that you reap what you sow. If you allow seeds of stress to be sown in your spouse, you can expect to reap accordingly at some point. Even if you didn't plant the apple tree, you know that apples fall off the tree whenever the wind blows them. If you position yourself downwind, you'll experience the fruit in a way you never intended.

If you see the fruits of stress rising up in your spouse, then as much as it depends on you, try to help him or her. Keep the peace by keeping the home clean as well. I personally find it easier to pray in a room that's tidy. If there are things strewn about, my thoughts linger on what needs to be done. No one can pray with a distracted mind, so do what is necessary to keep the house peaceful both physically and spiritually. The home is meant to be a place of rest, not wrestling.

To continue with the fruits, ask yourself how you've been longsuffering with your spouse. Have you been patient with your spouse as he or she grows in the Lord? Have you been portraying the patience of Christ in arguments?

How have you been showing kindness to your spouse? Husbands ought to consider that a woman likes a small gift every day more than a big one every once in a long while. She would prefer a rose thoughtfully picked for her daily more than two dozen given monthly. A woman needs daily affection. So how have you been providing this lately?

Wives, meanwhile, ought to consider how you've been encouraging and building up your husband. Men love compliments, affection, and help. If you're a stay-at-home mom and he works, consider having the house clean for him when he gets home. Remember that a clean environment promotes a peaceful atmosphere and if you sow peace in him, you'll reap it from him. If you want to compliment him, don't merely say something nice yet trite. Instead, think for a while to identify something you really admire about him. Then tell him from your heart what you admire about him and why. If you feel as if you can't admire him, try to remember those reasons you did when you were first married. Whether you are a husband or a wife, reflect on the good, not the negative, that you see in your spouse. Does God reflect on the negative He sees in you? Remember that He calls you to forgive seventy times seven. So forgive, and overlook the weaknesses in your spouse even as God overlooks them in you. And Jesus warned us,

"But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment...(Matthew 5:22, NKJV)

Jesus has forgiven your spouse's shortcomings. To speak evil of him or her is to speak evil of the blood of Christ. Walk in love and let it guide your heart.

Always look for ways to serve and bless your spouse. Pray that God will open your eyes, and He'll show you what to do. A good place to start would be to ask your spouse from time to time during the day if he or she needs any help with anything. Have you been practicing this? Take it to heart to be a kind and serving person as Jesus is.

How have you been growing in moral goodness? How have you been practicing the virtues of Jesus? What about faithfulness? Are there any leeches in your marriage? Is there someone who appeals more to you emotionally or physically than your spouse does? It doesn't need to be lust to be an issue of faithfulness. If you'd rather spend time with other people than with your own spouse, then you have a leech. Your spouse should be your best friend, and if he or she is not, you need to rectify that immediately.

Have you been gentle? Are your arguments gentle? Try having a gentle argument once. It's simple! It's called a discussion, in which you work out your differences of opinion to align them together with Christ's.

How have you had self-control? Have you allowed the flesh to rule over your marriage? Are you fleshly with your spouse? Do you partake in idle entertainment or become angry easily? Do you hear the Holy Spirit speaking to

you constantly, or are there thoughts that are keeping you from hearing? If you are self-disciplined to walk continually in the Spirit, you'll bear the fruits daily as you ought. Thus, the fruits come full-cycle in your marriage through self-discipline and abidance in the Spirit.

Take the time to examine your heart. Grow constantly and let God change your heart.

The Prayer

Lord, I commit myself to daily growth. Help me to obtain Your heart and to grasp Your virtues. Help me to practice them. Be my strength in my weakness, that I can focus on your Holy Spirit continually as I should. I devote myself from this day forward to practicing each of the fruits of the Spirit toward my spouse.

Lord, Help Me to Tame My Tongue

With your words you can bless, and with them you can break a spirit. And if they're not founded in love, they'll always be harmful in one way or another.

You need to take to heart what you say to your spouse. Words can divide your marriage or unify it. If you let the love of God guide your mouth, you'll be justified. But if you don't speak in love, there is an account to give, for by our words we are judged. Even as Jesus said,

“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” Matthew 12:36–37

Now, Beloved, let's consider for a moment: What justifies a man and fulfills the law? Love, no doubt. Seeing, then, that we will be justified by love and judged according to our words, it would stand to reason that we must learn to speak our words continually with love.

This is easier said than done. Consider arguments, coarse jesting, and all those words you regret. Praise God for our Savior! But even though you have grace, you ought to grow in speaking words seasoned with salt, in love and with all purity. As it is written,

“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” Luke 6:45

“But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.” Matthew 15:18–20

Don't let your words defile your marriage and corrupt its peace. Guard your heart from choice words and instead speak in love. The enemy tempts us, in the heat of a fight, to use words we'll regret. They may sound good at the time, but later you'll regret it. One day, you'll regret every sin. So take it to heart to resist the devil and press forward in the love of God.

Be careful not to engage in idle chatter, but rather turn your spouse back to God with everything you say. If what you say doesn't edify him or her, then why are you saying it? If it doesn't turn your spouse to Jesus, then what's the point? If it isn't spoken in love, then don't say it. So think before you speak and try to find words that build up rather than break down.

Leave nagging and contentiousness by the wayside. A friendly reminder once is fine, but nagging eats away at anyone's soul and only creates contention. And rather than saying something negative, try to augment your spouse with your words. Refrain from such statements such as these:

"That's not going to work."

"That's a bad idea."

"I think that's stupid."

"How much money is that going to cost?!"

"We can't afford that."

"That will never happen."

These only crush a spirit and stifle faith. But with God anything is possible, so why would money matter? If God gave your spouse an idea, why would it be a bad idea? Merely because it doesn't make sense to you?

If you have a better idea, then offer it without giving offense to the other person, and he or she will respect your opinion.

For example, "That's not going to work" should be changed to "That's a good idea. How are we going to make it work?"

"That's a bad idea" should be changed to "That's a good idea, but have you thought of this?" or "What does the Lord think of your idea?"

"I think that's stupid" should be changed to "What is God telling us to do?"

"How much is that going to cost?" should be changed to "Is God going to provide for this?"

"We can't afford that!" should be changed to "Is the Lord calling us to take on that expense?"

"That will never happen" should be changed to "Is that what God wants for us?"

Don't just shoot someone down. If you explain yourself with loving and kind words, you will change how the other person perceives you. If you don't properly communicate your love to your spouse, he or she won't feel loved and this will create issues in your marriage. But if you change your words, you will transform how your spouse perceives you. Make him or her feel loved even by critical words. Again I will say: Augment and do not tear down.

Changing the heart comes first. But as we change our words, our hearts in turn are further changed. By guarding your lips, you're guarding your future with your spouse and your future judgment before God. Take the time to consider how your words have been pointing your spouse back to the love of God. Consider how you've been healing with your words. If there is any way in which you haven't been doing these things, then change your words. It will bless your marriage.

The Prayer

Lord, help me to guard my mouth. Teach me how to love and heal with my words. I want everything I say and do to be a reflection of You. I commit my mouth to speaking Your holiness. Purify my words and convict me before I say anything that is not of You.

Jesus, I Give You Ownership of My Life

God has an ultimate plan for you—a place you should be taking up in the body of Christ. Do you know what that plan or place is? Daily He has small plans for you. Do you know what those are?

Do you know what God wants you doing daily? Do you know what He wants you doing immediately after your devotion time? Do you have plans to do things, or does God have plans to which you submit? How do you know God's will for your life? Do you know His immediate will?

If not, take the time to pray. Do not stop inquiring of the Lord until He's answered you.

Search your heart to see if anything isn't lining up with God's plan for your life. If you're chasing after your own desires or plans that are not God's, then you aren't chasing after the Lord.

If you aren't chasing Him, then division will manifest in your marriage. If Jesus is the center, however, then you and your spouse will become closer to each other the closer you get to that center.

Keep your heart in line with God's. The only way to do this truly is through being led by the Spirit, which happens when we listen to His voice and obey it. So the question is: Have you been hearing God's voice lately?

Sensitize yourself to His voice and obey Him immediately when you hear Him. Surrender your heart and your plans in life to pick up His. Never plan anything without praying and waiting for God's answer first. Some people pray but don't wait for God to answer. Instead they get off their knees and do what they intended to do without waiting for any of God's.

But as it is written,

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6–7

Lay everything before God in prayer. Make it a custom with your spouse to do this at all times. Let God guide your family, that you may not be ruled by self-willed decisions.

Agreeing to obey the Lord's plan together will create unity in Christ, which in turn will result in a deeper, more fulfilling relationship with both the Lord and your spouse.

The Prayer

Lord, I know You have a plan for my life. Give me revelation, that I may understand Your plan. Help me to stay in the center of Your will at all times. Help me to keep my heart on track with Yours. I know You have works and activities for me to accomplish daily. Help me to recognize them, that I can submit to You in this.

I relinquish my plans and my will to You today. I agree with my spouse that my house will chase after You and Your plan for us, Lord.

Lord, Help Me to Hear You More Clearly

In order to hear God's conviction, you need to be sensitive to His voice. Sometimes God will call you to serve your spouse, but if you aren't listening, you won't hear it. I have personally experienced this call innumerable times.

Many were the times I have sat down to read the Bible but God wouldn't speak to me through the pages. So I'd pray and ask Him why. Then, with a soft voice, He'd reply, "Because today I want you to apply the Bible." Then, upon getting up, I would find that my wife needed help around the house or with the children and it was stressing her out.

Love should compel us to bear one another's burdens. But let's face it: Sometimes our eyes aren't opened to others' needs because we're too caught up in the busyness of life. While we should always open our eyes to others' needs, sometimes we simply need God to show us how we can serve and love each other.

If you aren't sensitive to His voice, you'll never know what works God has in mind for you. Remember what the Scriptures say:

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Ephesians 2:10

God created us for good works that He has prepared for us. We'll never know what they are if we don't take the time to grow in discerning and understanding His voice.

So the question is: Do you understand the Lord's voice with clarity? Or can it be hard for you to discern His will? How often do you hear the Lord speaking? I'm telling you right now, from experience, that God is always speaking. So if you're not always hearing Him, then other things in your life are taking your attention away from Him.

Hearing God more clearly is simple: Abide more and pay attention to His Spirit. Common distractions that will keep you from hearing Him include allowing the flesh to be idly entertained, ignoring His voice, disobedience, and anything that satisfies the desires of the flesh contrary to the Lord's desires.

When you focus on your own heart and your own wants rather than on God's, you are plugging your ears to His voice. Don't let the flesh grow over your

spiritual ears, lest you need God to perform surgery. If you're accustomed to fulfilling the impulses of the flesh, God will likely give you a trial to scrape away those desires that are contrary to Him.

If you set your heart toward growing in discernment, however, God will help you. Pray for the wisdom to know His voice, and the Lord will grant it. However, knowing God's voice and obeying are two separate things. Sometimes the Lord will call you to do things that are contrary to your own heart, but you must carry your cross and obey anyway. If you don't, you will only find it harder to hear His voice next time. Why?

Consider whether you like to talk to someone who doesn't care about what you have to say. Neither does God speak to those who won't listen. While He may speak on occasion, most of His words are reserved for the obedient.

Now the real question is "How can we obey if we don't understand?" God never speaks in a confusing manner. He is not the author of chaos and confusion; Satan is. So any issues with discernment are not due to the Lord speaking unclearly. Rather, any confusion is due to your unclear discernment.

In order to grow in this respect, first you must recognize that the fault lies with you. Then, through humility, you begin applying the truths and practicing the habits that increase your understanding of His voice.

When you think you have heard the Lord but then circumstances don't turn out the way you thought they would, have the humility to admit it. Mark that voice in your mind as "not God" and then, the next time you hear it, don't listen. But when the voice turns out to be the Lord, mark it in your mind as being God; then obey every time you hear it.

The best way to grow in understanding His voice is through the word of God. This is a method that I constantly teach, and you will often hear it from me or read it in my other titles. I could never emphasize enough that the best way to grow in understanding God's voice is through listening to His voice while you study your Bible. Everything God says will always be in agreement with Scripture. So the more you grow in the word, the more you will understand His voice.

Every time God speaks to you, write His words down in your Bible. I personally use the NKJV *Take Note* Bible, which is a wide-margin Bible. Wide margins give you the extra room you'll need when writing the words the Lord shares with you. Then, when you read your Bible later, you'll have the notes for reference.

They will serve as a reminder regarding the truths the Lord has taught you through His word.

When He speaks, write only His words and not your own thoughts. This is not the time for personal notes. If you commit your study time to writing only God's words and not your own, you will better discern between your own heart and His voice.

God is always teaching you, whether through the word or through the circumstances of life. When you read, the Spirit will compare each scripture with others or with circumstances you are experiencing in your life. That He teaches us is evident, for we read,

“These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” 1 Corinthians 2:13

And also,

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” John 14:26

And as Jesus said,

“It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.” John 6:45

Knowing this, take the time to be taught by God as you study your Bible. The Holy Spirit will teach you the true doctrine and build you in His wisdom. Then, as you listen to Him and discern between your own heart and His voice, you'll come to know His voice perfectly. From there, all you have to do is abide and pay attention to the Holy Spirit's presence. As you do, you'll notice His voice constantly whispering to you.

He'll show you how to apply the love of God toward your spouse in practical ways, and He will convict you when you aren't walking uprightly. He'll teach you how and when to discipline your children—and everything else you need to know about every circumstance in life.

The Prayer

Lord, I know I need You to teach me. So please help me to hear Your voice more clearly. Open my ears to hear and my mind to understand.

I dedicate my life to following and obeying Your Holy Spirit. Show me how I can apply Your love to my spouse.

I Will Put Marriage Before Ministry

By ‘ministry’ I do not merely mean to say “being a pastor.” Rather, I am discussing the moments in which you serve anyone other than your spouse.

In the early church, a man was called to prove himself in the home before he could even be considered an elder. As it is written, a bishop must be “one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)....” 1 Timothy 3:4–5

If a man cannot rule his house, then he cannot take care of the church of God. How much more does this apply in every other facet of ministry?

Now, you don’t have to be a minister to have a ministry. If you work a job and God is calling you to witness to certain individuals there, you have a ministry. If the Lord has called you to feed the homeless or rake for your elderly neighbor, then you have a ministry. While you may not be a minister, you have a type of ministry when you’re ministering Jesus to another person.

Marriage is also a ministry. If anyone is not found faithful in marriage, he or she will be judged accordingly. Now, there is more than one type of unfaithfulness. There is physical unfaithfulness, in which you give your body to someone other than your spouse in sexual impurity. There is also emotional unfaithfulness, in which you’re more attached to someone other than your spouse. Then there is the impurity of the leech. This can manifest as pornography or as giving a friend or hobby more attention or emotion than you do your spouse.

There is also unfaithfulness in regard to taking up one’s role properly. God gave a man his place in the marriage and a woman her place in the marriage. If anyone refuses his or her position in favor of satisfying his or her own heart, then that person rejects both the Lord and His design. No one can claim to honor and walk with the Lord while refusing the Lord at the same time.

Lastly, there is ministerial unfaithfulness. This is when certain people may claim that their God-given objectives have supreme priority above their marriage. But God would not call you to do anything that would destroy the institution of marriage. If a person’s supposed ministry involves doing so, then he or she needs to take a step back and ask whether God is truly calling him or her to that service.

You also need to recognize your spouse's God-given work, duty, or task and willfully surrender him or her back to the Lord. Similarly to how Hannah gave Samuel back to the Lord, a person must be willing to allow his or her spouse to serve the Lord. But feeding the homeless isn't better than fixing one's own marriage. Raking leaves for a friend isn't more important than serving your spouse.

If you serve others around you but don't serve your own spouse, then you're acting hypocritically. First we must strengthen the foundation and the pillars; then we can worry about building the rest of the house. If Christ is the foundation of marriage, then the husband and wife are the support beams or pillars that hold each other up. As it is written,

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” Ecclesiastes 4:9–12

If you are caught up with serving others except your own spouse, you are cursing him or her. God gave you your spouse's hands so you may hold, love, serve, and cherish that person. But if you abandon your spouse's need for you, then the statement “*But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up*” takes effect. The first person who should be there for your husband or wife is you.

For example, your spouse may be suffering emotionally in ways you aren't. If you aren't there to hold him or her through it all, then how are you practicing love at all? If your spouse is stressed out by his or her job, then you need to be the one to help him or her relax and feel loved at home. If you don't serve your spouse in this, then you're doing a disservice to your own marriage and forsaking your spouse when he or she needs you. Let love compel you to serve your spouse and to be there for him or her when needed.

It is important for a husband to be in tune with his wife's state of heart. If she is a homemaker, for example, she may become bored or lonely quickly. If you're not really one for talking, this could tear her apart in the long run. She has no one around her with whom to enjoy wholesome, intelligent adult conversation. The kids consume her time, and she never gets a day off as you do. On her Sabbath day, she still does everything she would on any other day. Taking care of

children can be stressful, difficult work. If you aren't connecting with her emotionally, and taking the time every day to kindle a friendship through communication and fellowship, then you're doing a disservice to your marriage and forsaking your spouse when she needs you most. A woman has deep emotions but a small tank. She requires refills multiple times a day, and if you aren't filling her, it's only a matter of time before she breaks down.

Look at the needs of your spouse before you look to serve anyone else. For home-keeper wives, it isn't Christian to clean up someone else's home while continually leaving your own home a mess for your husband. Begin with the ministry God has given you. Then, after you have faithfully mastered it, branch out to serve others as God leads you.

Serving others outside the marriage isn't always about serving the Lord. If you won't take care of your spouse, then you aren't serving God at all. Providing for and taking care of your own household should come first. Then, if time, space, and money are left, use that to serve others. But that we should take care of our family is evident, for we read,

“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” 1 Timothy 5:8

Now, this scripture is specifically talking about children and grandchildren taking care of their widowed mothers and grandmothers. But if the child is worse than an unbeliever for forsaking his or her mother when she needs help most, how much more do you sin if you don't take care of your spouse? Your spouse has many needs that must be provided for—not just physical needs but emotional and spiritual needs as well.

Let each of us do what is necessary, that we may abide in the Spirit together. If your spouse is stressed or struggling to abide, then have him or her sit down while you take over for a while. Allow your spouse to get a moment of peace with God so he or she can be refreshed in the Spirit. Care for your spouse's needs and provide for him or her in whatever way is necessary.

Ultimately, if your marriage needs attention, turn around and fix it before you continue to serve others. Even if it's a momentary falling out through an argument, drop everything and go to be unified with your spouse. As it is written,

“Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your

brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”
Matthew 5:23–24

This gift was once the sacrifice the Jews gave for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is saying, “If you want to be forgiven, then go through the ropes of repentance and be reconciled to those whom you’ve offended.”

If you are called to do this with a brother, how much more should you do it with your spouse? Take this to heart, putting your marriage first. Constantly strengthen the foundation, and then you’ll have an augmented ability to serve the Lord. How so? Because your spouse can help you to accomplish the tasks you can’t while you’re busily serving the Lord. He or she can help you serve the Lord by serving you where and when you need help, which will result in an amplified capacity to serve Him.

The Prayer

Lord, I know that You call me to serve my spouse before anyone else. Help me to be faithful with the tasks You've given me to do at home. Help me to serve those nearest to me first, before I stretch out to help others. I know I have an account to give for my marriage, so I pray that You will help me to stay accountable.

God, I devote myself to strengthening the foundation before I move on to build other aspects of my family and my life.

Help Me to Forgive

Choice words ruin any relationship. But forgiveness holds the power to heal—to heal friendship, mend the broken heart, and find peace.

Choice actions destroy more than words do because actions speak louder than words. Yet forgiveness has the power to heal, and the first person forgiveness heals is the forgiver.

Choice forgiveness has already changed your life. Consider that God has chosen to forgive you even though you sin against Him. Let His love inspire you to forgive your spouse as well—because if you can't forgive those who are closest to you, whom can you forgive?

Unforgiveness creates bitterness, but complete forgiveness sets your heart free. When you harbor unforgiveness, it acts like a massive weight on your chest, burdening your heart from all the joy God has intended for you.

Being unable to forgive is also dangerous. As it is written,

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment...” Matthew 5:21–22

Notice that being angry without a cause results in the same judgment as murder!

“Well, I have a cause. My spouse sinned against me!” one may contend. However, if your spouse has repented, then the blood of Jesus covers him or her. If the blood of the Lord has cleansed your spouse, then God doesn't see any fault in him or her any longer. If God doesn't see a fault and God is never wrong, why should we blaspheme the blood of Jesus by holding our spouse's sins against him or her? If God has forgiven him or her, then we have no cause to be angry. If we have no cause, then as Jesus said, we are under the same judgment as a murderer. Why? Because being angry without reason is malice, and showing malice is being hateful. As it is written,

“Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” 1 John 3:15

Knowing this, be compelled by love to forgive, even as Jesus has forgiven you. Don't hold a record of wrongs but, rather, release the debt to God. In the end, the first person to be healed will be you as you learn to allow the healing of God into

your heart to the point of forgiveness. But if you don't forgive, then you won't be forgiven, either. Even as Jesus said,

“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Matthew 6:14–15

And also,

“Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. ‘So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.’” Matthew 18:32–35

God has forgiven you much, so go and do likewise. As Jesus also said,

“Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.” Luke 7:47

Let love compel you to be the image of Jesus in everything you do. If you don't love those who are closest to you, how can you love anyone? Love and forgiveness go hand in hand. Let love satisfy your heart through the power of forgiveness.

Examine your own heart. If there is any way in which you haven't forgiven your spouse, then forgive. Be careful also to forgive future insults quickly.

During arguments is a prime example of when unforgiveness sets in. When harsh words are exchanged, don't take them to heart. If you do, then you'll be tempted to say things you'll wish you never had. But if you forgive your spouse and keep your composure, you'll guard your lips to love him or her.

Unforgiveness is a wedge that drives deeply into a marriage. The more grievances you hold against your spouse, the closer to divorce you'll be. But if you repay your spouse with love for his or her offenses, then the healing of Jesus will overwhelm the darkest moments of your marriage.

The Prayer

Teach me to forgive as you forgive, Lord. Even during disagreements, I pray, help me to portray Your heart. I commit myself to being a forgiving person by my actions, even if the other person hasn't shown repentance as of yet.

I Will Put My Spouse Before My Children

The marriage is the foundation of the family, with Jesus as the chief cornerstone. If we give more attention to the building while allowing the foundation to crumble, then it is only a matter of time before the whole structure will collapse. It could take months, years, or decades, but without a doubt, the whole family will crumble if the proper attention isn't given to both the foundation and the cornerstone.

Those who have weak or struggling marriages will also have emotionally troubled children. The parents are a child's world. Watching their parents experience continual disunity shatters their world. God made marriage to be a structure that stands the test of time. Children don't just need two parents who are there for them; they need two parents who will get along and love each other. They need to see the power of God's love in full display as they watch their mother and father interact.

Fighting can result in undue stress on a child. Then the parents who are stressed may accidentally, and regrettably, take it out on their children. Even if a child knows the parent is sorry, just watching the entire scenario unfold is unnerving. This never goes well for the parent-child relationship, especially in the case of teenagers. If you and your spouse don't have any reason to respect each other, then your teenager may not feel any different.

God has called us to unity, love, and likemindedness with our spouse. In order to accomplish this, you must spend much time building, and perhaps mending, your marital relationship. This requires your relationship with your spouse to take greater priority than does your relationship with your children.

Unfortunately, some parents put the interests of their children first. Those who do so risk losing their spouse or sharing in a damaged marriage in time to come. I can never emphasize enough that if you allow the foundation to go unmaintained, your marriage will crumble over time as it is exposed to the eroding elements of life.

Sometimes this issue arises in the Christian marriage when the ministry of the children receives more attention than the ministry of the marriage does. Children are, in fact, a ministry, for you are commanded to disciple them in Christ. As it is written,

“Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, like the days of the heavens above the earth.” Deuteronomy 11:18–21

A husband and wife must be unified in the way they raise their children. If they aren't, they may put the children first and then fight about how the children are raised. This will cause the children to pick favorites between the parents. A child may love one parent and despise the other. Thus, the whole house will be divided.

So how can we be unified? Through embracing the mind of Christ. If you are attentive to the voice of God, the Lord will tell you when to spank and when to refrain. He will show you everything you need to do. But if you aren't accustomed to having your ears attuned to the Lord, you won't hear Him and, thus, won't properly discipline your child. So as we mentioned before, it is a must for the believer to grow in hearing and understanding the voice of the Spirit.

Diligent study of the Scripture will augment your efforts in this regard. As husband and wife, study together how the Lord calls you to raise your children. Then, with unity of heart and mind, agree to apply the Lord's discipline. Remember that these are not your children; they are God's. From God they came, and to God they shall return. Be like Hannah, who willfully offered her child Samuel to serve the Lord. Daily offer your children to God, not only in prayers but also by pointing them to God in everything you instruct them to do.

God has shown me that a child must respect your words and learn to listen to you the first time you speak. If you give them chances to misbehave, they will take chances; but if you don't, then they will learn to respect you. Everywhere my family goes, people are raving to me about how wonderful and well behaved my children are. But I know in my heart this isn't because they're good kids. Rather, it's because they are properly disciplined.

Good children are not born. They are made through proper, loving discipline. God doesn't give you good or bad children; rather, He gives you the authority to lead them to good and proper conclusions through appropriate positive and

negative reinforcement. For as it is written,

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.”
Psalm 51:5

Everyone is born in sin. While a child may be sanctified by the believing parents, sin is impossible to avoid. With that said, a child is naturally bad and needs proper discipline to lead him or her to Christ. Notice that I say *proper* discipline.

We should not punish, or discipline in wrath. Every moment a child is disciplined is a moment of training. As it is written,

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” Proverbs 22:6

Train your children to obey. Don’t punish them and hope they’ll figure it out. How could they? They’re just children! So lovingly guide them to the right conclusions by telling them why they are being disciplined. Explain that their conduct is sin (and if it’s not, then explain why are they being disciplined). After this, explain the meaning of repentance and do not stop the discipline until your children repent from the heart.

If you train your children to love the Lord and teach them that it’s right to do so, then they will love Him. And if they love Him, repentance will be natural. Those who do not have saved children must teach them the importance of repentance, that the wages of sin are discipline, and that they need to listen to their mommy’s and daddy’s words. Why? Because if they don’t take the words you say seriously, then neither will they take the gospel seriously when you preach it to them. But if they respect your words, then they will respect the word of God when it comes from your mouth.

After your children have received the Holy Spirit, all you have to do is teach them to submit to His conviction and listen to it continually. When you turn the hearts of your children to the Spirit, the Lord will take control of the parenting, from inside your children. The end result will be respectful, godly, loving children who continue to walk in the Lord because they have been trained to do so.

Taking them to church and hoping they’ll figure out the right things from the teachings they receive there is not enough. God has commanded you to take charge of your children’s future and to train them in the Lord. This is a

commandment from God, and if you love Him and your children, you'll take their eternal security seriously and train them up in the Lord.

There are no ifs, ands, or buts about this. This must be done, or there will be an account to give. God will require your children from your hand, and you'll have to explain to Him why you chose to raise them the way you have.

How will God respond to your parenting? Trying our best doesn't cut it. God desires to parent through you. So who's in charge of your child's future—you or God, who is training them through you?

I don't know about you, but I want the Lord to say to me, "Well done, My good and faithful servant!"

If your spouse isn't saved, God still commands you to raise your child in Christ. So if your unsaved spouse doesn't agree, you need to take to heart that your child could be separated from you for eternity because of your decision to disobey the Lord and not train the child to receive Jesus as Savior.

Many will say that it is ultimately the child's decision whether or not he or she will choose Christ. While this may be true, a child who is trained to follow his or her own heart and despise the salvation of God is a hundred times less likely to choose Christ than is a child who is trained to love God and shown how to follow Him.

Ultimately, you must be unified with your spouse in the way you raise your children. Your kids are your ministry. However, you cannot put the ministry of children above the ministry of marriage. Don't let the process of raising your children get in the way of your relationship with your husband or wife. No aspect of parenting should ever get in the way of a marriage.

Rather, parenting should support marriage as you learn to serve your spouse's need to abide in the Spirit first. If your kids are driving your spouse crazy, then take the helm. Let your spouse have some freedom to breathe in the Spirit, and serve your spouse by taking care of the children for him or her. This is something that I most often see necessary for a stay-at-home mother. She never gets a break or a true Sabbath. So the daddy should be willing to serve her by stepping into her shoes for a couple hours or a whole day each week as necessary. Take the kids and let her have Jesus.

If married couples would do this for each other, then it would be easier for each parent to act like Jesus toward their children. Stress can keep us from being the

example we ought to be. Therefore, parent in your spouse's place sometimes—for the whole family's sake.

The Prayer

Lord, I will commit myself to train my children up in Your ways, that they may find You as Savior. I will lead them in Your love, in unity with my spouse. Today I commit to studying Your word with my spouse in order to learn how to raise my children properly. I commit to doing this daily until I have a full understanding of Your word and Your voice.

I surrender to Your Holy Spirit, that as He convicts me, You Father can parent my children through me. As the Father, You were always meant to be their true parent. So I surrender them to you now, that You can receive back what has always been Yours.

Bless my marriage as I grow in unity with my spouse.

Help Me to Be a Better Listener

Communication is essential for success in any marriage. Without the ability to communicate one's heart effectively, division and brokenness will ensue.

The woman may feel lonely, unloved, and desiring to feel treasured but finding nothing. Even though she's a tender and beautiful person, she will not receive what she needs to fill her emotional tank.

For his part, a man may feel disrespected, unwanted, unloved, and lonely. Even though God commands that a husband and wife should respect one another, he'll feel as though he doesn't receive any.

Both of these situations occur through a constant breakdown in communication. Every person should be expressing his or her heart freely in a manner that blesses his or her spouse. But because some don't know how to express themselves in a way that blesses their husband or wife, they find themselves broken—and breaking others. This issue can be resolved by listening to and studying your spouse.

Listen to your spouse's heart and pay attention to how he or she receives your words and actions. If it seems as if your spouse isn't receiving your words or actions well, then learn how to rephrase things for his or her sake. If you're intending to speak love but your spouse is not hearing love, then you aren't communicating love. If you feel you are loving your spouse but he or she doesn't feel loved by your conduct, then you're not acting like Christ. It's not about how you love the individual but about how he or she receives and perceives your love.

Jesus loves us in a way that effectively meets our hearts with what we need. You, likewise, should be willing to change the way you approach your spouse so that he or she can feel loved by you. Sometimes when you love someone, you may tend to focus on yourself and how you love the other person rather than on how he or she feels loved by you. In communicating love, however, there are two ends to the communication: the giver and the receiver. People sometimes tend to focus on the fact that they give love and forget to analyze how others receive that love. In this, without realizing it, you can unintentionally make your love for spouse about yourself.

You should always examine your spouse to make sure his or her emotional tank

is filled. A woman needs to feel cherished, treasured, wanted, and embraced. A man's emotional tank is slightly different, however. He needs to be given confidence boosts by kind words. These fill his emotional tank more than touchy-feely words do. Similarly to a woman, he needs to feel wanted and appreciated. If he doesn't feel appreciated for what he does, and if he doesn't feel as if he's good at what he does, he feels inadequate.

So take the time to hear out your spouse. By so doing, you'll know when his or her emotional tank needs filling. Sometimes your spouse just wants to share his or her heart or to present his or her side of the conversation. If you constantly cut your spouse off, he or she will feel unloved or unappreciated. It will seem to your spouse that his or her words don't matter to you.

God gave you two ears and one mouth, which serves as a reminder that you should be a better listener than you are a talker. Sometimes you really just want to share your own heart. But true love suggests that you would be willing to absorb someone else's words while waiting patiently for your turn to speak.

Take the time to practice listening. If your spouse wants to share something with you, try waiting for your turn to talk. But in the meantime, don't struggle to hold onto your thought so hard that you don't process what your spouse is saying. Listening is more than hearing: Hearing is the ability to perceive sound while listening is caring about, and absorbing, the words being spoken.

Your spouse wants to be understood, so take to heart what he or she says to you, no matter how insignificant, and it will mean the world to them. Don't be quick to give advice or add to the conversation, especially if your spouse is pouring his or her heart out. Sometimes a person just wants to be heard.

The Prayer

God, I dedicate myself to becoming a better listener. How can I learn someone else's heart unless I take the time to hear it? I choose to let love govern my heart as I grow in compassion toward my spouse. Help me accept the things my spouse says even as (s)he shares opinions that may be contrary to mine.

Open my eyes to see when my spouse's emotional tank needs filling. I know if I talk all the time, I won't hear it. I also know that everyone draws closer to a listener. So help me to listen more than I talk, that my spouse may be nearer to me.

I want my spouse to know that I care about his (her) heart, so help me to treasure it.

I Will Dedicate Myself to Pray Continually for My Spouse

God commands you to be in constant prayer. So, wives, while you're practicing continual prayer throughout the day, take the time to pray continually for your husband. He likewise should pray for you. Satan throws a lot of arrows at the marriage. The husband has been given headship by God. For that reason, he'll be targeted. Satan will attack him at work, at home, through the children, and by everything around him so that, rather than abiding in order to lead you in the Spirit, he'll be meditating on his own heart. But you can be an encouragement to him to continue in the Spirit. All you have to do is abide constantly yourself; then, from that foundation, encourage him to do likewise.

But if you're praying for your husband, God will answer, and this will make a tremendous difference in his life. Even before I married my wife, God was changing my life through her prayers.

I once worked a factory job making pizzas for Jack's Pizza, DiGiorno, and Tombstone, and often the enemy attacked me there just to get me down. Machines would break down, certain coworkers would be harsh to me, and others disgusted me with their crudeness. On many occasions, Satan met me at my workplace but then, suddenly, the situation would stop and I'd feel the presence of God. Later I would talk to my wife, Megan, who was my fiancée at the time, and she'd say, "I prayed for you at this and that time. Did God do anything for you?" And it was always—without fail—the exact time she was praying when everything fixed itself and God met with me at my workstation.

I remember a particular time when I had to place the pizzas into shrink-wrap rolls to be prepared by machines and I had to work with a contentious old lady named Kathy to do so. One day, when one of the machines broke down—which was the operator's fault, not mine or Kathy's—she decided to be angry with me for it. Kathy proceeded to pin me against a wall using an entire metal rack of pizzas, which measured ten feet wide by seven feet high. Then, after I managed to roll the rack off of me, my team leader yelled at me because she thought I was playing around. So I began sweeping the area as I was supposed to, but Kathy threw the racks around again. She made a mess of things and almost got me written up. But then, suddenly, I felt the presence of God; and right when I did, the top supervisor walked by and caught Kathy trying to pin me with another pizza rack. I was pulled into the office and was able to explain what had

happened. After they interviewed a couple other people, they decided to write Kathy up, and she left me alone for the rest of my career with that company.

When I went home, I found out that my wife had prayed for me moments before the supervisor felt compelled to leave her office. It changed my life. A few short minutes of prayer was all it took to change my life. Never again did I have to deal with that contentious woman's attitude, and I felt the Lord with me constantly at my job after that. The funny thing is that the supervisor had no idea why she felt compelled to walk by. She had forgotten what she was doing, but something had urged her to get up at that moment, which I knew was the Lord's doing. The more embarrassing part happened later, when the supervisor informed me of Kathy's age: I now have to go through life knowing that I was beat up by an eighty-year-old woman.

So pray often for, and with, your husband. At every opportunity God grants you, you should pray for him. Read the Scriptures with him and let him teach you from the Bible as God leads him. Constantly fellowship with him. Every time you read something encouraging or learn something new, share it with him. Even if he already knows the concept you just learned, share it with him anyway. Your passion for God will cause him to desire the Lord as well. If he feels like being fleshly yet sees you being spiritual, he'll be convicted and seek the Lord. By this you can be an encouragement to him to walk in the Spirit.

The Prayer

God, I know my spouse needs prayer. So please help me to keep a disciplined heart in praying for him (her). Help me never to forget nor falter, so that my spouse can be encouraged by Your working hand. Hear my prayers for my spouse and help him (her) to walk strongly in You.

God, I Commit My Actions to Your Love

Do everything out of love. As it is written,

“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” 1 John 4:8

And as the scripture continues,

“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.” 1 John 4:20–21

Although you may love your spouse, he or she may not always receive your love if your actions are speaking otherwise. Love is not about how you express it but how the other person receives it. If your spouse doesn’t receive your actions as loving, then how are you being loving at all? Your spouse should never be repulsed or uncomfortable with who you are or what you do.

I once knew a man who always brought the worst out of his wife through disrespect. In the end she never came to church because she feared the judgment others laid upon her due to his gossip. Her marriage was a train wreck, and he was the engineer.

You have the power to bless your spouse’s life and the power to destroy it. Blessing someone else doesn’t mean blessing yourself; sometimes love requires us to carry our cross. But what would love compel you to do? What do you want your spouse to do for you? Remember that you reap what you sow. While you’ll never reap as quickly as you sow, you can be certain that the day you begin to reap, you will find your heart satisfied in every longing you’ve ever had.

If you want to be loved, then first you need to love. If you want to be cherished, treasured, and treated with respect and gentleness, then act likewise toward your spouse even if he or she isn’t doing the same for you. Change begins with you. God will only change the person who’s willing to be changed. If your spouse isn’t willing to grow, then you grow. Don’t let your marriage dictate your relationship with God. Love Him no matter what someone else is doing.

Never let your spouse’s actions determine how you will treat him or her. Walk in love no matter what. If God’s actions were dependent upon how we have treated Him, neither you nor I could be saved. But love compelled Him to die for us

while we were yet His enemies. Have the same mind as Christ had for you and carry your cross to love your spouse whether your spouse deserves it or not. For there was a time in your life when you didn't deserve God's love or forgiveness yet He gave them to you happily.

And He had no other way to give His love to you except through the conduit of self-sacrifice and literal death. Jesus died for you; now die to self for your spouse. Learn to die daily to your own desires and needs in order to fill those of your spouse. Love him or her and expect nothing in return. Then, in time to come, God's conviction will be too much for the other person to bear.

I once knew of a South African woman who dedicated her life to walking in God's love. Her husband hated God, and he despised his wife for her religion. Daily he beat her for her faith, and Sundays were worst of all.

"I thought I told you NEVER to go to that stupid [expletive] Church again!" he'd scream at her.

"I'm sorry ... but Jesus has my heart, and I won't let go of Him." she'd reply softly. But her reply was met by a swift punch to face.

She spent over 20 years of her marriage being beaten black and blue. Everyone urged her to divorce him, but she refused—not out of fear, but out of faith. "I'm persuaded that love will save his soul," she replied, "and if Jesus was beaten to save me, then I will do the same to save him, because both God and love are telling me to do this right now."

One day the man's life fell apart. Then the last person he ever expected to be there for him was by his side, loving him. Her love shattered him, and because of her unrelenting love, he gave his life to Christ. From that day forward, she was never hit again.

He learned to respect her and give her the dignity she always deserved—doubly so because of all the years of disrespect for which he needed to make up. In the end, all of her daughters gave their lives to Christ after seeing the difference Jesus had made in their father's life. Each of the daughters had tremendous respect for their mother—for her courage, resilience, and persistence to love.

Love binds a family together. It can take many years to see the love and grace of God bring your family together, as it did for this woman. But persist in faith because Jesus has the power to mend any broken family.

Now, I'm not telling you to stay in an abusive relationship. This woman was different. She felt a certain pull on her heart from God, and because she listened, her whole family was blessed forever. She demonstrated the power of God to forgive the unforgiveable, to love the unlovable, and to cherish the abominable. This is the very love that Jesus uses to save and convict souls to repentance daily. So do whatever God convicts you to do, and in His perfect timing, circumstances will all work together for good.

But don't let your actions be determined by how your spouse treats you. Be meek like Christ and love like no tomorrow.

The Prayer

Jesus, make me a living, breathing example of your love toward my spouse. Create in me a clean and upright heart through Your Holy Spirit, that I can walk in kindness as You command me. If You command me to do good to my enemies, how much more should I love and serve my spouse? I'm aware of the need for this. And I'm aware that every change in life begins with me.

Show me how to be the image of Your love so that, in everything I do, I can bless Your child. I know my spouse is Your baby and you take it personally how people treat him (her). So let me be found respecting and loving my spouse as You command me to do.

From this day forward, I devote myself to being a loving and living sacrifice. That no matter what my spouse does, I'll still cherish and treasure them.

Give Me a Servant's Heart

Serve your spouse. Those are three little words that will make a massive difference in your marriage. I can never express enough that you must maintain a servant's heart if you want a fulfilling marriage.

Learn your spouse's daily needs and take the time to address them. Serve your spouse physically and emotionally. We all have emotional tanks that need filling, so take the time to be aware of your spouse's state of heart and bring him or her some healing. If your spouse can't share his or her heart with you, then with whom?

If your spouse has any physical distresses, lift the load and carry the burden with him or her. As it is written,

“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Galatians 6:2

Serve your spouse with a diligent heart. A few men may argue, “Well, actually, I'm supposed to lead.” But remember that Christ led yet He served the disciples. So serve your wife and wash her in the water of the word. Be the example of God's love to her and refresh her constantly in it. Women, serve your husband with a diligent heart. For this reason the woman was created, that she may be a companion to the man and help him.

Serving your spouse shouldn't be a once-in-a-while activity. Rather, it should be an ongoing, day-after-day work of love. Try to find multiple ways in which you can express God's love in action through serving, even if it is something as simple as a shoulder or foot rub after your spouse has a hard day at work. Men, if your wife doesn't work outside the home, know that she works very hard taking care of the children. She also never gets a day off. Therefore, try serving her with a true Sabbath. Help her with the dishes and household chores for one day. Feed the children and take over everything for her so she can have a day to rest in the Lord. She needs it just as much as you do.

Now some of you may be thinking, “I work hard. Very hard! How can I possibly help her with that? I need all the rest I can get!” If you can afford it, then, consider paying a friend or a maid to help.

Reading this, I know a few of you may have rolled off your chair just now. “A maid? Where am I going to get the money for that?” you may be asking.

But did you know that some maids are willing to come to your house once a week for a couple of hours and work for only \$10 to \$15 an hour? What if you set aside \$20 to \$30 a week for your wife to have a Sabbath? Don't you think she deserves it? Isn't God more important than that little bit of money? All you need to do is have someone come late in the day and stay for two or maybe three hours, and the whole house will be clean. Then, the next day, you can eat from paper plates with plastic-ware. The day before her Sabbath, you can make a double-sized breakfast and lunch and then save half for leftovers on the Sabbath. For supper, you can order a pizza. All of the dinnerware gets thrown away, and all you have to do for her is spot-clean a few things.

No matter who you are or where you're at in you walk, you should constantly look for ways to serve. If this is always on your mind, you'll find that your spouse has many more needs than you may ever have realized. For those of you who are stay-at-home moms, consider how hard your man works. Have a meal prepared for him and help him out of his coat when he gets home. Let him expect you at the door; let love be the first thing that greets him when he gets home. Help him recline, and serve him with a drink. Encourage him to pray and to release any issues of his heart to the Lord. Take the time to have a listening ear. If he had a stressful day, he needs your feminine touch. God made you sensitive, and he needs that sensitivity from you after a bad day. So serve him with a listening ear. Comfort him and remind him that he's at home with the people who love him most.

It should be a rule of the home that anyone who works must leave negative emotions on the other side of the door when he or she steps into the house. If you remember to do this, and then release yourself to God and your spouse, you won't carry the emotions in. If aggression enters the house due to a bad day at work, it will also create a bad day at home with your spouse. So serve your marriage in leaving the pain outside and picking up the love, peace, and healing inside.

Keep a mind to serve your spouse in everything God points out to you. But if you're not staying aware of your spouse's needs, you won't be able to serve him or her. So put a sign on your wall if you need to do so. I myself do this! Even my wife and I forget to serve each other sometimes due to her homeschooling and taking care of the children and my constant work in ministry. The busyness of life can keep us from remembering to apply this vital virtue continually. But a decorative plaque, picture, poster, or sign that simply says, "Remember to serve your spouse today," if left in a conspicuous place, will make it impossible to

forget.

Take it to heart to serve your spouse even if he or she doesn't serve you back. Consider all the times God has provided for you in your life. He never waits for your praise; rather, He shows you compassion regardless. He even sends rain on the fields of those who hate Him. If He will show love to His enemy, how much more should you serve your spouse even if he or she doesn't notice or serve you back? Wouldn't this be having the heart of Jesus? Your actions will convict your spouse to do the same for you before long—and if not, then say something loving and convicting that may motivate your spouse to serve you as hard as you have served him or her.

Persevering in this will change your marriage forever.

The Prayer

Lord, help me to be a better servant. Give me a servant's heart and help me to be the example of You in all my conduct. I want to show my spouse Your love through better serving him (her). Open my eyes to my spouse's needs, that I may accomplish this. Show me what You want me to do for my spouse so that I can love him (her) as You would, Jesus.

Jesus, Help Me to Cultivate a Friendship with My Spouse

Over time, some marriages go from a friendship to an idea of serving the institution of the marriage. Marriage may gradually become less of a kindled bond and more of an ideal or concept. Rather than build a friendship, you may tend to do things for the marriage. “This is best for the marriage” becomes a common phrase in an institutionalized marriage. At that point, you are just trying to keep the status quo for the marriage as such rather than building and cultivating a worthwhile relationship with someone who should be your best friend.

But there are many ways to rekindle those bonds. In marriage, no gift is greater than the gift of time. Plan some quality time with your spouse, without the kids. Don’t just do this once or twice in a month or in a year but at least once a week. Remember how romantic life was before you were married? It was because you had fewer responsibilities, more time, and puppy love in your favor.

Through the course of life, that puppy love fades for some. Priorities take the place of fun; lack of sleep from a newborn takes a toll on energy; and working many hours to provide can sap away your time. A person can spend more time acting out love toward his or her children than being in love with his or her spouse.

To this day, however, I have never lost that puppy love with my wife. It has only grown year after year, and she still gives me butterflies. What we have isn’t impossible for others to enjoy as well. All you need to do is maintain the same interest you had in your spouse at day one and spend as much quality time with him or her as possible.

My wife and I take every opportunity we can get. At the end of every day, we send the children to bed a little early and take the time to talk. Sometimes we make it a date night and order out, watch a movie, or play a game. But most nights we spend sharing our hearts, studying the Bible, and making each other laugh.

I like to say that the two greatest things that cause my wife and I to be so tightly knit are fellowship and friendship. We take the time for fellowship, and every moment is friendship. My wife is and always will be my best friend. If your

spouse isn't your best friend, then I would beg you to change that today.

I knew a woman named Beverly whose husband Frank spent more time with a friend of his than with her. Their marriage waned, and they constantly had fights. Most of the fights were due to the time he spent with someone or something else.

"Don't you love me?" Beverly asked him.

"Well, I married you, didn't I?"

"Then why do you spend more working on your project car, or with Dan, than with me?"

"What are you talking about, woman? I spend every day and night with you. I go to bed with you! I'm always around you!"

"But every free moment you have you spend with someone else!"

"Well, of course! 'Cause every free moment I don't have I spend with you!"

Frank couldn't seem to understand that his wife wanted quality time. He felt his presence was enough. He was there for her physically but not emotionally. Their marriage dried up when their friendship did. Frank had a difficult time realizing that one should never distinguish between being your wife's friend and being married to her.

When you put that ring on your finger, you are saying to your spouse, "We're going to be best friends forever!" If you're saying anything else, your heart isn't right.

Some people care more about doing other things or about other friends than they do about their own spouse. But the spouse should come first. Was your wedding ring given to your spouse or to a group of friends? Was the gift of your eternal love handed to that activity or entertainment you love so much or to your spouse?

Sometimes leeches like to form in marriage. As an idol is to God, so a leech is to a marriage: a distraction. Take the time to ask yourself if there is anything distracting you from your spouse. If there is anything that takes away quality time with your spouse, or takes away emotional attraction, you have a leech. Leeches can come in the form of entertainment, a group of friends, a hobby, something you're passionate about, or even pornography.

Take the time to identify anything that could be taking your time, emotion,

attraction, or friendship away from your spouse. If there is any such distraction, remove it and put your spouse first. If you don't, it will lead to endless roads of hurt, remorse, and regret.

I once knew a pastor who became addicted to an online video game. Gradually, his daytime hour with his wife was consumed. Then the night was taken. He spent countless hours wasting his life away before a computer. Before long this caused some heated arguments. She wanted quality time with him, and he'd agree to have it with her—but then he just needed to finish that level first. Or he couldn't leave his friends fighting that big monster alone. His character was at a higher level, so they needed him, after all.

So night after night, she would wait for him on the sofa, but he'd never come. Or when he did, they'd have less than a half hour together. Eventually she'd turn the movie on and watch without him. He'd keep playing, thinking she was into the movie and didn't care anymore whether he showed up. But she did, and his neglect broke her heart, especially when it was a romantic movie. She'd watch the man woo the woman, and she'd remember how he used to do that. Rather than enjoying the night with her husband, then, she found herself distraught and crying on her couch, wishing she had a better friendship with him.

At a certain point, she stopped waiting for him and gave up on their friendship. She went to bed so often without him that she no longer welcomed him in bed with her. So he slept on the couch in the basement with his computer. This ended up being the worst move of all. Because his bed was next to the computer and he didn't have his wife begging him to come to bed, he spent as much time as he wanted playing on his computer at night. So Satan took advantage of his opportunity.

During the late hours of the night, when he was weakest and most easily tempted, he gave in to looking at pornography. He wasn't intimate with his wife anymore, mainly because she didn't let him be. So as a measure of revenge, he looked at other women who appealed to him more. Then his wife caught him in the middle of his actions.

Could you imagine the look on her face? Could you imagine what she felt and how devastated she was? Every sin has a root, and it always branches out into more sin if it isn't removed. His video game was an idol before God and a leech in his marriage. Rather than getting rid of his addiction, however, he made choices that led to more addictions and marital issues.

To make matters worse, this man was once a spiritual pastor who oversaw a church of two hundred people. None of them realized this was going on behind closed doors because he hid it all. So it doesn't matter how spiritual you are: A leech is a leech. Identify it and get rid of it, or it will ruin your marriage and your relationship with God.

Try to take as much time to build a friendship with your spouse as you can. If you don't have any hobbies in common, find one. But especially take the time for fellowship. Read and study the word together. Pray together as much as possible. Write a list of family needs. Pray for your children and pray over your children. Pray for anything God lays in your heart.

Take the time to worship as well. Sit down, whether as a family or with only your spouse, and adore the Lord together. I can never emphasize enough that the more time you spend drawing nearer to the Lord together, the more your marriage will improve. Remember that even if you don't have anything else in common with your spouse, you both have God.

The Prayer

Lord, I devote myself to becoming my spouse's best friend. Help me to cultivate a relationship with him (her). Give me wisdom to accomplish this. I pray that you would help me through conviction to uphold this and that you would hold me accountable for any leeches or idols I may acquire. If any exist in my life, please convict me so I can repent and get right with you and my spouse.

I Will Submit to Your Blueprint, Lord

At this time I have to mention the word some women hate to hear. It's that bad S word that American feminism commands men not to say to their wives: submission.

God calls the man to lead. But if he leads the wife astray, he will have an account to give as Eve did. However, if you read the Scriptures carefully, they don't actually call the man to lead per se. Rather, the Scriptures say that God must lead and that God will lead through the man. So if the man isn't seeking the Lord and being led by God, then who is leading your family?

There was once a couple who were in a heated argument. The husband then pulled the submission card, and the wife wouldn't have it. "Why would God call me to submit to an imperfect man?" she retorted.

At this, the husband shook his fist and roared back, "And why would God call me to lead an imperfect woman?"

The moral of the story is that nobody is perfect. So if both men and women are imperfect, then we should just submit to God, who is.

Now, I have heard many people say, "Submission was a cultural thing back in ancient times. Women don't have to do it now." But actually, all women submitted to their husbands in almost every single culture and country since the beginning of time—until the United States experienced the feminist movement.

It is important to note that feminists have often tried to equate the feminist movement with the women's rights movement. However, there is a tremendous difference between a woman's right to vote and suggesting to women that they should live like men. These two movements have always been, and always will be, two separate events.

Incidentally, some of the women who are at the forefront of feminism are lesbians. Have you noticed that the doctrine of life a lesbian lives is that of feminism? It is their personal belief, and through American doctrine they are influencing the women in the church to live like men, as they themselves want to do.

A major proponent of feminism, Ti-Grace Atkinson, founded a group called "the Feminists." The motto of the group is a famous saying of Atkinson's: "Feminism

is the theory, and lesbianism is the practice.” This group first advocated that women should lead celibate lives to protest male superiority. Later, they advocated political lesbianism. The feminists then began to advocate matriarchy and tried to turn feminism into a “woman’s religion.”

America embraces this doctrine, and it has affected many families throughout the nation. Even if a family doesn’t subscribe to feminism per se, they are practicing it if the wife leads and the husband submits. Women in the church are then affected by this doctrine because they are raised with it in the schools and inundated with it in popular culture.

So it is the American culture that has affected the church in this way. But God has called a woman to be feminine, not feminist. Non-submissiveness is cultural in origin, and submissiveness is biblical.

If you’re going to call yourself a follower of Christ, then you must obey the word of God. If you are a man, then God commands you to be led by Him and to lead your wife through Him. If you are a woman, then God commands you to be led by your husband. But why would the Lord call a woman to be led? It begins with this curse:

“To the woman He said: ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.’” Genesis 3:16

Some may say, “Well, Jesus freed us from the curse, so why should I submit now?” But Jesus has not freed us from the curse entirely yet. If you don’t believe me, try having a pain-free birth or stepping in front of a quickly moving train. Painful childbearing and death are part of the curse. If you still have sorrow when birthing or still die, then you’re still under the curse while you wait for redemption.

“But I’ve been redeemed! He set me free!” I’ve heard some say. But has He already redeemed? What does the word say?

“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” Ephesians 1:13–14

You have been purchased, and the Holy Spirit has been given as a deposit until the redemption. So we are still waiting for God to redeem that purchase—as one

may claim a holiday gift on layaway. Some Christian musicians have influenced doctrine by singing that we are already redeemed. However, the word says that we have been purchased and, when Jesus returns, He will redeem us. The original Greek word for 'redeem' in this passage is *apōlutrōsis*, which literally means "to *ransom* in full." A good comparison is winning the lottery: We are at a point in this life when we have the winning ticket in hand but have not yet turned it over to redeem the money.

The redemption happens in the last day, when the Lord receives us to His side and gives us a new body. When we have the new body, we will never sin, nor will we die. Hence, we have been redeemed from the wages of sin and death. As it is written,

"So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?'" 1 Corinthians 15:54–55

Jesus has not yet descended from heaven and gathered us all to His side. Until He does, the curse will continue on this earth as it always has. Therefore, if you as a woman still have pain in childbearing and you will still die one day, you should still be ruled by your husband. As we also read,

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself." Ephesians 5:22–28

Now, the main points of this scripture are (1) that she is to submit to her husband as she does to God Himself and (2) that the husband is to sanctify her in the word in order to present her as a glorious woman of God, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing but, rather, being holy and without blemish. So to those who ask, "Why should I submit?" the Lord says, "So that I may cleanse you through your husband." And to those who say, "Why should I submit to an imperfect man?" the Lord says, "Submit to me through the man."

Therefore, if you do not submit to your husband, then neither do you submit to God or to the word of God. Rather, the word of God will be blasphemed if you aren't submissive. The Scriptures explain this in describing "sound doctrine":

"...that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed." Titus 2:4-5

How can you call yourself Christian if you blaspheme His word? As it is written, "For by grace you have been saved through faith..." Ephesians 2:8

And how do you come by faith? As the Scriptures also tell us,

"...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10:17

Therefore, you are saved by believing and practicing the word of God. As we also read,

"Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?" James 2:22

And again,

"You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." James 2:24

And lastly,

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." James 2:26

If our faith is dead, then how are we saved? But if your faith is alive, then let it show by submitting to and living out the word of God.

Ultimately, submitting to your husband is not about your husband or your relationship with him; it's about the Lord. If you're going to submit to God, then you have to submit to God who is in your husband as well. Why? Because it's the way God designed marriage. It wasn't my choice, but I take a lot of flak from certain women for preaching this. Anyone who wants to argue the point is arguing with God and His design, not with me.

Understanding why you should submit to your husband is key to understanding how you can be an encouragement to your husband. God doesn't say, "Submit to an imperfect man," but rather, "Submit to God in the man." That way, God can

lead you through the man. This doesn't mean you get to pick and choose when God is speaking and working through your husband and when He isn't. If you're sinning without realizing it, how can you be rebuked if you pick and choose when to listen? Whatever your husband tells you won't line up with your heart at such a time. So the husband must have full authority as God commands; and as you would submit to God, so you must submit to your husband in everything. Not in certain matters only, but in everything:

“Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.” Ephesians 5:24

Why would God tell you to do this? So that He can have full authority over you through your husband, His tool. So the question is not, “Can you believe that God will use your husband to lead you?” Rather, the question you must ask yourself is, “Do you believe God is able to lead you through your husband?” If He is able and has told you that He will do it, then believe God and submit by faith. This will be righteous submission because it has become an act of faith for you as you believe God will work through it. So having faith in His word is your salvation.

If the man is the head, then the woman is the heart. The man is affected deeply by the woman. So how can you, the wife, affect your husband positively in submission? Constantly encourage him to submit to God as much as you submit to your husband. Encourage your husband to make all his decisions through the guidance of the Holy Spirit—not just the major decisions but the little day-to-day ones as well. What you do daily determines who you are more than impressive but occasional actions do. The little things always add up to the greater. After all, many small steps are required to go up a flight of stairs. So encourage your husband to inquire of the Lord constantly and to make each step the family takes, no matter how small, a step taken in the Lord.

God has given each person a role in marriage. If you want to live a Christ-centered marriage, then you need to submit to that design. So take up your roles exactly as outlined in the Bible. God created the mold. Therefore, as the clay of God, conform to His mold, and you'll find the deepest sense of meaning in your marriage.

God created marriage and ordained how it should be conducted and lived out. Following His design will lead to the greatest peace. Why? Because in His design, neither man nor woman is in charge. Rather, God is in charge. However, He communicates the message through the man, as we read:

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

As Christ presents His bride to Himself blameless and spotless, even so a husband must minister Christ to his wife to present her spotless to Him. He is called to be the teacher of the spiritual things. He leads his wife as he follows God. And she follows him as he follows the Lord. Thus, by submitting to him, she is submitting to Christ and not merely to the man.

Knowing this, a man is not to lead his wife according to his own heart, lest he lead her astray. He must abide continually, listen to the Holy Spirit, and obey and follow Him. That way, God will lead the wife through the husband. This is why the Scriptures command the wife to submit to her husband as to the Lord—because the husband must submit to the Lord. As he submits to God, his wife will be submitting to the Lord by submitting to her husband.

In leading his wife, a husband must love her with self-sacrificing, unconditional love, even as Christ loves His Church. Jesus laid down His life, and a husband also must be willing to lay down his life for his wife. This applies not only in life-or-death situations but also in terms of daily sacrifices to lead his wife in the love of Christ.

A man must forgo the desires of his heart to put those of his wife and children first. Obviously, above their desires come the Lord's. Therefore, a husband must submit to God's heart first, self-sacrificing to the Lord, and afterward place the needs and wants of his family above his own. Remember that, figuratively speaking, Jesus led His disciples on His knees. He made Himself a servant of those whom He led, for if Christ did not serve us, no one could be saved. Now, if the Lord of all would humble Himself and serve, how much more should His servants be found doing the same? Thus, a man must be humble in his leading, doing all things through the love of Christ.

So I ask husbands, “How have you been leading your wife in the Holy Spirit and washing her in the water of the word?” God will call you to give an account of how you led your wife. He has handed His precious daughter to you as He would a seed, and you are commanded to return her back to God fully grown, with blossoming flowers and much fruit.

Having a wife is like having a ministry. A husband is to his wife as Moses was to Israel, or as Jesus is to the church. So if you are not acting like Jesus and cleansing her through the word, you'll have to explain to God why you led her astray and fouled the beautiful girl He gave you.

How do you think God will respond to you if you testify that you defiled her soul? How would any father respond to a man who defiles his daughter? Take this to heart and lead your wife in the Spirit and love of God.

Now, I know I'm using some bold words in this prayer. But there is no easy way to explain these truths. Some things need to be said bluntly because of the influence American doctrine, and ultimately I cannot and will not apologize for the gospel. The word says what it does, and if we are to live godly, Christian lives, then we must submit to His word. As we mentioned before,

“For by grace you have been saved through faith...” Ephesians 2:8

And as we also read,

“...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Romans 10:17

You are saved by believing and practicing the word of God. ‘Christian’ literally means “follower of Christ.” How are we being Christian if we aren't following Jesus by living out His word daily?

Knowing this, a man must take to heart to study his Bible diligently. How can you practice what you do not know? How can you teach your wife if you need to be taught as well?

But whether you are grown in the Lord or not doesn't change the fact that you must lead your wife now. And likewise, a woman must not wait for her husband to grow in order to submit to him. If a husband is weak in the Lord and a woman still submits, this convicts the husband to grow and walk in the Lord. As we read,

“Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.” 1 Peter 3:1–2

Submission as outlined in the Scriptures forces a man of God to grow. As we also read,

“Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak;

but they are to be submissive, as the law also says.

“And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.” 1 Corinthians 14:34–35

If a woman takes this to heart and asks her husband a question regarding God’s word and he doesn’t know the answer, he is required to seek it. The husband is thereby encouraged to grow personally with the Lord and then communicate the messages God gives him to his wife. By this the two develop a greater unity than if they were to seek the Lord individually.

A married man should be a well-educated man. We know that we are all taught by God, so a husband must take to heart to constantly seek the Lord’s teaching and to grow in discerning His voice. That way, he can lead his wife properly. So study your Bible, men of God, until you come to know it like the back of your hand. For God has called you no longer to be a youth but to rise up to lead the next generation.

If a man doesn’t lead his family and rule it well, he is setting up his family for catastrophe. I once knew a man, whom we will call Larry, who was married to a woman we will call Debbie (I am changing their names for their sakes). Larry loved the Lord but didn’t take it to heart to lead his wife or to grow as diligently as he should have. Instead he was caught up with working his job, living life, and being a father.

Then, after thirty years, he felt a strong pull to act as an elder. He examined his own life and saw that everything was falling apart by the seams because he didn’t maintain his walk or his marriage. At first, all had seemed well with his marriage, and his wife was happy to follow God however she thought and felt was right. But because he chose to be completely hands-off, she ended up attending a different church than he did.

“Well, Adam, I met her at a Christian concert. She attended a different church at the time. She was walking just fine before I met her, so why would that change now? If she attended a different church when we first got together, why would that matter now?” he asked me while venting about his marital issues.

But this church wasn’t like the others either of them had attended. It seemed well for her at first, but as time went on, the church slowly focused more on the touchy-feely and less on the meat of the gospel. A change in leadership occurred, and a few years later, the church was unrecognizable. Debbie followed along with the whole trend, and Larry was completely oblivious to it. He wasn’t

involved in her life, and it led to her having some cult-like beliefs.

Then, when he decided to take responsibility to be the man and lead his wife, disaster followed. He began by growing in the word, and not too long after that, he noticed the corrupt doctrine in his wife's church. So he took charge and told her to leave and to join his church.

Well, she didn't take too kindly to that demand since she had been going to her church for over fifteen years now. So she fought back and insisted that he should leave his church and join hers. Often I was invited to their house, and it wasn't a pretty sight for me to see these two Christians, who had been saved for over forty years, bickering at a table like children.

Her church insisted she should stay and that her husband had no right or authority to lead her. So she came back home one day shaking her finger and calling him Satan. "You're the devil, Larry!" she snapped, "and I ain't gonna let the devil control my life! I'm gonna serve Jesus my way!"

It wasn't too long after that when she began threaten to divorce him. Her peers from church suggested it, for they were involving themselves her marriage. Watching this happen to my two friends shook me to the core. When I first met Larry and Debbie, these two people loved each other sincerely. They didn't always agree and didn't always get along, but they both loved the Lord and each other. Now, because he chose to take his walk and role in marriage more seriously, he was on the brink of a divorce. He finally stepped out to honor God, and the devil stepped out to slap him in the face for it.

The main reason she wanted a divorce was because she didn't feel she should have to leave her church and friends that she'd had for over fifteen years. To some extent, her point of view was understandable. He had let her follow God and live her life however she wanted for thirty years. On the other hand, however, she was wrong because she was putting those friends above her husband. Friends don't come first; your spouse does. She would rather have divorced him and kept her friends—and she honestly felt that way. That's when Larry came to me.

"I can't believe I'm actually saying this to you, Adam, but I'm on the verge of a divorce! I'm Christian! I never thought in a million years that my marriage would end like this." But being Christian doesn't determine whether your marriage will be successful or not. Whether you choose to apply the principles of Christ or not decides this.

Larry recognized the warfare with which he was struggling for stepping out to obey the Scriptures. He chose to stay in the fight and seek a way both to keep his marriage and to take up his role in obedience. Through much persistence, love, and persuasion, Larry was able to convince his wife. It took much time and faithfulness, but God saved his marriage in the end. Although this was hard for Debbie at first, once her eyes were opened to the truth, she saw the need to leave her church and conform to the word of God.

Satan will always confront you when you step out to honor the Lord. God allows this to test your heart in order to see whether you will continue to honor the Lord earnestly or cave in to pressure and sin. Larry wanted to cave in, but he didn't. Of course, if he had chosen to honor the Lord from day one, he never would have suffered this trial.

So don't let what happened to Larry happen to you. There's no better time than today to take up your role. But if you've been married for many years and are only taking such steps now, don't expect them to go well at first. The enemy will intervene to stop you.

A husband may not want to lead his wife. However, if she submits, he will be convicted over time to honor the Lord and grow in His word. If the man leads his wife—not forcefully but gently and lovingly, with a servant's heart as Jesus leads us—then his wife through time and gentle persuasion will conform herself to God's design and be encouraged to grow in the Lord.

So commit your marriage to God's blueprint. He knows what He's doing. If leading or submission sounds like a hard thing for you, then just do it by faith. Besides, faith should lead every one of your actions, anyway.

The Prayer

Lord, You invented marriage. I believe that You know it better than anyone else. So I commit my marriage to conform to the pattern of Your design. Teach me how to take up my role and to honor You in it.

How to Overcome Sin Easily and Naturally

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Introduction

Sin has always been the plague of humanity. By it we fell, and because of it we die. Yet we know that there is hope, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to be free from sin. In Him we have redemption, and because of Him we have strength to overcome all things.

Although we know this, there are times in the Christian life when we may struggle with overcoming a particular issue. Each of us has his or her own individual strengths and weaknesses, but it is by the strength of Jesus that we overcome.

Chapter One

When Sin Become Acceptable

There is no true Christian who automatically accepts his or her sin. At some point, before there is any major issue with sin, there is conviction. When convicted, we seek to turn from our own wickedness to honor the Lord. Yet there are sins that we commit at times without realizing it.

Every instance of sin is like a cockroach. Whenever one is spotted, there are more lurking behind the walls. Similarly, whenever a sin is noticed, there are always more lurking in our hearts, whether we see them or not. No matter how old we are in Christ, and no matter how grown we are in Him, we always need more growth. There will always be an area in which we need growth since we're not yet perfect.

Until then, there are always issues in our hearts, even if we don't realize it. In order to grow in these respects we must train ourselves to look for them with humility. In order to overcome the hidden issues, we must be humble enough to admit our weaknesses when they're brought to our attention.

Sometimes, when we discover a weakness for the first time, we don't want to admit to it. Unfortunately, when we do this, we will never overcome the sin but, instead, only justify it and hide it. Pride hides sin, but humility before Christ covers sin through confession and repentance.

Now, it's not that we want to hide our sins. The statement may sound more sinister than our hearts intend to be. But Satan subtly tempts us through the hidden issue of pride. When we can't admit a fault, the enemy steps in immediately to cement that sin in us. Then, when it's cemented, he moves on to cement another. One day, after many sins of which we're unaware have been firmly fixed within us, we begin to notice one of them.

That one particular issue may have always been there, in some cases, but may have grown worse. In some situations the issue seems to pop up out of nowhere, and we struggle with defeating it. For when we see our sin, we want to grow; as a result, our search for strength begins. We absorb every bit of material we can in our hunt for wisdom to overcome.

Yet such a sin is typically cemented and mortared together by other sins. Therefore, we must have humility to admit our weaknesses when we discover them. There is no measure of learning or wisdom that can help us overcome

unless we first prepare ourselves with humility. Sometimes there is a closet full of hidden things, and when Jesus walks in the room and opens that closet, we will be surprised to see the mess that is inside.

When we seek strength to overcome, we begin searching our own hearts to find the root of the issue. When we search our own hearts, however, we can be sure that a myriad of other issues, of which we were never before aware, will be found. Therefore, we must be humble and ready to make confession of our sins before the Lord. Every victory begins with repentance, and every confession begins with humility. In order to overcome perfectly, we must overcome every little issue that is holding up the sin.

Sin, like a weed, must be pulled up by the roots, but sometimes each sin is connected to another. Like a vast root system, sin depends on more sin for balance and support. If, then, there is an issue with sin, there are more likely other sins under the surface, propping up the main issue. In order to overcome, one must pull up all the roots of the weed so that it may not return.

Now, some such sins that go unnoticed are idleness, gluttony, pride, complacency in our walks, and living for this life rather than for Christ, among others. Idleness is indeed a sin. If we choose to partake in idle activities not pertaining to the Lord, then we are opening a door for an idol. 'Idol' literally means "thing of nothingness." When we're idle (partaking in nothingness), we will form an idol (a thing of nothingness).

Also, idleness goes hand in hand with gluttony. Most of the time when people think of gluttony, they think of someone overeating. Most gluttony ultimately comes from boredom or idleness. Think of a couch potato sipping his soda and chowing down on a bag of chips.

Likewise, idleness can lead to various forms of gluttony and to overindulgence in the desires of the flesh. There are, in fact, many other forms of gluttony that take place in the Christian life: gluttony in games, TV, the Internet, and all manner of entertainment.

We tend to be gluttonous in our shopping patterns as well. Because of gluttony, compulsive buying is a very lucrative market in today's society. Unfortunately, we're always buying things we don't need and end up having unnecessary excess. Remember that the road to excess is always a gluttonous one.

The flesh constantly desires to be gratified. It wants to be filled with pleasure and, so, indulges itself in entertainment and in everything that brings it joy. God

gives us all things abundantly to enjoy, but let our rejoicing be in the Lord and not in the flesh. When the flesh is allowed to have its desires continually, it strengthens itself against the new creation within you.

We only have twenty-four hours in a day; either we can spend our time filling the spiritual creation with Jesus or we can fill the flesh with its desires. You have to pick one or the other, and unfortunately, by their conduct, many people prove that they prefer to gratify the flesh.

Now, there's nothing wrong with a little enjoyment and a little play here and there, with discretion. But there are some people who give themselves over to it daily and constantly. Such rejoicing in the flesh gives continual strength to the flesh.

When we gratify the flesh with its desires, we “feed it,” so to speak. When we feed it, it grows stronger and harder to resist. When we first begin the road to excess and gluttony, our flesh is weak and easy to resist. Then, one day, we notice our sin and can't figure out why it's become so hard to resist. Because it's easy to resist in the beginning, our first nature is to attempt to resist it again—only to find this difficult after we have fed the flesh and given it strength for a long time. Then, when we fail, we no longer know how to overcome, so we begin our search for wisdom.

Sin would be easier to overcome if we were to call it what it is and turn from it when it first begins. Although many Christians do this, not all do it in regard to the seemingly “lesser” sins.

In God's eyes, all sin is alike. Sin is sin, and Jesus hates it. It was on account of sin that He was crucified and because of your sin that He died. He endured the cross not so you can continue to sin or to justify it; rather, He died so that you would be free from it forever, having power over it and being justified by His love, grace, and blood.

The reason why these lesser sins are more common is because of modern conveniences and the heart of the believer. They justify themselves in asking, “What's wrong with a little entertainment?” But a little here and a little there adds up to a whole lot in the end. You should ask yourself instead, “What do I spend more time doing?”

Do you seek to be entertained, buying whatever you feel like just because you can afford it—whether or not you need it? Do you give more time to God or to idle things? How much time do you give to idleness and how much time do you

put into to seeking the Lord, praying, worshiping, meditating on the Holy Spirit, and reading the word?

Seriously, count the amount of time and consider it. Many Christians spend hours everyday day channel surfing, surfing the Internet, filling up their flesh to the full, and just skidding by in their time with God.

“Well, I give God a twenty-minute devotion every day!” some may offer in rebuttal. “Sometimes twice a day—every morning and evening!” But what defines your relationship with the Lord is not only the morning and evening but also everything you do in between. We give entertainment hours of our attention, but God only gets twenty minutes a day?

Whatever you spend more time with is your god. If you’re glorifying the entertainment of the flesh, then you have an idol. Change your heart, and it will transform your life. Learn to spend more time with the Lord than with idle things. If you don’t feel like doing that, then your flesh is attached to your sin and, thus, you’re being complacent and justifying sin.

Jesus gave up His entire life to save you. Is He asking too much by requiring you to do the same for Him? Whatever happened to carrying our crosses and dying to this life? We must die to this life, that we may truly live for Christ!

Because of sin, people end up living for the here and now in this world rather than for a future and a hope in Christ. They put off in their thoughts the future for which they are reaching in Christ, and they think idly about the next entertaining thing. Such people, without realizing, begin to live for themselves and their desires rather than for the Lord. In this case, they’re feeding the flesh and giving sin strength to rule over them.

Because of this state of heart, such believers end up being complacent in their walk, feeling that they “do enough for God” and are “good with Him.” Although God has grace, He isn’t pleased when we constantly sin without regard for growth. He doesn’t want us to continually stumble in the darkness but, rather, to be filled with the light. When a believer becomes complacent, bondage comes naturally. Then, when we have bondage, sometimes God makes us hate our sin so that we should desire to grow.

Yet all of this could be avoided if a believer would grow sensitive to the voice of the Spirit and obey Him. When we sin regularly, we stop feeling conviction—not only in the sins we commit but over other sins as well.

Conviction is the voice of the Spirit. If you drown His voice out, it won’t be

louder in one area and quieter in another. When some people lose conviction in a particular sin, they feel as if they hear God just fine everywhere else in life. But as with plugging your ears, everything gets harder to hear. When we do this, our flesh begins to rule over us and all we hear are the desires of our own heart, as the whisper of the Spirit grows more and more faint.

It's unfortunate that most churches don't put a lot of emphasis on discerning God's inward voice and obeying conviction. Every church would adamantly agree that one should listen to God and obey Him, but there are many churches where it doesn't come up in the sermon. Some will talk about it, but they don't make sure every believer understands exactly how to operate in the Holy Spirit.

This is a serious tragedy and the major reason for almost every issue that plagues the church today—from church splits to false doctrine to the suffering and broken in the church who go without help, among many other problems. If we were to listen to and obey conviction, we would take care of one another so that there would be less suffering. We would seek the truth together rather than having our own spiritual quests that cause church splits. We would be a body and seek the Lord together as on whole unit. We would seek the truth, speak the same things, and be a body in Christ.

It's a shame that people don't call things for what they are. Rather than calling false doctrine what it is, they say, "You believe something else." Then, because we live in an era of social acceptance and political correctness, they say, "You believe your thing, and I'll believe mine. It's my own personal relationship, anyway." Rather than leading one another to the truth and seeking to be unified in the Spirit, we embark on our own, personal "spiritual" quests.

Whatever happened to being a body and functioning as one unit in Christ? Whatever happened to truth—the one and only doctrine that Jesus handed down to us? Indeed, the Lord calls us to be unified. Even as we read,

"Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you." 1 Corinthians 1:10–11

All of these sins are too commonly accepted. From idleness and self-indulgence to divisions in doctrine, we should call all things for what they are and seek growth together as one body in Christ. But unfortunately, too many people are interested in maintaining their own opinions of the gospel and calling these

opinions “truths.” They all go about believing their own version of “truth,” thinking that they’re the closest to God and that they have it right.

Yet no one can agree on doctrine, and as a result, many go about their walks arguing with others while struggling with sin issues and not always understanding what they are, how deep they are, or how to overcome them. The Bride of Christ is in disarray and in serious need of an awakening. If we would just listen to the Spirit, we would be more unified and holy in our conduct.

Conviction is the first thing Jesus listened to. Think about it: How many times did Jesus sin? It’s obvious, then, that He must have maintained a tremendous emphasis for Himself on listening to conviction and obeying it.

We should do likewise. Jesus was always listening to the Father and obeying Him. We likewise should place a great emphasis on seeking God’s voice to know His will, and on obeying the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

When we obey our own heart, however, sin slowly turns into joy and becomes more acceptable. It no longer is sin in our opinions, but rather we begin to feel that these sins are lesser things we think God overlooks or doesn’t care about. Yet these “small” issues are the roots of the larger problems we face, both as individuals and as a corporate body in Christ.

If we don’t listen to the Spirit, His voice becomes hard to hear as we starve the spiritual creation. But if we feed the new creation with the things of God, the voice of the Lord becomes stronger.

When we hear God, we must obey Him. If we love the Lord, we must take His voice seriously, no matter how loud or how small and subtle. We must discern if, indeed, the Lord is speaking to us or if our own heart is speaking. Yet sometimes the enemy manipulates our own heart and mimics God to deceive us and tempt us. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to learn the voice of God and to discern it. Then, when we have understanding, we must obey Him, and His Spirit will strengthen us as we do.

Ultimately, if we accept our sins, we’ll never overcome them. Pride will step in, and we’ll ask, “What sin?” while expecting God to overlook it, even as we do. Just because it’s a small issue to us, however, doesn’t make it a small issue to God.

Besides, when we’ve been sinning, our hearts are no longer aligned with His, so how can we claim to know He approves of us or that we know His will? Rather, we ought to call sin for what it is, hate it, and humble ourselves. Confession

leads to salvation, and repentance to the halls of life.

Chapter Two

A Time to Hate

It is written,

“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven...”
Ecclesiastes 3:1

And also,

“A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.”
Ecclesiastes 3:8

There is a time to love and a time to hate. But we should always love the Lord and hate our sin! Sin is sin. We need to call it what it is: It's a nasty, unloving act that always ends in grief. Although sin has the appearance of joy before committing it, it will always end in grief at some point in your life. It may not always be immediately, but at some point, whether in moments, days, or years, you'll be grieved by your sin. Even unbelievers who are not grieved by sin but, in fact, reject Jesus as Savior will be grieved by their sins at Judgment. All sin always ends in grief, and the only joy it gives is temporary.

Therefore, there is much reason to hate it. We must hate our sins, or we can't truly overcome them. If you don't want to be rid of something, you'll never throw it out.

Like a lazy bachelor who should take the garbage out, so are those who don't hate their sins. The bachelor looks at the overflowing garbage and says, “Ugh ... I should take that out”—even as he proceeds to pull out a beverage and kick back in a recliner instead. After the garbage stinks, he says, “I really need to take that out!” only to seek refuge from the smell in another room and do something else.

Then, when the girl he likes surprises him at the door, he finds himself embarrassed that he didn't take care of it earlier. Likewise, when Jesus our Beloved comes, we'll be embarrassed by our deeds if we don't take repentance and purity seriously. Let us not be caught off guard being sinful, lest we be embarrassed at His coming. Even as it is written,

“And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He

is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.” 1 John 2:28–9

Therefore, let us be diligent to practice righteousness and seek a pure life in Christ, lest we be ashamed at His coming. If we say, “I shouldn’t do this,” or “I should do that,” we’ll never actually commit to the right thing. Rather, we have to be fervent in our hearts and say, “I must not sin—I must honor the Lord because I love Him.”

This is the beginning of overcoming all sin. First comes the state of heart, and then comes the method. We can have all knowledge in regard to having victory, but it means nothing if we lack the desire and will to overcome.

Now, if you have bondage, it will be very hard to hate your sin in the heat of the moment. You will hate it every moment in between, but when faced with temptation, you’ll ignore the voice of conviction and will stumble.

Therefore, you have to force yourself to hate your sin absolutely in the heat of the moment, or you’ll never overcome it. When desire is pressed in your heart, push back against it and tell yourself “no.” Choose hatred for sin; you will be choosing life. Hate your sin and love Jesus.

Accordingly, it is written,

“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.” James 4:7–9

Remember that hate is the action of pushing away and killing, whereas love is the action of drawing near and holding dear. Therefore, push back on the devil and resist Him. But when tempted, know that while you’re pushing back, you’re not only pushing against the enemy but against your own flesh.

Thus, resisting temptation itself isn’t the answer but, rather, finding strength in the Holy Spirit is. When we focus on temptation, we’re focusing on desire. And when we focus on desire, we’ll always succumb to it. So it isn’t that we should stop resisting desire and temptation but, instead, that we should simply change our approach.

We need to begin with hating our sin and allowing our hearts to come to gloom. Then we must resist the devil. But what should we do after saying “no” to the devil? What does James go on to say? That we need to draw near to God. In

this, we find strength to overcome and faith to persist in holiness.

Chapter Three

A Time to Love

As we know, there is a time and a place for every season. Yet we are called to hate sin always. Hating sin and resisting it are not enough for overcoming it, however. We must also love the Lord in everything we do, being the example of His love in all our conduct.

There is no sin that is an act of love. If we love the Lord, we'll hate our sin and desire change. Now, desire can be either good or bad. Good desire can be turned into lewdness by the temptation of the enemy, though for the most part good desire ends in good decisions. But all bad desire ends in sin.

Therefore, it is evident that sin is dictated by what we do with our desires. When resisting sin, it isn't that we should merely wait for the heat of the moment to resist but, rather, that we should control it at its roots—through desire.

In short, we must change our heart so that we can have godly desire. And if we walk in the Spirit, we will be able to resist temptation just as Jesus did.

Unfortunately, the fact that good desire can be used for sin is evident. For Eve desired to be wise, which is a good desire, but she used the wrong means to obtain it. Rather than seeking the Lord for it, she went against the commandment of God and ate of the tree. Yet if she had loved the Lord with all her heart, soul, mind, and strength, she wouldn't have questioned the integrity of God. Thereafter, having loved the Lord, she also would not have handed the fruit of sin to her husband because she would have loved her neighbor as herself. Thus, love fulfills every law and the commandments of God.

As we understand this, our love for God must compel our quest for victory over sin. Although we are called to hate our sin, if all we do is hate it, then we will never overcome it. Hatred doesn't lead to victory, but the love of God does.

Remember that He chose to come down to us because of love. Remember that He gave His life to save us due to love. And remember that His love was so powerful that it overturned the grave, destroying all our sin in His flesh. If, then, we walk in love toward the Lord, He will strengthen us to overcome, even as He has overcome all things. And if we love Him, we will resist our sins and flee from temptations.

Nevertheless, resisting sin is not entirely the answer. Many believers wait for the

heat of the moment and then press against temptation, calling it “resisting sin.” Yet this isn’t necessarily how we’re called to resist sin. Although we should push back against it in the heat of the moment, we must change our hearts to remove the weed of sin from its source. We need to focus on being edified long before temptation ever comes into the picture.

In the end, it all begins with our alone time with God. As we said previously, if we spend much time being idle, we can develop bondage. However, if we spend much time with the Lord, we’ll find constant strength through the Holy Spirit. In this we learn that, to grow in Him and to overcome all things, we must continually express our love and affection for the Lord.

We are called to express our love to Him through constant prayer and worship while meditating on the presence of the Spirit. If we love Him, we will draw near to Him. When we draw near to Him, He strengthens us to overcome.

We also must seek Him in the word to grow a strong knowledge of the Scriptures. How can we rightly obey the word unless we know it from our hearts? Therefore, we must do more than read the Bible: We must study it, memorize it, and absorb it.

Although we must seek the Lord in His word every day, it is not an activity that we can do all day. But prayer and silent worship are indeed, activities in which we can engage continually throughout the day. When we do these things, it keeps us meditating on and walking in the Spirit.

Since we have two natures, both the nature of the Spirit and that of the flesh, we do not always walk in the Spirit as we should. Hence, the need for a new spiritual body, which the Lord will give us at the last trumpet. Until then, we have the flesh with which to deal.

When we walk in the flesh, we walk contrary to the Lord. This is not walking in a pattern of love but in enmity. As it is written,

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

“For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.” Romans 8:5–7

Therefore, if we love the Lord, we will seek to understand and apply the concept of walking in the Spirit. Yet if we walk in the flesh and do not seek change,

we're walking in enmity against God. Enmity literally means "bitter hatred toward." Thus, it is more than evident that we must learn how to walk in the Spirit, and do so daily, if we love the Lord.

In order to walk in the Spirit, we must focus on the things that benefit us in the Spirit. As we discussed earlier, these things are prayer, worship, and meditating on His presence. As we focus on His presence, we must diligently listen to Him and be faithful to obey Him. We are led by God's Spirit when we hear His voice and obey Him. Thus, we are following after Him as He leads us.

When we continue in the Spirit throughout the day, it strengthens us to overcome the moments of temptation. We must do more than resist sin when tempted, however; we need to seek the Lord on a daily basis, praying continually and meditating on the Spirit constantly. By so doing, we will be strengthened to resist temptation, making it easier to push back when the moment arises.

Knowing this, dedicate yourself to becoming a house of prayer for the Lord. At every possible moment, pray and reflect on His heart. This takes a growing process to master, but it is only mastered through faith.

When you try to meditate on the Lord, the enemy will rise up to distract you. People around you may be influenced by the enemy to make noise, constantly interrupt, or otherwise distract you. Also, you may yourself have distracting thoughts, and your mind may trail off.

In this we need to press against the enemy and our own hearts by focusing harder on the Spirit. This is where faith enters. Have faith that God will give you the strength to drown out the noise so that you may be able to press in the Spirit.

The inward distractions will slowly dissipate, but don't always expect the outward distractions to do the same. Sometimes, if it is at all possible, you may need to move away from the distractions around you to be near to the Lord. Although it is not always possible due to being in the world, such as at a workplace, we should make every effort to be alone with God and recharge in Him.

When it is not possible to escape the noise, continue to press in the Lord, for He will give you strength as you persist. But remember that it is a growing process, and it doesn't always work out easily at first. However, as you grow, it will become easier to persist without succumbing to distractions. In other words, we simply need to learn to meditate on the Lord, even if we are in intense situations.

Consider that Peter was in an intense situation when he walked on water in the

midst of a storm. When he focused on Jesus, he walked on water; when he didn't, he fell in. Therefore consider these things and seek to press in the Spirit. Focus on Him, or you'll fall into distractions and various temptations.

Whether we are alone or in public, we ought to continue in the Spirit. It is our duty as Christians, and we must take this as a most serious thing. If we love the Lord, we must express it by seeking Him constantly and walking in Him always.

Take every moment that you can to pray and talk to Him. Converse and commune with your God, and you'll see how intimate He is. Then, as you walk in the Spirit, you will be strengthened to overcome. By nature, then, you'll be walking in the Spirit and glorifying the Lord.

Chapter Four

The Method

Keeping in the Spirit should be the goal of every believer, whether faced with sin or not. Now, by saying “keeping in the Spirit” or “abiding in the Spirit,” we really mean to say “continuing in the Spirit” or, more specifically, “walking in the Spirit.”

To walk in the Spirit is to operate in the Spirit. Although the Spirit may abide in us and never leave us, nor forsake us, we do not always walk in the Spirit as we should. If we believe that we always walk in the Spirit because we have Him, we would be guilty of blaspheming the Lord. For example, it would be blasphemous against the Holy Spirit to say that we are walking and operating in Him when we are sinning.

So, quite obviously, we do not walk in the Spirit at all times. There are times when we succumb to temptation or sit in idleness without focusing on the Spirit. It is a lifelong effort to meditate continually on the Spirit while simultaneously taking care of the practical necessities of life. Yet remember, there is nothing more practical than walking in the Spirit.

Even so, it should be the goal of every believer to continually operate and walk in the Spirit. And unless we meditate on His presence while listening to Him, we will never be led by Him. For we are led when He speaks and we obey. As we discussed previously, we are commanded to obey the words of God. He is our Lord and Master and must be obeyed. We were not created for our own selfish will but, rather, to live for His purpose.

Remember that because God had a plan for you, He created you. Having a plan for your life, He knit you in your mother’s womb. Therefore, seek to be a vessel for honor, constantly obeying the Lord and being cleansed from all filthiness of sin and unrighteousness. For righteousness comes by faith, and faith comes by hearing God.

So what, then, is unrighteousness? It is when we do not obey God through faith when we hear Him and, as well, when we choose not to listen to Him at all.

If we turn a deaf ear to God, then we’re walking in unrighteousness. And when do we turn a deaf ear to the Lord? When we have desire and seek to live for our own heart, not God’s. How, then, can we operate in the faith? By listening carefully to God’s voice and obeying it through faith. This, Beloved, is true

righteousness and how you ought to walk in it.

Now, when we are faced with sin, there are various things we are called to do in order to overcome it. As we discussed earlier, if we seek to walk in the Spirit, sin will be overcome both easily and naturally. For it is the nature of the Spirit to be pure, knowing that God does not sin.

Therefore, when we focus on living out the nature of God through the Holy Spirit, sin is overcome by nature. And to live according to nature is quite easy to do. Yet it is difficult when struggling with two natures, unless one becomes more powerful than the other. In this we need to learn to feed our spirits with the things of the Holy Spirit so that our spiritual nature will be strongest.

When we worship, continually pray, and constantly focus on His presence, giving Him our attention to listen to Him, we begin to be strengthened to overcome. Indeed, all things are overcome by faith. As it is written,

“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” 1 John 5:4

Knowing, then, that we overcome all things by faith, we must focus on the things that make for faith. When we focus on the Holy Spirit to listen to His voice, we will live according to faith. For faith comes by hearing God and obeying His word. As it is also written,

“...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Romans 10:17

Therefore, Beloved, I’d like to encourage you to give yourself entirely to listening to the Holy Spirit and obeying Him. If we do not obey His voice or His conviction, then we sin. After all, we have established that faith comes by hearing, and it is also written,

“...for whatever is not from faith is sin.” Romans 14:23

Knowing, then, that we sin if we do not obey faith, we must take obedience as a most serious thing. If we love the Lord, we will trust Him. Every relationship is founded on love and trust.

Therefore, if we want to have a relationship with God, we must learn to have faith in His word and obey it. If we believe God, we should do something with our faith and obey Him.

To believe and not obey is sin. If you would obey your boss at work, how much more should you obey your Lord and Master? If you would obey your parents as a child, how much more should we be subject to the Father of spirits and live

thereby? If you would respect and obey a police officer, how much more should you respect and obey the One who authored the law in our consciences? If you look up to any authority, then how much more should you submit yourself to the Master of all authority, that you may live?

Beloved, surrender to God and so find strength and life. For through Him we have the substance of life while sin is the gateway to death. Death was introduced because of sin, and it reigns over mankind because humanity is enslaved to sin. Nevertheless, we have freedom from sin and death through Christ Jesus if we walk in His Spirit. For when we walk in His Spirit, we overcome sin. As it is written,

“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”
Galatians 5:16

Beloved, focus on the things that cause you to walk in the Spirit, and you will overcome sin. Think for a moment: What things cause you to feel the presence of the Spirit? All things that pertain to seeking and obeying God, no doubt.

Therefore, set your heart on drawing near to the Spirit all day and every day. Sing songs to the Lord and worship Him through the Spirit. Worship Him, and His Spirit will overcome you. Do you remember that Jesus said the Father desires worshippers in Spirit and in truth? Therefore, worship Him from your heart—because you love Him—and the Spirit will come upon you.

Pray constantly, and He will bless you with His presence. Remember also that when you pray to Him and focus on His presence, the Spirit intercedes for you. Even so, we must learn to pray in the Spirit.

Do all things that cause the Spirit to come upon you, and you will be edified by His presence. If you are idle, or if you’re sinning, the Spirit is not operating through you or, thus, upon you.

Although He is always with you, there is a difference between when we operate in the Spirit and when we don’t. When we permit the Spirit to be upon us, He will be upon us. But if we ignore Him, then we’re in the flesh and operating in the flesh. Therefore, be diligent to do all things that cause the Spirit to come upon you. For when He is upon you, you’re operating in Him.

Now, Beloved, it is God’s desire and will for you to overcome sin. Jesus Christ was crucified to give you life. He conquered your grave when He conquered His own grave. But our sins are the reason we die. Christ came to cleanse us, as we know, that we may live.

But if we choose to operate in the flesh and walk in sin, we are not choosing to be cleansed from our sins. In this case, we are like pigs in the mire—for when the Lord cleanses us, we happily go back to rest in the mud and wallow there.

How, then, can we remain clean for Him if we do not resist sin? If we sit idly in the mud, we will be covered in the mud. For God cleanses and forgives the repentant, not the unrepentant. If He cleansed the unrepentant, then the whole world would be saved—yet it is not. Therefore, we know that we must be diligent to walk by repentance.

Beloved, God desires for every man to be saved and walk in the light of life. In order for Him to save us from death, we must be saved from sin. Sin can be overcome easily if we choose to walk in the Spirit and understand how to do this. As we discussed earlier, when we walk in the Spirit, we don't fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Yes, God wants you to overcome sin and have eternal life. It is His deepest desire for you to walk continually in the Spirit. For by the Spirit we have been given all we need to overcome every obstacle in life. There is nothing too hard for the Lord, so if we learn to lean on Him as we ought, we will overcome all things.

How to Overcome in the Heat of the Moment

Now, when you are faced with the heat of the moment, there is a way to overcome temptation every time. But we will only overcome if we put forth the appropriate amount of effort. The harder you try, the more likely you will overcome. If your heart is not invested in overcoming, however, you will fall.

No matter what you're tempted about, God will be your strength if you approach Him appropriately for it. Whether you're tempted with anger, sensual lust, or stealing, it doesn't matter—the method will always be the same for all manner of temptation, for we have one God who overcomes all things. Again, this method of overcoming depends upon whether we seek God properly for strength.

When tempted in the heat of the moment, first flee the situation both in your thoughts and physically, if at all possible. For it is written,

“Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” 2 Timothy 2:22

Although we're called to resist the devil, we're called to flee sin. The main struggle for most believers is differentiating between resisting the devil and resisting temptation. For when they are tempted, they think that the source of the temptation is Satan. Thus, they press hard to resist it. But in reality, it is their own heart they're resisting because the devil is merely stirring up the desire that already exists. For it is written,

“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.” James 1:14–15

In order to be carried away in temptation, first we must be carried away by our own desires. Satan only entices us after we've been wallowing in our own sinful desires. We already want to sin, and all he does is make a suggestion; then we go ahead with it.

Therefore, when you resist temptation, you're really resisting your own heart. No person can resist his or her own heart and overcome every time. For we overcome all things by faith, not by our own strength.

A strong Christian is not determined by his or her own strength or ability to overcome. Rather, a truly strong Christian is one who can humbly admit his or her own weaknesses and lean on Christ for strength. Strong Christians are not

strong in themselves, but they make Christ their strength. Thus, they appear strong when it is really Christ who is strong in them. Truly, such people are strong because they walk in the Spirit by faith, and we must do likewise.

So, then, this question remains: How do we overcome when faced with temptation? As we stated earlier, we need to flee the situation. When we resist our own heart, we will fail, but if we submit to the heart of Christ, we will win. Therefore, we must flee the situation both physically—if possible—and in our thoughts.

Now we must ask ourselves: To where do we flee? To the farthest possible place from sin. And what is the farthest possible place from sin? The Lord, no doubt. Therefore, when you're tempted, flee into the arms of Jesus. We are overcome with temptation when we walk in the flesh, but when we walk in the Spirit, temptation is easily overcome by continuing to focus on the Spirit.

Hence, when we are overtaken with temptation, it is obvious that we've been in the flesh. So in order to get out of the situation, we need to focus on the Holy Spirit and the things that cause Him to come upon us.

In this situation, it is generally best to begin with prayer and to continue after prayer with worship. When we're tempted, remember that Jesus said,

“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one...”
Matthew 6:13

And remember also how Jesus encouraged Paul,

“And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness...’” 2 Corinthians 12:9

Knowing these things, Beloved, when you're tempted, let your prayers be thus: “Lord, save me from this moment. I want you! Lead me not into temptation but deliver me from the evil one! Please be my strength in my weakness!” Plead with Him and continue to focus on Him as you pray.

But above all, have faith that He will be your strength. Remember that you overcome by faith, and this is the moment to exercise that. If you only pray, but don't have faith, it won't do anything for you. But if you pray with all faith that He will help you, and if you turn your focus to His Spirit and not the temptation, you will win.

When you begin to feel strengthened, then continue to take your focus off of the temptation and rest it on the Lord. Don't even think of the tempting thing, but

instead meditate on the Spirit and worship God. Let His Spirit come upon you and continue to focus on the things that bring this about. When you do so, the Spirit strengthens you to overcome naturally.

Then, when your heart is conformed to His, you will desire what He desires. Whenever the Holy Spirit comes upon us, our desires conform to His, our mind to His, and our heart to His. Thus, we are strengthened by the Holy Spirit, through faith, to overcome.

As an example, if you're in an argument and you're tempted with anger, you and the person with whom you're at odds should agree that both of you will step into another room and get in the Spirit. Then, when the Spirit is upon you, come back to discuss the matter. Now being full of the Holy Spirit, you will have the mind of Christ and not the heart of the flesh.

But when you're seeking the Lord in the other room, flee the thoughts of your heart, which the enemy will replay in your mind to keep you abiding in wrath and distract you from the Holy Spirit. Pray for strength, and worship Him.

So, to break it down in an easily understood list, when tempted we need to do these three things:

- 1) Flee the temptation both physically and in our thoughts.
- 2) Pray for deliverance and strength.
- 3) Have faith in the Spirit that He will give us strength right now as we pray. He won't do it one minute from now, nor later. It is His will for you to overcome right here and right now.
- 4) Worship God and keep your focus on Him.
- 5) Do not approach the temptation again, but continue in the Spirit.

Conclusion

If you follow this method and the various points we have outlined, God will strengthen you to overcome sin both easily and naturally. If you learn to keep in the Spirit continually, bondage will disappear forever and sin will fizzle out. Although we will have moments of mistakes at various points of life, defeating sin will not be an ongoing struggle.

Ultimately, we always need to have the Spirit upon us—not just during Sunday service or at Bible study but continually and always as well, since we are spiritual creatures. Indeed, as spiritual creatures, we should be full of the Spirit. It is God's desire and heart for us to have the Spirit constantly upon us. But since we have free will, it is our decision as to whether or not that will be the case.

Therefore, Beloved, I'd like to urge you to keep in the Spirit and walk in Him. Pray constantly and worship the Lord. Do not merely sing about God but, furthermore, aim your praises at Him. If you make a lifelong commitment to continue in the Spirit through prayer and worship, this will not only help you overcome a singular circumstance of sin or bondage; it will also bless your relationship with the Lord both now and forever.

BONUS *How to Memorize the Bible Quick and
Easy*

How To Memorize The Bible Fast And Easy™

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Introduction

Welcome to the life changing rewards of Scripture memorization! After this challenging course, you'll be changed down to the core because you will understand your Bible like never before. When you increase your understanding of God's word, it changes how you think, act, walk, and breathe. His word dictates how He wants us to live, and the more we understand how to apply our Bibles, the more like Jesus we become. But prepare yourself for the work that lies ahead. There is always work associated with memorizing, but the rewards of knowing God's word are infinite.

I believe that every Christian should know the word of God by heart. How can you practice the word unless it's locked in your heart? How can you lock the Scriptures in your heart unless you memorize them? This is not a call to be vainly religious by impressing people with a bunch of Scriptures. This is a call to know your Bible for your own personal walk.

I have personally memorized many books in the Bible word for word. I am convinced that any Christian can memorize dozens of books and recall them word for word flawlessly, just as I have. In this book, I will be teaching you the method that I have used to memorize so much Scripture.

It is an easy-to-follow formula that does require a little elbow grease. But after you're done, your sword will be sharper than you ever thought possible.

The Basics

We know that God commands us to apply His word and be found faithfully walking in it. How can we apply it unless it's locked in our hearts? Thus we know that God also commands us to retain His word in our hearts. It is necessary for each of us to memorize. But how do we know God wants us to memorize His Bible? Does He truly command us to memorize? I believe He does, which is why it is written,

“How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You. Blessed are You, O LORD! Teach me Your statutes. With my lips I have declared All the judgments of Your mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, As much as in all riches. I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes; I will not forget Your word.” Psalm 119:9–16

It's clear that God calls us not to forget His word. How can we remember unless we memorize? What is sin? To depart from the ways of God. How shall we keep from going off course if His word, which establishes His will, isn't bound in our hearts? Hence we are also called to meditate on the Scriptures always. As it is also written,

“Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.” Psalm 1:1–3

We must meditate day and night on the Lord's word—both what His Holy Spirit speaks into our hearts and the Scriptures. But that God wants us to bind His word in our hearts is evident. For we read,

“My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart;” Proverbs 4:20–21

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” John 15:7–8

In order to bear the fruit of God, His words must abide in us. How can they abide unless we memorize them and meditate on them continually? The word “abide” in this Scripture is “meno” in the original Greek. Meno means to abide, to dwell, or to continue in the presence or concept of. Thus is it more than obvious that God is calling us to both dwell in and continue in His word daily. But does God really want His word to dwell in us? As it is written,

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” Colossians 3:16

Let His word dwell in you. Be established in it, and meditate upon it that you can rightly apply it. Even as it is also written,

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” 2 Timothy 2:15

We must rightly divide the Scriptures and know His doctrine perfectly so that we will know how to apply it. Yet we could never apply His word unless we remember it for application, which is why it is also written,

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away,

and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.” James 1:22–25

Don’t merely read God’s word. Study it, know it, meditate on it, and memorize it so you can practice it. Even as God commanded Joshua, so He commands each of us. As we read,

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” Joshua 1:8

The book of the law was the only written word of God in Joshua’s time. Now we have the law of liberty, which is the law of Christ. We know that we fulfill this law through the Holy Spirit as we practice God’s love. But we still are required to meditate on and memorize His word that we can know what the love of God looks like. How can we apply something if we don’t know how it works? If a person doesn’t know how to operate a factory machine, how can they manufacture anything? Likewise, if we don’t know the word of God, we cannot produce the fruit of righteousness. Faith may not always require knowledge, but it always requires understanding. We don’t always know how a circumstance will turn out when we put our faith in God, but if we understand the character and nature of His love, we will understand that He will work everything together for good.

Now, some may argue that it is not necessary to memorize so much Scripture. But we cannot practice God’s will unless we understand it perfectly. There’s nothing wrong with memorizing this amount of Scripture if you intend to use it for your own personal walk. But if anyone wants to use the Scripture to show off and impress others, then they’ll vainly puff themselves up. Even as it is written,

“...Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.” 1 Corinthians 8:1

If we love one another, we will edify each other with the word of God. There is nothing wrong with understanding the Scriptures in the deepest sense and using that knowledge to edify the brethren. In the days of Paul, Bibles were not as abundant as they are now. Many Christians had to memorize entire books so that they could carry the words with them in their heart. It began with the oral tradition of the Pharisees, who believed that the fathers before Moses passed down the traditions orally. These were the traditions that Moses wrote about. So it became a part of the Jewish tradition to both read and orally share the word of God. Today Christians have become so dependent on their Bibles that many could not discern Scripture without having a Bible in hand.

Imagine going to a foreign country to share the word of God where a Bible is not permitted. How can you teach anyone from the Scriptures unless you smuggle a Bible in? It sounds noble to smuggle Bibles, but there’s nothing wrong with smuggling it in through having it bound in your heart. Those that live in hostile countries tend to memorize more Scripture because a Bible is hard to find. So it means more to them than it does to us. But God’s word should mean everything to us!

It is impossible to study a vast amount of Scripture without having the right heart. It is easy to be complacent and ask such questions as “Why do I need to memorize so much? Where can I find time to do that? How is it even possible to memorize so much?”

Now let’s answer these questions one by one. We have already addressed why we need to memorize so much. How can we find time? Simple. If we love the Lord, we will make time to put Him first. Even as it is written,

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” Matthew 6:33

Seek God's kingdom first, and worry about the rest later. Make time for God because He's more important. If you don't have time, then make the time and be diligent to study your Bible. Memorize it faithfully. You will never memorize it unless you make a commitment to do it. This commitment requires a disciplined heart. You must be self-disciplined and force yourself to do it. It's easy to become complacent with all the distractions around us. It's easy to desire entertainment over education. But let each of us be educated in the things of Christ and simpleminded in the fleshly entertainment and sin of this world.

Yes, there is nothing wrong with being entertained. But if it gets in the way of a relationship with God, then it has to be set aside. If one cannot set it aside, then they have an idol. Most people would have at least an extra hour or two per day if they put aside entertainment. Consider yourself. How much time can you make for God? Doesn't He deserve the time from you? Be diligent to memorize His word today.

If you need to, make an agreement with yourself and your family. Write it up on a piece of paper and sign it if you need to, but ask your family to keep you accountable. If they see you being idle, they can encourage you to seek the Lord.

I have heard one memory expert tell Christians to make a covenant with God on paper and sign it. In the covenant, they claim that a person should come up with a date on which you guarantee God that you will completely memorize the particular book. This person says that it makes a person very serious about memorizing the word of God and keeping to it. While we must take memorizing His word seriously, I question the expert who said that. This man claimed to have memorized dozens of books from the Bible word for word, including the book of Matthew. If he truly memorized so much, then how did he miss the scripture that says,

"But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one." Matthew 5:34-37

God makes it clear to never make an oath. God makes the covenants, and we are called to believe them. Let your yes be yes and no be no. Show your fervent heart by being committed but only within a biblical context. It doesn't do anyone any good to memorize a mess of scriptures and then end up having no idea how to apply them, which was the case for that memory expert.

Nevertheless, we should be committed to seeking the Lord and understanding His word. God is pleased by those who diligently seek Him. Even as we read,

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

Knowing this, be found faithfully seeking God. Diligence is best defined as faithfully doing something when it is least convenient. If it is difficult for you to memorize Scripture due to a time constraint, then consider when you are most mentally alert and make time during that part of the day. God deserves our time. So let each of us prioritize accordingly that we can become more intimately attuned with His word.

It is easier to memorize God's word when you're mentally prepared for it. This preparation simply comes through being awake to the Holy Spirit. First you need to be alert in your mind but more so in the Spirit. To prepare for memorization, it is good to worship or pray for a good period of time first. Continue to do so until you feel the Spirit; that way you can memorize through the Spirit—a technique that we will discuss later.

Know Your Bible

It is worthless to memorize something you don't understand. Take the time to study the Scriptures, then memorize the things that the Spirit has explained the context to and the meaning of to you. That way, when you understand the meaning, it will have real life application. It's hard to retain scripture that doesn't have any purpose for your life. This is true to anything. Consider your days in high school. There are many things that you learned that you haven't applied for years, and how much of that has been retained? However, the things you have applied you still remember to this day. But the things you haven't applied, you need to brush up on.

It is the same with the word of God. Whatever Scripture you intend to apply in your life should be memorized. Then as you apply it and meditate on it, your mind will be able to retain it longer.

If you understand something, it is easy to remember it. If it is useless to you, you won't retain it. For example a nonsense phrase is difficult to remember. Try memorizing this: fa na sa pa la na ba da fa pa ga sa ya la da pa na fa.

This may seem ridiculous, but it has a point, so stop reading and try to memorize it. It will be very difficult even though it has fewer letters when compared to most verses. In fact, it's easier to memorize a longer verse such as John 3:16 than that. Anything that has real life application means more to your mind and is retained longer. It is held together by passion, and that passion is centered on your love for Christ. When you intend to fervently apply the word of God through love, you will retain it more effectively. The things that are applied are held onto longer, but you must have the love, the passion, and the zeal to apply what you're going to memorize.

If there is no purpose for the scripture that you're going to memorize, then there is no point to memorize it. It will only be for prideful reasons. But if you have a purpose for it and a use for it, then it will benefit you.

Also, unless you are very serious in your attempt to memorize, it will be very difficult to memorize more than one verse. First you must diligently seek the Lord. Then He blesses those that diligently seek Him. How does He bless them? He helps them retain it. Hence we read,

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." John 14:26

It is more than evident that we can find wisdom through faith in Christ. And we know that God wants us to understand our Bibles. How can we apply His word with an ounce of discernment unless we take the time to know and understand the Scriptures?

We must allow room for critical thinking that life application can take place. If we memorize a vast amount of Scripture without knowing its meaning, then we'll only have useless information. What's the point to remembering something you won't use? It is better to memorize that information only after having gained insight as to how it is practical for your life. Then by using the scripture daily, it will be retained longer. It is more useful for memory to use a scripture once a day for 55 days than it is to repeat it to yourself 55 times a day without knowing how to use it.

There are some Christians that want to memorize Scripture without actually knowing its meaning. They feel it has some sort of underlying purpose that will aid them in the end. Some feel it will make them look good as Christians. But in truth, while such a person may accurately recite the scripture to another, they will wrongly apply it. So the end result makes the person look unwise rather than spiritual or godly.

The Best Method

There is really only one method that has worked for thousands of years. Rote. By this method, billions of people throughout time have memorized whole books, sacred texts, musical symphonies, mathematical laws, and countless documents. Even today it is the preferred method of memorization for children in schools. Children with mental disabilities memorize best through variations of rote. It is and always has been the preferred and perfected method of memorization for every individual on the planet. If a child with a mental disability can use it and remember much, then why can't anyone else? It is the most basic and simplistic method that employs the best method for retaining a memory.

Various methods of rote use all three methods of learning to establish a long-term memory: kinesthetic, auditory, and visual. It does use much repetition, which some people like to avoid. The reason why repetition is superior is that our minds are programmed by God to remember things we encounter frequently. If we frequently encounter a difficult circumstance, for example, God created us to think creatively to overcome it.

But if we experience an obstacle only once, we may not remember how to overcome it. In as much as some would prefer to avoid memorizing by repetition, it is actually better for them. But by and large, it is much easier to remember something we encounter every day for a month than 30 times in a day. It isn't about how much we repeat things to ourselves but how often we use them on a daily basis. Remember the "use it or lose it" mentality? It certainly applies with memory. If we meditate on the word of God daily, we are more likely to retain it for the long term.

There are two things that stick out in the memory: a repeated experience or an extremely emotionally elevated experience. I bet you can remember a terrible nightmare you had as a child but can't remember what you dreamt one month ago today. Extremely heightened states of fear, joy, anger, and all other emotions open the mind to retain a memory. This is why some experts claim you should create strange mental images to remember scripture or other texts—because it incites emotions of intrigue or laughter.

Yet no context can be retained by this method. This is where knowledge deviates from wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to accurately apply knowledge, whereas knowledge is merely stored information. While there are many tactics that can help you store information, relatively few help you to accurately apply what you retained. Rather than using useless methods to retain worthless material, we need to focus on the things that help us to retain the Scriptures for proper application. As we said before, so now I say again: what good is it to remember the Bible if we don't understand how to properly apply it?

We can't retain the word of God unless it is held through daily use. So the best method is to repeat the Scriptures to ourselves and apply them daily. None of us will have heightened states of emotion with each verse, so it is best instead to just be diligent and memorize the Bible through self-discipline and age-old tactics that work.

There are many Bible scholars and memory experts who have memorized entire books of the Bible word for word using the rote method or variations of it—myself included. I teach a variation of rote that is built on the power of faith in the Holy Spirit.

The rote method was developed thousands of years ago before print was known to exist. Seeing that people couldn't write down the information they needed for later reference, they would memorize it. Even the ancient Jews, especially the Levites and scribes, would memorize whole texts word for word using rote.

Due to the results this method produces, it has been employed by billions of people for thousands of years. This method works so well for any individual that all major religions have employed it. For example, in

Buddhism, the Buddhist monks use rote memorization to memorize their sacred texts. They are required to memorize several pages of an entire topic as little children before they can even discuss its meaning. (We as Christians should meditate on the meaning before we memorize and during memorization.) By the time a monk “graduates,” their level of understanding of their faith is about the same as a Christian who has their doctorate. This goes for every Buddhist monk because of the way they go about studying their faith.

It is known that they are a very self-disciplined and determined people. A Buddhist monk is a Kung Fu monk, known to be one of the most self-disciplined people in the world. They have employed rote along with self-discipline to memorize sometimes hundreds if not thousands of pages of religious text word for word. Unlike a Buddhist monk, self-discipline and consistency are the things that many (but not all) Christians lack today. If we employ more self-discipline and remain consistent with it, it doesn’t take long to memorize entire books and epistles from the Bible.

But it is true that some Buddhist monks memorize thousands of pages. The Guinness Book of World Records of 1985 had listed a Buddhist monk by the name of Bhaddanta Vicittabi Vumsa as recalling the most text by memory. In one circumstance in 1954 he recited 16,000 pages of their religious text, which he knew by heart, word for word with no errors, in front of an audience. He had memorized all 20,000 pages of their sacred texts and all of their commentaries as well, whereas there are only 1,200 pages in the standard Bible. Yes, there may be different amounts depending upon the size and translation, but it generally amounts to less than 2,000 total pages. If then a Buddhist can memorize 20,000 pages, why can’t we memorize 2,000?

But Buddhists aren’t the only ones that use this method. There are some Muslims, for example, who have memorized the entire Koran word for word. Such individuals are called “Hafiz,” which literally means “guardian.” They are called this because the Muslim faith considers such people as guardians of the faith. So quite literally, there are enough Muslims that memorized the entire Koran word for word that they gave them a name for their achievement. Their Koran has 114 chapters comprised of 6,236 verses. This is over 80,000 words, which they know word for word by heart. Both Muslims and Buddhists use rote memorization to memorize these vast amounts of verses.

If then a Buddhist or Muslim that does not have God can memorize their entire volume of sacred texts, why do so many Christians that have the Holy Spirit struggle with memorizing a few verses of the Bible? For both the Buddhist and the Muslim, it comes down to self-discipline and persistence. But many Christians struggle with understanding how to remember the word of God. If we believe that we are saved through faith and faith comes by the word of God, then why don’t we take it more seriously to be self-disciplined to remember the Scriptures word for word? Why don’t we become “guardians of the word,” so to speak, by guarding the word in our hearts through memorization? If we don’t apply self-discipline and persistence to know the Lord more then how can we claim to treasure His word? If we treasure it, our actions will prove it. Let each of us be diligent to memorize His word, taking it to heart and growing in the discernment of it.

But some find it very difficult to memorize a few verses. This doesn’t have to be the case seeing that we have God. It is a matter of understanding that God wants to help us at a one-on-one level and being self-discipline enough to seek it. Other religions memorize what they do through the power of the flesh, so how much more can we do so through the power of the Spirit? But God is always faithful to bless those that seek Him. Remember that it is written,

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

Knowing this, be firm with yourself and make time for God. Let each of us awake to righteousness and seek Him. Memorize your Bible so you can apply it faithfully. How can you apply something if you don’t remember it? Stand firm, and be self-disciplined!

What Is God's Suggestion for Expanding Memory?

What is God's suggested method for expanding our memory? Surely if the Lord has something to say, it would be perfect. So what do we read?

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways." James 1:5-8

"For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding;" Proverbs 2:6

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." John 14:26

God shows us through the word that He is the source of wisdom, and the Holy Spirit helps bring it to remembrance. So the secret for a truly deep memory is understanding how to tap into the Spirit. Is God incapable of helping you retain His word? If He expects you to apply it and offers help through the Spirit to assist you in its application, then certainly the Spirit will help you retain His word.

So before we do any memorizing, we need to prepare our hearts in the Spirit. We will discuss this more in depth later.

Applying the Method

Rote memorization is an age old tactic. We often desire to read about new tactics, but sometimes the oldest ones are best. Why? Because they've had thousands of years to be perfected, while the new idea is from the office of a quirky professor's that made a single discovery. Those tricks that professor employed have only been studied by him or a team of his colleagues. What good is it to apply something that hasn't worked for anyone outside of a lab experiment?

How does rote work, and how can it be applied to the Bible? Simple. Pick a chapter in the Bible you'd like to memorize and divide it out by the number of verses it contains by the number of days you'd like to take to memorize it. So for example, let's say you wanted to memorize the book of James in two weeks. There are 108 verses in James and 14 days in two weeks. So $108/14=7.7$

If you memorized eight verses a day it would take you 13.5 days, which is 14 days seeing that the half day would be the fourteenth day.

With the rote method, you would then memorize each verse out loud on the selected days. For example,

1st Day) While speaking out loud and in your mind, memorize the first verse and recite it at least five times. Then move on to verse two; memorize it and recite it from memory five times without flaw. After you have memorized verse two, recite verse one and two together five times without flaw. Move onto three and memorize it, and recite it five times out loud without making a mistake. Then recite all three verses together five times without making a mistake. Continue this process until you have memorized all eight verses. You're done for the day.

2nd Day) First try to recite yesterday's eight verses without flaw once. If you can, then proceed to finish reciting it all five times. If you fail, then rememorize the portion you forgot and then recite it all together five times out loud.

Afterward move on to verses 9–16, and memorize verse nine repeating it out loud five times. Then move on to ten, repeating that five times. Now when you have ten down, don't recite 1–8. You did that yesterday and were only brushing up today. Instead, you need to recite 9 and 10 together five times. Then work on 11 and recite five times then 9–11 five times until you've memorized 9–16 and recited that five times without failure as well. After you're finished with 9–16 then, recite 1–8 and 9–16 together, then all 16 verses. When you've done this five times without fail, you're done for the day.

3rd day) Recite 1–16 five times without fail. When accomplished, move on to verses 17–24. Repeat the same method from yesterday and every consecutive day until all 108 verses are memorized in 14 days.

When you're doing this method, you're also supposed to walk back and forth or sit on the edge of your chair for mental alertness. If you recline or sit back, it tells your brain that it's time to shut down and rest. So take it seriously, and sit forward in your chair.

Now, there are some problems with this method, which is why I have personally augmented it. The first is that we are commanded to approach God through faith. We are to surrender to His work that works in us that He may work through us, as we read,

“To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.” Colossians 1:29

Let each of us strive according to His working. It is easy to figure it out in our flesh saying, “If I memorize eight verses per day every day, I'll memorize such and such amount of books by next year.” It sounds very

appealing, but through faith in God, I have personally memorized whole books in one day. God doesn't need our logic; He can do anything if we have faith. If we strive according to the inner working of the Holy Spirit, the resulting knowledge is greater than using human logic. If we memorize in the power of the flesh, we will retain much but won't always retain the meaning. When we memorize through the Spirit, we always retain the meaning of the word for daily application.

We are not justified by our works. It is God who is supposed to work in us and through us. Hence we are justified by faith because God operates through our faith. By using rote without augmenting it, such a person is operating in the power of the flesh and not the power of faith. They are memorizing their Bible by their own effort, little by little, rather than through the ability the Spirit supplies. Remember that we established through Jesus that the Spirit will bring to remembrance His words. As it is written,

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” John 14:26

Let the Holy Spirit bring the word of God to your remembrance. Have faith in Him that He intends to do so according to God's promise. It is the promise of God, and if you're willing to seek it, you shall obtain it according to the measure of your faith. If you're passionate about His word, then pursue the help and power of the Holy Spirit to understand and know your Bible. Don't rely on your own heart or own mental ability. Yes, God gave you a brain to use it, but He also gave you the Holy Spirit, and you should learn to utilize His strength as well.

Now, there are MANY Bible scholars who have memorized whole books of the Bible using the rote method. They swear by it and would teach everyone else to do it as well. But they are doing it in the flesh and not through Christ according to His method, which we outlined. Yes, they may pray for help before they start, but they don't let God direct and lead the process. Rather, they pick a book they like, divide it out, and apply the rote method.

But God calls us to be led by the Spirit in the things we say and do. As we read,

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” Romans 8:14

How can we be led by God in this? Simple. First we pray and ask the Lord to speak to us through the Scriptures. We need to pray that He would show us the things He wants us to apply and memorize.

After doing this, read the Scriptures, and whatever sticks out to you is the Spirit speaking. So when the words of the Bible jump out at you, memorize them. Find the entire portion that speaks to you, even if it is a whole book, and memorize it.

Now, those Bible scholars who memorize using the rote memorize six to ten verses per day, and it takes them over a month to memorize an entire book. But using the method I'm outlining, I have personally memorized entire books in a day. It's very draining and hard work, but it only takes a few hours.

I don't consider myself to be any more intelligent than the next person; the only difference is that I do it through faith and strive according to God's work in me. I have learned that the more faith I have and the more self-discipline I have, the more I can memorize. Again, I don't consider myself to be any more intelligent than another person. God doesn't operate through my strength. Rather, He operates through my weakness. As it is written,

“And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness...” 2 Corinthians 12:9

Before I memorized through faith, I could hardly memorize a single verse. It was extremely hard for me to even do five verses per day. But as soon as I acknowledged my weakness and handed it over to God, He

worked through me to memorize whole books and chapters. I know for a fact that everyone that has the Holy Spirit can memorize as much as I have if they choose faith and apply self-discipline. If God would bless me to do it in a day, why wouldn't He bless you? I'm no better than you in any way! And what do we read?

"But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me." Galatians 2:6

God doesn't favor anyone but gives the Spirit without measure. Listen to the voice of the Spirit through the Scriptures, and let Him guide you to the things He wants you to memorize. The scriptures He speaks out to you are the scriptures that He will help you with. As for the others, He won't help you with them until His timing.

While ALL Scripture is profitable, only some directly apply to our current life circumstances. God is our teacher, and He chooses the lessons and leads us through the course book (which is the Bible). So read along with the lesson God has at hand for you, and don't go off on a tangent. Let God teach you and build you in wisdom. For we must all be taught by God and not ourselves. As it is written,

"It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me." John 6:45

By memorizing what He speaks out to you, He will lead you through the Scriptures His way. In a very short time, He will guide you through all Scripture and help you memorize dozens of entire books as He has done for me.

So beginning with the things God wants you to memorize, break them down and memorize and recap similar to before. But first we pray and read to find the verses God wants us to memorize. After reading, let's say God really spoke out to us in the entire book of James. So we would memorize the book like this:

- 1) Read the book, and make sure you understand it. What good is it to memorize a ton of scriptures that you don't know how to apply? After knowing the meaning and being sure that it is what God wants you to do, pray and ask the Lord to open your mind to help you retain the word and bind it in your heart. Pray for wisdom, and have all faith He will give it to you. Then memorize the first verse.

Don't recite it multiple times. Just move to the next after it is memorized, having faith that God will help you retain it.

- 2) After finishing the second verse, recite one and two together. After you have done it well, move on to verse three.
- 3) After three is memorized, recite verse one through three together. Then move on to four.
- 4) Keep doing this until the chapter is finished. Recite the whole chapter without failure. If you make a mistake, brush up in that one spot then try reciting the chapter again.
- 5) After you've recited it, you're done with that chapter until the end of the book. Move on to chapter two.
- 6) Memorize chapter two the same way you did the last chapter then you're done with chapter two until the end.

7) Move on to chapter three, and memorize each chapter individually until all five chapters in the book of James are done.

8) Afterward recite them all together without failure. If you make a mistake, brush up then recite it. After you recite the whole book without looking at the pages, you're done.

I do everything in fives as it makes it easier. Every five verses, recap on all five. With large books, stop every five chapters and recite them all together: chapters 1–5 then 6–10 then 11–15 then recite them all together, 1–15, as a whole. After you've done this, congratulations! You've memorized the entire book. When memorizing, there is nothing wrong with looking at the page. After it's memorized, though, don't try reciting it by peeking at your Bible for a reminder. If you have to look at the page, then it's not memorized.

There are some supposed experts on Scripture memorization who claim that there is no shame in looking at the pages for a reminder. But in truth, if you're looking at the pages, then you don't have it memorized. In the next few weeks, you'll completely lose those scriptures that you had to open your Bible for. But if you can recite it without looking at the page, then you'll retain it longer. Besides, you can't always carry your Bible with you, and it would be good to remember every verse you memorized word for word when you don't have it on your person. Those supposed Bible memory experts who say it's okay to peek claim they memorized many books. But if they are looking at the pages, then the truth is they are reading the Bible and not memorizing it. The books I have memorized I can recite without a Bible in hand. Anyone can do this through the power of the Spirit. By doing it through the Spirit, it is glory to God and not ourselves. If we do it through our own strength, then we glorify ourselves. While there are many helpful tricks to memorize a verse, nothing could help you more for memorizing entire books than applying the rote method through faith in Christ.

You will no longer need to look at the page, but you will need to brush up. Don't listen to the Bible readers who call themselves memory experts. They need a Bible in hand to teach because they don't have the whole book retained.

I have held scores of Bible studies examining the Scriptures word for word without holding a Bible. I don't do this to impress anyone but to encourage others that it is possible for anyone to memorize the Bible in its entirety. By knowing my Bible, it has also opened the door to have impromptu Bible studies in all kinds of unimaginable places and at unexpected times. I have had them at gas stations when filling up the gas, in hotels, in the lobby, next to the pool, at grocery stores, in aisles, while standing in line, in parking lots, and while walking through city parks. God's word comes up all the time, and it's good to be able to study it with others at irregular times when we normally wouldn't have a Bible handy.

Know your Bible, and it will change your life! Be serious about it. Don't memorize it to impress others, but have a humble heart and you'll become a blessing to those around you.

Now, if you're struggling with putting two verses together, it can be helpful to chunk them. We use the chunk method in many areas of life already. Think of numbers for example. 18165559471 is hard to memorize, but if we break it into chunks like a telephone number, 1(818)555-9471, it is much easier.

When memorizing large portions of Scripture, break each verse into smaller chunks. After memorizing each chunk, put them together as one full verse. After this, you can go on to memorize the next verse. Try to memorize paragraphs three to five verses at a time. Take each chunk one at a time and each verse one at a time. Work on the first verse then when you have it down, work on the second verse then the third; go back and test yourself by trying to recall all three in order.

Try to say all three verses in order without any mistakes. If you make a mistake, go back and brush up. If

you're having a hard time remembering which verse comes next, create a chunk between the two verses.

For example, consider these two verses:

"That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9

"For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Romans 10:10

If you have both of them memorized but can't recall them in order, then take something in between the two verses, such as: "you will be saved. For with the heart one believes."

Then after you have that chunk memorized, go back and recall them both in order. It will be much easier to do so at this point. You can do this at every break in Scripture—anywhere that you're having a hard time remembering what comes next. If you're struggling with a single large verse, then do the same thing.

Also, confidence helps tremendously. Sometimes when we memorize a verse, we have it down correctly but keep questioning ourselves in regard to accuracy. When you have established that it is accurately memorized, be confident, or you'll forget it more quickly. When you question yourself, it's hard to retain because your mind rejects it as bad information that needs correction. But if you have memorized it well, then have confidence and move on. It may sound overly simple, but it really makes a tremendous difference compared to constantly questioning if you have it right. If you've memorized the verse accurately, then be confident through faith when reciting it. If you're not, you'll feel as if you're going to mess up then want to look at the page. Make sure that you have the verse memorized correctly, though. It is easier to memorize a verse correctly the first time than to try to fix a verse that was memorized incorrectly due to laziness.

Faith is the essence of everything. After having prayed and having asked God to help you memorize and retain the Scriptures, then you need to memorize by faith. When I first started this method nearly a decade ago, I struggled. I read James 1:5–8, which told me that God will grant me wisdom if I had faith.

So I sat down to memorize that verse through faith. It was the first verse that I ever memorized through faith. Later I memorized the entire book and moved on to other books. But when I first started on verse 5, I struggled. I always had a hard time getting a single verse down, and I couldn't handle more than eight verses per day. It took me a couple of hours to get those eight verses too!

But as I struggled, I came to the conclusion that I couldn't memorize it. When I was about to give up, the Lord reminded me of two verses:

"Jesus said to him, 'If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.'" Mark 9:23

And

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Philippians 4:13

Then I realized that I couldn't memorize it, but God can. In fact, He already knows all the Scripture by heart, seeing that it is HIS word after all. So I put my trust in Him that He would give me the wisdom to memorize. I didn't know how He would do it; I just trusted that He would and that it would be His work. Afterward I finished verses 5–8 in two minutes tops.

As time went on, I began to realize that the more faith I had, the more I could memorize. I found it hard to memorize whole paragraphs, but I realized through my journey that it was merely an issue of faith. When I considered memorizing a whole book, I gulped. "How can I possibly do that!?" I thought. But then I remembered not to trust myself. So I put my faith in Christ that He can do anything. Then I stepped out on

the water, so to speak, and He blessed it. After that, I memorized around 50 different chapters and nearly a dozen books in about two months.

So I laugh at the teacher that tells you to memorize five to eight verses a day for a month and a half and then you'll have a whole book memorized. I memorized and retained a book per day on several occasions during those two months. I could hardly memorize a single verse then suddenly through the Holy Spirit, by faith in Christ, I memorized a vast amount of Scripture. I have now, over the years, memorized many more books and chapters and have retained much of what I memorized.

Do I forget things through this method? Obviously. I have to go back and brush up like everyone else. But I've found that brushing up is infinitely easier than memorizing, mainly because the scripture is still there in my head. It's just lingering around in a hidden memory bank, and I have to find it again. I retain each book for about a month to two months before I need a brush up. Otherwise, I can recite it word for word without a Bible in hand.

I believe with all my heart that anyone that has received the Spirit of God can do this too. The only thing that you need is faith.

But you have to take it very seriously and be disciplined. As we said before, self-discipline is something lacking in the church today. If your mind drifts off, then wrangle your thought back in and focus hard on what you're memorizing. Be serious, and take it seriously through faith.

God opens your mind for a greater wisdom through faith. It is not obtained through fleshly practice or trial and error but only by faith. While many people have memorized and retained huge portions of text, they did so with a great struggle. I've only needed diligence, and God did the rest. That's all He requires from you. If a person finds it hard to believe that they can memorize more through faith, then that's exactly why they've been struggling in the first place. Remember that we approach God and practice His word through faith. Why wouldn't we retain it that way either? This isn't a method that works for a few people but for everyone that has the Holy Spirit. As it is written,

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." John 14:26

The Holy Spirit will bring to remembrance the word of God to the children of the Lord. All you need to do is believe. God did it for me, and He will do it for you. Take it to heart. Don't try this method; do this method.

We never try to have faith. Anyone who tries to have faith doesn't actually have faith. Anyone who has faith does what they need to and operates in the Spirit of God. There is no "try"; there is only "do." If you "try" this method, it won't work for you. Trying implies a level of uncertainty. You have seen the Scriptures in which God promises to give you wisdom.

God has promised and intends to help those that have His Holy Spirit. The only way it can't work for a person is if they don't have the Spirit of God or don't have faith. Faith is God's method, not mine. His method works for everyone.

Consider the benefits of knowing His word intimately. Have faith in His power to help you then apply this simple but age-old memorization technique. Now, one may ask, "Did anyone from the Apostles' days memorize the word of God in its entirety?" We see that Paul memorized much Scripture. But our greatest evidence is actually Luke. He wrote both the book of Acts and the book of Luke. He never actually walked with Jesus personally, so the book of Luke was the testimony from the apostles he heard. But he remembered it in extremely vivid detail. By this it is obvious that he memorized the entire gospel narrative. Also, we believe that the Holy Spirit wrote the bible. So if the Holy Spirit wrote through Luke, then it is

more than obvious that the Spirit helped him retain the memory of the book of Luke so he could write it and it could be added to the Bible.

When Jeremiah had his scrolls destroyed by King Jehoiakim, the Lord commanded him to rewrite them. As we read,

“Now after the king had burned the scroll with the words which Baruch had written at the instruction of Jeremiah, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying: “Take yet another scroll, and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll which Jehoiakim the king of Judah has burned.” Jeremiah 36:27–28

Was it a lengthy scroll? Quite obviously. Hence we read,

“And it happened, when Jehudi had read three or four columns, that the king cut it with the scribe’s knife and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth.” Jeremiah 36:23

This scroll had columns of text, and Jeremiah remembered it all. It was obvious that He had them all put to memory since he was told by God to rewrite it. Again, we believe that the Spirit wrote the word of God. So it is evident that the Holy Spirit helped Jeremiah retain that information to write it again. And as we stated before,

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” John 14:26

As the Holy Spirit brought the words of the scroll to Jeremiah’s remembrance, so He will do for you as you memorize the word of God.

God’s method works. Have faith in His power, and be very serious about memorizing His word. He will help you on your journey and make your burden easy and your yoke light.

Final Thoughts

Memorizing God's word is critical for every believer. By locking His word in our hearts, we can carry it with us for daily practice. This is why it is vital to meditate on His word after it has been memorized.

After you have the book or section in question fully memorized, come back to it a few days later to meditate on it. Do not merely recite the scripture to yourself, but slowly mediate verse by verse. Take the time to consider and absorb the meaning of each verse. As you listen to the Spirit, He will give you revelation upon revelation in regard to how each verse fits together with verses from other books to create a bigger picture. Even as we read,

"These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." 1 Corinthians 2:13

As you meditate on the verses, the Spirit will compare each verse with other verses and teach you the doctrine behind the scripture. You'll begin to realize how the words fit together more appropriately in ways you've never realized before. In some cases, it will be as if the Spirit opened your eyes to a hidden meaning for the first time.

This is why I teach that it is best to meditate on the meaning of the verse as you memorize. That way you can carry the appropriate doctrine with you as well as understand perfectly how to apply it in your life. It is better to know how to apply the scripture personally than to know how to recite it to others. We should sharpen our own swords in Christ before we sharpen another's.

Some get carried away with trying to memorize the reference numbers with the verse. It is better to memorize the passage as a whole in order to meditate on the meaning first rather than to try to memorize the exact numerical location at the first. After you have meditated on the passage, then consider what verses you'd be mostly likely to use; you can then memorize the corresponding reference numbers. You certainly can memorize all the reference numbers at the first, but I have personally learned that it is difficult to meditate on the meaning of the verse when a person is struggling to retain where it is numerically located. Besides this, if you do not frequently use the verse, the first thing you'll forget is where it is located, leading to an endless cycle of remembering the locations.

It can be difficult to press ahead with new material to meditate on and grow in if you're constantly brushing up and focusing on the old. If you don't intend to recite every little verse according to its number to another person, then it would be best to remember what book and chapter it comes from and focus on the meaning of the scripture to rightly apply it in your own life.

Some try to give an appearance of being spiritual through reciting much Scripture. But it is better to BE spiritual by applying the Scripture personally through understanding how to use it rather than trying to look spiritual without knowing how to properly use it.

Part of learning how to wield a sword requires the fighter to know how to properly use it. There are some that enjoy spouting off scriptures but don't know how to use them. They know where they are located and have them memorized but have no idea what they mean. It is like a man in the market strutting his stuff while showing off his sword: "See, I have a sword!" Or it is like the man that wants to look cool by carrying a gun in a holster but has no idea how to shoot it straight.

Such a person is no intimidation to a thief or murderer. But the swordsman that knows how to fight like a warrior is the dread of any thief. A criminal does not often take a poke at a marksman. Even so, Satan takes advantage of those that memorize for prideful reasons. For he puffs them up with pride to make them

stumble. As it is written,

“...Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.” 1 Corinthians 8:1

And also,

“Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.” Proverbs 16:18

Knowledge is merely stored information, while wisdom is the ability to properly use that information. If you only memorize your Bible to look spiritual and share much information with others rather than edifying yourself, then you’re doing it for prideful reasons. But if you are doing it for edification, then consider the wisdom of meditating on each passage while listening to the Holy Spirit’s explanation. I just cannot emphasize it enough; it is that important! Do not only memorize your Bible but take the time to meditate on its meaning to rightly apply it in your own life. Take it verse by verse to absorb the meaning that you may rightly apply it in your own life!

Do not let the devil take advantage of you. Seek the truth behind the scripture, and take the time to meditate on it for your own personal use. Let each of us memorize our Bibles to grow in understanding and applying them and not to look showy or flashy in what we know.

But one cannot be wise without knowledge. For wisdom determines how we apply knowledge. So if we don’t increase in knowledge, we won’t increase in wisdom. Knowledge stored for love does not puff up but rather edifies. If you memorize to be nearer to the Lord out of love for Him, then you will be edified.

But if we do not listen to the Spirit, we will not be led to truth. For it is written,

“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.” John 16:13

The Holy Spirit teaches us as individuals and leads us into all truth. We must be taught by God and take the time to sincerely listen to the Spirit and grow in His word. Be intentional about seeking Him fervently and continually throughout the day, and it will make a dramatic difference in your life. If we don’t take the time to bind the truth in our hearts, then how will we remember it later for appropriate use? And it is the Holy Spirit who gives us that truth, so we must be faithful to seek Him for it.

When you come across a situation in life where you need to apply it, He will remind you of the verse that you took the time to memorize. All you need to do is grow in listening to the voice of the Spirit, and then all things will be easier to apply with wisdom.

“For the LORD gives wisdom; From His mouth come knowledge and understanding;” Proverbs 2:6

I'd Love to Hear from You!

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Adam is a preacher, teacher and #1 internationally bestselling author of over 100 books on the Christian faith. He is a devoted husband and father of three boys. Through his travels, he's seen the need for a new awakening and a new revival: a revival of the heart. Come join Adam on this journey of redemption and experience God like never before!

Becoming a Disciplined Man of God™

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Introduction

The Nature of Godly Discipline

Becoming a Christian can be likened to becoming an Olympic athlete. In order to be called an Olympic athlete, one needs to reach the pinnacle of self-discipline or else all hope of winning will be lost. Likewise, a believer cannot step into the race of God without counting the cost first. Even as Jesus exhorted us through the parable,

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it...” Luke 14:28

The Lord calls us to carry our crosses and deny the desires of the flesh, or else we may not finish the race. Therefore, we must count the cost and remain self-disciplined in all our conduct.

As it is written,

“And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.” 1 Corinthians 9:25

Seeing, then, that we do it for an imperishable crown, let us become temperate in all things as well. We should train our bodies not to rule over us, that we may remain in submission to Christ as Lord. In ancient Greece, the word for training was *gymnos*. This word literally means “naked.” It is in fact from this Greek word we derive the English word “gymnasium.”

In ancient Greek culture they held that, by freeing themselves of everything that could hinder them, they could train to their fullest potential. Hence, they would exercise naked. Similarly, we are called to strip ourselves of the things of the flesh, that we may exercise ourselves toward godliness. As it is written,

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...” Hebrews 12:1

By stripping ourselves of the works of the flesh, we can better discipline ourselves in godliness. Thus, we are clothed with Christ. As it is written,

“For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For

we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.” 2 Corinthians 5:2–4

From this scripture, we understand that God will give us a new spiritual body. Likewise, we are called to clothe ourselves in the things of Christ now, while we wait to be “further clothed” by Him. Seeing that we are not justified by the flesh, we should be diligent to do away the works of the flesh. As it is written,

“And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Galatians 5:24

Therefore, we must strip ourselves of the works of the flesh, that we may clothe ourselves with Christ. In godly discipline we are seeking to establish the works of the Spirit in ourselves so that we may bring glory to the Lord. In the works of the Spirit we are justified because it is no longer we who work but, rather, Christ in us. Seeing that Christ is perfect, when He works through us, we also may become perfect in Him.

Chapter One

Disciplined in Purity

There are many struggles that come with being a man. Particularly, there is the struggle of purity. With our ever-raging hormones, there are times in our life when sexual purity becomes an issue. But God, who is greater than ourselves, is able to help us overcome every obstacle to pleasing Him.

In all things we should have a guarded heart—not a heart with walls around it, but one hedged in by the Holy Spirit. If we allow bad influences in our lives, it's only a matter of time until we succumb to them. In order to maintain purity, we need to be disciplined in our nature.

For example, there are many passionate scenes in movies today. If you find yourself stumbling, then perhaps you should stop watching the movies that contain such scenes. It would be better to be disciplined in committing those two hours to God instead. Then, by resting in His Spirit as you seek Him, you may be edified in His presence.

Stumbling in sexual purity generally occurs when we allow ourselves to become idle-minded. If we are choosing not to be sober-minded, we can easily be influenced to walk down bad paths. Sometimes idle-mindedness occurs when we entertain the flesh. We tend to entertain the flesh through various activities that do not pertain to Christ—activities such as video games, movies, TV shows, and so on. Some of these things can be edifying when they are Christ centered, but there are many such things that are not.

We must have discernment in regard to what points us to Christ and what does not. Whatever does not lead us to Christ should be removed. A little bit of idleness can go a long way.

As it is written,

“A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” Galatians 5:9

And it is further written,

“Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.” 1 Corinthians 5:7

So it is good to eradicate the bad influences and the things that lead us down bad

paths. When you fall into sin, be mindful of what you did before you sinned—not just immediately before but, rather, backtracking everything in your thoughts. What led you to temptation in the first place? Sometimes the source can be surprising. Usually it begins with idleness; and seeing that our guard is down, Satan steps in to slowly steer us into the direction of lust. The source is not the tempting situation halfway through idleness but the first step that caused you to let your guard down. When you discover the source, choose not to walk down that path next time, and continue in the path of Christ.

But removing the object of temptation isn't enough. Yes, we must be disciplined in our conduct in keeping such temptation removed, but this doesn't solve everything. By removing the opportunity for temptation, you will be tempted less. But that doesn't mean you will never be tempted. So in order to truly overcome, we need to focus on overcoming temptation as well. And how do we do that?

What did Jesus say? Did He not teach us to pray? As it is written,

“...And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” Luke 11:4

When you are in the heat of the moment, pray in faith, asking God to deliver you from temptation. This may seem oversimplified, but it's not. It will not work unless you press yourself wholeheartedly into the Lord as you pray. But pray in faith that He will be your strength in your weakness as He promised. As it is written,

“And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’” 2 Corinthians 12:9

Therefore, we should seek the Lord in the heat of the moment, and He will strengthen us. But if you allow your mind to entertain the thoughts of sin, you will fall back into it. If you give your mind to God in that moment and press your thoughts into prayer and the Holy Spirit, you will be delivered by His strength. This is the only way to truly overcome bondage and every man's battle, by applying these things in faith. It is what the Lord teaches us to do to overcome temptation and sin; therefore, we should believe Him and apply it by faith.

By sitting in God's Spirit and meditating on His presence as we pray, worship, and read the word, temptation will be less powerful and easier to brush away. But if we are not disciplined to seek Him continuously throughout the day, we

will succumb to temptation through the weakness of the flesh and be more likely to fall.

Being disciplined to continue in Him and focus on pure things can lessen the amount of temptation we encounter as men. Then, from being faithful to abide continuously in the Spirit, we will be strengthened to overcome always. Temptation will become less and less until it fizzles out altogether. Yes, it will come back from time to time, but due to the strength of God compensating for our weaknesses, temptation will not be so tempting unless you entertain the thoughts in your mind.

So in being disciplined to be pure, we must be disciplined both in the internal person and the external person. By removing bad influences, we can be tempted less. Also, by changing our thoughts, we can change our lives.

If you allow your mind to rest on holiness at all times, then you will become what you think. I'm not saying you'll become who you think yourself to be; rather, I am saying that cleaning the inside will make the outside clean. If you think of evil things, you will be evil. If you think of godly things, you will be godly.

Therefore, we must make it our aim to maintain godliness within our minds. This is loving the Lord our God with all our minds. We must continuously meditate on the Lord in our thoughts and refrain from idle-mindedness.

So it is up to us, then, to recognize when our mind is drifting from God and to catch this immediately so that we can refocus on Him. The faster you catch it, the longer you will abide. If you do not catch it right away, you will drift off for long periods of time. So make it your aim to catch your wandering thoughts immediately.

No matter how hard you focus on the Lord, however, your mind will drift off. We are human and inherently weak toward God. But if we are being mindful of what we are thinking, then we will be able to catch ourselves and repent when we are entertaining thoughts that we shouldn't.

Generally, an evil thought doesn't start out evil. It begins as an idle thought; and then slowly, as that idle thought is entertained, Satan jumps in and correlates temptation to our desires. Satan does have an idea of where your thoughts are going. This is how he is able to tempt you in relation to what you're thinking in the first place.

The Scriptures tell us that men do not know each other's thoughts:

“For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him?” 1 Corinthians 2:11

But nowhere does it say that the enemy doesn't know. How else would he be able to tempt you in your mind, if he couldn't perceive what you're thinking? But the secret places of our hearts are not so secret in the heavenly places. Even so, God will have all of our deeds shouted from the rooftops in heaven. As it is written,

“For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops.” Luke 12:2–3

In the end, God will reveal all things, and even now some things are already known. As it is also written,

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...” Hebrews 12:1

We should therefore be disciplined in regard to the inward person as well as the outward, knowing that we are being watched. Our actions and thoughts are being weighed in the balance, and the secret places of our hearts are being laid up for judgment. If we guard our hearts and minds and discipline ourselves to reflect our thoughts on Christ, we will become more like Christ. Thus, the judgment we shall have is not to be that of condemnation but of salvation.

But just thinking about Him isn't enough. We need to interact directly with Him. This is a relationship, and in treating it as such, we will grow to be strengthened to overcome. If we pray and worship while continuously focusing on the presence and words of His Holy Spirit, then we will be empowered in a victory walk with Christ.

As men of God, we need to be disciplined continually to be pure. Disciplining ourselves inwardly can help us with many sins and forms of impurity in life. By disciplining ourselves to remove the things that influence us into temptation, we can have greater strength to overcome.

Chapter Two

Disciplined in Righteousness

Righteousness is hearing the word of God and applying it. Therefore, we must first focus on hearing it, that we may obey. Being His children, we inherently desire to obey God. The flesh battles with us in the inward person, but our true desire is to be well-pleasing to Him in all things.

Yet sometimes His will isn't always so clear. It doesn't have to be that way, however, and by growing in our understanding of His speech, we will automatically know His will by discernment in the Spirit. The methods God uses to talk to us can vary. It may be through a situation, through the Holy Spirit, or through fruit in life.

It is good to look at the fruit of a situation that God is granting us. Sometimes God speaks inwardly to us, in the inward person through the Holy Spirit. At other times He speaks to us through the circumstances of life. Logic and previous experiences may not apply to the current situation, but if we seek the Lord in prayer and wait for His answer, we will know His will in all things.

There was a time I was driving from Madison, Wisconsin, to Cedar Rapids, Iowa. I was with my wife, who was pregnant at that time. The sun had set, and we were driving in the dark. As we approached Dubuque, on the edge of Iowa, a blizzard unexpectedly came upon us. I wanted to press farther, to Cedar Rapids, but the storm was intensifying. The weather reports hadn't mentioned the possibility of snow, so I hoped that it would let up and the roads would be cleared.

While I waited, I decided to sit at the last gas station on the edge of Dubuque before leaving the city. But the storm slowly grew worse and worse until it was a white-out. That's when I decided to ask God what He wanted me to do. Usually I hear God pulling at me one way or another to do this or that. But for whatever reason, I couldn't hear Him, and His will wasn't clear to me. Would the storm stop and the roads be cleared? Or was God guiding me with His hand through the unpredicted storm He had created?

So I asked Him, "Lord do you want me to press on to Cedar Rapids? Or will the storm let up? What should I do?" Before I could get the prayer off my lips, He answered, "What do you think you should do? I'm not going to stop the storm, and your wife is pregnant." He had already laid it in my heart, through the fruit

He was producing, to do what He wanted me to do.

Sometimes He puts fruit in our lives to steer us in the direction He wants us to go. I was new to Dubuque at the time, so I didn't know where to get a hotel. I continued to pray, "Lord, if you want me here, then please lead me to a hotel. Will you send me someone who will take me to one? I don't know my way around here, and I need help." I walked inside the gas station to ask for directions when a woman in line stopped me and asked, "Do you know your way around town? Or are you new here?" It was a rather rhetorical question since she could tell I was from out of town with my thick Northern accent.

"I'm from out of town, ma'am," I replied. Then, without another word from me, she continued, "Well, I'm headed up to such and such a place, and there are a lot of hotels over there. It is a bit out of my way, but kind of on the way, so I'll take you there, anyway." And just as I had prayed seconds earlier, she led me to the hotels. By this God confirmed His will, so that night I proceeded to pray over which hotel to stay at.

When the Lord led me to a hotel, He blessed that night exceedingly. We were given the highest-end luxury hotel room for free, for His Spirit was upon the room. It offered much-needed rest at the time for my overworked, very pregnant wife.

God led me to the hotel, then paid for everything for me. If I had not been led by the Lord that night, circumstances would not have worked out for the better. It is good to seek God in everything, no matter how small or silly it may seem. God has plans for us, sometimes even in the little things of life.

We must be led by the Lord in all we do. This is having righteousness: hearing His word and obeying. Could staying at a hotel be righteous? Yes, if God told you to stay there and you obeyed. Righteousness is faith in motion, and faith comes from hearing His word. As it is written,

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10:17

If you pay attention to the Holy Spirit, you will see that God is speaking to you always. This is how He leads us daily in the faith, that we can put our trust in the leading of the Spirit. As it is written,

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." Romans 8:14

No matter what His word is for you, if the Holy Spirit is speaking, just obey Him without question. He is your Lord and Master, and He owns you. It is our reasonable service to obey Him and believe Him. Even if His word doesn't make much sense to us, as long as we know it's from the Lord, we should obey, having blind faith. And there are many times His words won't make sense to us. But if we know God is speaking to us, then we should be disciplined to obey blindly. It is good to remember this scripture:

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.” Isaiah 55:9

There are times we will find ourselves questioning God, even subtly. Sometimes this happens when we hear His voice, gentle and quiet, and know it is Him but brush it off because it doesn't make sense to us. “Why would God say this or that?” we may respond, or “Why wouldn't God want this or that?” Rather than asking ourselves “Why?” and justifying our own plans or ideas by logic, we should be disciplined to ask God directly for His will. If it doesn't make sense to us, we should confirm His will, even as Gideon did:

“So Gideon said to God, ‘If You will save Israel by my hand as You have said—look, I shall put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor; if there is dew on the fleece only, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that You will save Israel by my hand, as You have said.’ And it was so. When he rose early the next morning and squeezed the fleece together, he wrung the dew out of the fleece, a bowlful of water.

“Then Gideon said to God, ‘Do not be angry with me, but let me speak just once more: Let me test, I pray, just once more with the fleece; let it now be dry only on the fleece, but on all the ground let there be dew.’ And God did so that night. It was dry on the fleece only, but there was dew on all the ground. When we have confirmed what God wants then we must be disciplined to obey.” Judges 6:36–40

Even though Gideon asked for a sign, God doesn't always work by the signs we request. Sometimes He is already telling us what we need to know in another way, in which case we need to grow in discernment.

This is why He spoke against the Pharisees. It was obvious to them that He was the Christ, but because they were having a difficult time accepting the will of God, they would ask for a sign. As we read,

“But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks

after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.” Matthew 12:39

If God has already given us something by which to confirm His will, then we need to accept it. As with His statement about “the sign of Jonah,” it is up to us to discern what He is telling us.

We’re like small children learning to talk. When we’re infants, we hear the voices of our parents but don’t understand them. Then, after a while, we pick up on a few words. From there our parents compare what we know with what we don’t know to expand our vocabulary. Even so, the Lord does this with us spiritually. As it is written,

“These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” 1 Corinthians 2:13

As the Holy Spirit teaches us, He expands our understanding of Him and His way of communicating through previous spiritual knowledge or experiences we have.

If you are having a difficult time understanding the Lord’s will, pray and seek with all your heart to grow in spiritual discernment. God will answer you and teach you what you need to know. But if you’re not sitting on the edge of your seat, trying to learn from God, life will be a cycle of difficulty and failure to understand the Lord.

Sometimes we already know God’s will, but it can be difficult for us to accept it in certain circumstances of life. Not that we are like the example of the Pharisees, by any means, but in some cases it can be too hard for us to understand why God has willed what He has. Nevertheless, if we know the will of God, then it is good for us to obey Him blindly whether we understand or not. His ways are higher than our ways, and His plans are beyond our comprehension.

Therefore, we must obey and continue to follow Him in the path. If you know God’s will but are having a hard time understanding why, let blind faith enter your heart; then simply obey. We need to be well-disciplined in our walks, which we ought to take seriously. We must do everything He calls us to do. As it is written,

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” James 1:22

Sometimes when people hear a sermon, they say “amen!” in their heart only to forget the lesson when they get home due to the busyness of the day. It is good to be disciplined in remembering and applying the lessons God teaches you through His servants. If you know the Lord has spoken to you, whether through a man or His Spirit, then obey Him diligently. Even though it’s a preacher talking, if the Holy Spirit is stirring your heart to say “amen,” then you know it’s God speaking to you through the man.

As it is written in regard to preachers,

“Now therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.” Exodus 4:12

And we likewise read,

“And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!’” Romans 10:15

A preacher brings a message to you, having had it laid on his heart from God. Then, being sent by God and compelled in his heart by God, he preaches the message given to him by God for you. As it is also written,

“...but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” 2 Peter 1:21

Knowing, then, that men of God are led by the Spirit with words from the Spirit, it is good to put to practice what God is confirming to you in your heart. God will speak to you through the preacher, and thus it is still the word of God. As it is written,

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” John 10:27

And also,

“We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” 1 John 4:6

If you hear Christ speaking through a preacher, then it’s Christ speaking to you and not the man. If you feel the Holy Spirit in a preacher’s words and you’re inclined to say “amen,” then obey those words. At such a time, when you have heard God speak through a man, it is no longer about the man who speaks but about your own relationship with the Lord.

In order to be righteous, we must be disciplined to continue in all the words of

God given to us. If we are found faithful, then we will be called the friends of God. As it is written in regard to Abraham,

“Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to Him for righteousness.’ And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.” James 2:22–24

Therefore, we need to take it to heart to be well-disciplined in obedience. Righteousness is faith in motion. By acting on faith, we are justified because it is the Lord who works in us and through us. By believing, obeying, and practicing God’s word, we will become righteous. If we do not apply His words, then we are in sin. Therefore, beloved, make it your aim to be well-pleasing to God in all things by obeying His word for you.

Chapter Three

Disciplined to Abide

I have been asked by many people, “What does it mean to abide? Don’t we abide in the Spirit once we’re born again?”

When we are born again, the Spirit comes into us; and as Jesus promises, He will never leave us nor forsake us. But God is not a controlling God. Even though He has the power to control us, He chooses not to do so, that we may have free will. God gives us the choice to do what we like throughout the day. We can either choose to seek the Lord or do other things not pertaining to Him.

God always pursues us wildly in His overwhelming love. He can’t help but seek us, as the lover did his beloved Shulamite in the Song of Solomon. The Song of Solomon is talking not only about the intimate details of courtship and marriage but also about the relationship of the church and Christ.

The comparison of a man and wife to Christ and the church has also been drawn in the Book of Ephesians. It was not creating a mere metaphor or parable in comparing them but, rather, stating that God created marriage to mirror our relationship with Christ. What is the purpose of doing this? That through the conduct and course of life, we would better understand our relationship with God, how He loves us, and how He looks at us. We are like a bride to Him.

Likewise, the Song of Solomon was really the song of Christ seeking His church. There are many conclusions that can be drawn for a Christian walk, in terms of how we respond to God, if we compare the lover and the Shulamite with our personal relationships with Christ. Incidentally, Solomon literally means “king peaceable” or “king of peace.” So if we are to translate the title “Song of Solomon” literally, it means “The Song of the King of Peace,” who is Christ.

God came seeking us as Solomon did his lover. He pursues us with a passionate, loving heart, but it is up to us to respond. Even as we read,

“I sleep, but my heart is awake; it is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying, ‘Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.’

“I have taken off my robe; how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I defile them?” Song of Solomon 5:2–3

Sometimes God is reaching for us, but we aren't always reaching back as we should. He seeks to abide in us daily. Likewise, we should seek to abide in Him daily. 'Abide' comes from the Greek word *meno*, which means "to abide" or "to continue." If you abide in a certain path of life, it means that you walk along that path. If you walk along the way of Christ, to abide means to continue this walk. We are called to continue to walk in the Spirit daily. Just because we have the Spirit doesn't mean we walk in Him at all times.

We have two natures to deal with, and as a result we walk either in the flesh or in the Spirit. When we obey the will and lusts of the flesh, we are walking contrary to Christ. Therefore, we are no longer abiding in Him although He abides in us. He will continue in us, but we are not continuing in Him as we are called. But as it is written,

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me." John 15:4

In this statement Jesus has introduced the concept of "double abiding." He isn't the only one abiding; rather, He states that there are two separate "abidings": Jesus abides in us, and we abide in Him. From this concept, then, we learn that we need to abide in Christ.

To abide in Him suggests we are abiding in the way of Christ. We abide in His way when we continue in the Spirit. This is to say, we abide in the narrow way when we continue walking in the Spirit. For as it is also written,

"If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." Galatians 5:25

In this verse we find the suggestion that, although we live in the Spirit, this doesn't always mean that we walk in the Spirit—hence the words of exhortation to continue walking in the Spirit. But what does it mean to walk in the Spirit?

In order to walk in the Spirit, we need to be sensitive to His voice throughout the day. When we obey His voice, we are walking in the Spirit. He is always speaking, but we aren't always listening. Whether due to busyness or to idleness, we aren't always listening for the voice of the Spirit. Yet we should be doing so, seeing that His words are the word of God, which saves us. And if we listen diligently to the Spirit's voice and obey, God has a promise for us. As it is written,

"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine." Exodus 19:5

And also,

“Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God...” Deuteronomy 28:1–2

When we hear God’s voice internally, we are *commanded* to obey it. The Old Testament lays out a difference between two “words of God.” One is the written word, or the law, which for us comprises the New Testament and the Old Testament. The second word of God is His voice through the Holy Spirit. We are commanded by God to obey both. If we love the Lord, we will take the words of the Holy Spirit seriously and live by them as He guides us daily.

In order to better hear His word, we need to make our spiritual ears more sensitive to His voice. As it is written,

“Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you—the sure mercies of David.” Isaiah 55:3

If we incline our ears to obey the voice of the Holy Spirit, we shall be saved. But if not, then we haven’t walked in the Spirit but in the flesh. If we walk in the flesh, then there is a curse for us. As it is also written,

“For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” Romans 8:13

And as the scripture previously said,

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.” Romans 8:5–7

Now, one may contend this point using Romans 8:1, which says, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...” However there are three problems with such a counter-argument. The first is that now two scriptures supposedly contradict, which cannot be. If one scripture says you’ll be condemned and the other says you won’t be, don’t brush one verse off in favor of another.

Rather, seek out the full and true meaning of both scriptures as you become

disciplined to seek and understand the truth. There is always a greater picture to be found above the scriptures. Even if they seem to contradict, this is because there's a greater concept that ties it all together above the seeming "contradictions."

The second problem with this counter-argument is that if you have not continued in Christ, then it does not apply to you—since it addresses "those who are in Christ Jesus." Just because you are born again doesn't mean you are continuing to walk in Jesus. You could be walking according to your own heart and flesh and, thus, not be justified.

This brings us to the third and most important problem with the Romans 8:1 contention: Every time people recite this verse, they never seem to finish it, and it ends with a warning. As it is fully written,

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." Romans 8:1

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ, walking in the Spirit. But if you walk in the flesh, this verse does not apply to you. Rather, Romans 8:13 does. Therefore, beloved, be diligent to obey the voice of the Spirit. Seek Him daily and grow in Him. He is already reaching for you; all you have to do is reach back.

He is always speaking to us, but we don't always hear Him. Sometimes this is because we have allowed wax to build in our spiritual ears by being busy or idle. In order to become more sensitive to His voice, we have to pick out the "wax" by sitting in His presence more often. We should be sitting in His presence throughout the day, keeping our minds focused on Him while we busy ourselves about our days.

In order to sit in His presence daily, we should read His word, worship, and pray. As we read the word, we hear Him speak to us and interpret scriptures. The more we listen to Him, the more we will understand His voice. The more we understand His voice, the easier it becomes to follow through with what He says in other areas of life.

By constantly worshipping, we are taking up a heart of gratitude and praise. He will always be with one who worships Him. This is why you feel His presence with you every time you worship from the heart. Also, He exhorts us to be in constant prayer throughout the day. As it is written,

"...pray without ceasing..." 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Whether we pray, worship, or read, we are commanded to seek the Lord at all times and forever. For it is also written,

“Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His face evermore!” Psalm 105:4

When we continually sit in His presence and seek Him, this will help sensitize our ears to His daily speech. As we begin to hear Him more frequently and clearly, we must be diligent to obey, even if His word doesn’t make sense to us. He is our Lord, and a faithful servant obeys his or her master in all things, without question.

Chapter Four

Disciplined in Singleness

There are many struggles that come during singleness that can be overcome by proper self-discipline in approaching God. Purity may be one such struggle that first comes to mind. But as we said in an earlier chapter, if we discipline ourselves to continue in the Spirit daily, these problems will fix themselves through the inward, abiding power of God.

Another issue for single men would be “God, do You want me to remain single or get married?” This struggle happens to some brethren due to this scripture:

“But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife.” 1 Corinthians 7:32–33

While this verse is true, it is not always the calling of everyone to remain single for the Lord. God has a plan for each of us, and for some of us, it is His plan for us to be married.

We are His bondservants, having been paid for with a price. We are no longer our own but Christ’s, and the life we used to live we live no longer. Now it is Christ within us who lives through us.

Therefore, seeing that He purchased you and you have called Him Lord, now submit to His guiding hand. Does He not have a plan for us? As it is written,

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Ephesians 2:10

God has prepared your life for you since the foundation of the world. If He is your Lord, then let Him rule over you and make the decisions for you as to how you will or will not live life. If God wants you to be married, He will make this evident to you. Do not say in your heart, “I will be married” or “I will be single,” but let God lead you to His plan.

I myself pursued singleness to honor God. I thought that He gave us a choice, seeing that we have free will. But He continually laid it in my heart to have a companion. I thought this was my own desire, so I denied what I thought to be my own heart in an attempt to deny the flesh. Later, however, He reminded me,

“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face

of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.” Acts 17:26–27

God has predetermined where every child will be born and live. If, then, He has determined that certain children will dwell in your house, wouldn’t that mean He has predestined you to become a father? Furthermore, He predestined the salvation of your children, whom He planned for you to have. Doesn’t God predetermine all our lives? Let us see what is written:

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” Romans 8:29

Beloved, God foreknew you before He created time. He also has foreknown who your children will be, what their names will be, how they will live, whom they will marry, and how they will die. He has foreknown all things since before the beginning. If He knows all these things, shouldn’t we let Him lead us in all things? He does know best, after all! So it is better to open our eyes to His will rather than seek our own will. We are His children, after all, and as our Father He has a plan for us.

But just because we have open eyes doesn’t mean we will always see God’s plan. We have to wait for Him to reveal His heart to us. Then we are able to submit to His direction. But does God really direct us to a wife? Or do we have free will?

Both. You can choose your spouse, or you can choose to let God lead you in His plan—even as we read in Acts 17:26 that He “has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings...”

So wouldn’t He pre-appoint His daughter’s dwelling place also, and not yours only? Did you not know that, when you’re married, your home is a family church? You are called to lead your family as one body and as one unit in Christ, being brothers and sisters in Christ with you as the family pastor.

Similarly, this is why a bishop needed his family to be respectable and submissive to his guiding hand. If he couldn’t lead his own family, he couldn’t lead the family of Christ.

Therefore, if it is in your heart to be married, lay the matter before the Lord. Isn’t God wiser than we? Ask Him for an “arranged marriage.” Let God arrange whom you will marry, when, and where, and let Him lead you in all aspects of

this. He knows who would be the best fit for you. He knows who would be the best mother of your children. He has foreknown all of His children. As we have already read,

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” Romans 8:29

So, then, if you are a father, decisions about marriage are no longer about your walk only, but about the walks of your wife and children as well. God has already known and understood who His children would be. He has known whom you would choose as your wife and who is best for you. He knows which woman, as your wife, would best complement your walk, the walks of your children and their spouses to come, and the walks of your grandchildren and their spouses. God knows all these things and has the greater picture in mind.

Therefore, beloved, it is better to pray and ask the Lord to give you one of His daughter’s hands in marriage. Remember the age-old tradition of asking the father for the daughter’s hand in marriage? Has not the Lord become her Father also? So ask her Father in heaven for the hand of one of His daughters in marriage. However, let Him choose who that is. Surrender to Him, and He will guide you the right way.

God will lead you if you seek Him for the answer, rather than seeking it for yourself. As it is written,

“Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife.” 1 Corinthians 7:27

In this scripture, there is an exhortation to remain single and not to seek marriage. And why not? To permit you to be open fully to hearing and heeding God’s will and caring for the things of the Lord. In singleness we are more mindful of the things of God, but in marriage certain distractions arise.

Since the scripture exhorts us, “Do not seek a wife,” pray and let God seek a wife for you. He has a plan for your life, so be submissive to it. If He desires you to be married, it will come to pass in His perfect timing. If He desires you to be single, He will do the work in your heart and give you the same desire.

Then you will be justified in all things because you allowed Christ to be your Lord, leading you in all things and giving you all things. If He is our master, it is best to be submissive to His will while we wait for the redemption in His return.

Therefore, it is good to discipline our hearts to follow after God in all things.

Can we choose a wife? Yes! We have free will. But can God make better decisions than we? That should go without saying. So if we temper our hearts to wait for God, and ask Him what His will is, He will lead us into it. As it is written,

“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Romans 10:17

God leads us into everything in life. It is good to wait for His word, that you can walk by it. Faith comes by hearing His word, and righteousness is faith in motion.

Take the time to seek the Lord for His will in your life. Ask Him for one of His daughters, and in His time He will grant her to you. If you want Him to be the center of your marriage, then let Him be the center before you even meet her. Let God guide you in all things and remain submissive to His hand. He will lead you to His desire and bless it. When He gives you a wife, He will give to you “exceedingly abundantly above all that you ask or think...” Ephesians 3:20

And remember that it is written,

“He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord.” Proverbs 18:22

Chapter Five

Disciplined in Marriage

God created humanity with various elements of His nature. In man we see a dominating, adventurous, protective, powerful, and delivering nature. We were created by God to go and dominate the world, knowing no master (except God) and mastering all creatures of the earth. The adventurous nature of a man takes him to uncharted territories, as when the United States first expanded westward. He seeks to protect and save the damsel in distress and to “wow” her with his masculine power.

But a woman is built differently. She wants to be wooed, romanced, treasured, and cherished. She is tender, meek, emotional, and compassionate. Whenever unconditional love comes to mind, many reflect upon the love of a mother.

A man wants a woman to look at him and think, “Wow! He is powerful, respectable, honorable, and handsome.” And a woman wants a man to look at her and think, “Wow! She is stunning, captivating, amazing, and beautiful! This is someone I need to romance, hold, and cherish.”

God has given us these natures to be reflective of His person, albeit not all-inclusively. In a man, we see His nature to govern, overcome, and save. In a woman, we see His sensitive nature—His love, His beauty, and His desires to captivate and be cherished.

It is important to understand these natures as being the nature of our heavenly Father. Through these natures, we can better understand the character of God. Yet the character of God is best understood as the combination of the two characters, both of men and of women.

Sometimes as men we can become overcharged, overly gruff, and overly grizzly bearish. Just look at a bachelor’s house! Not many men keep their home very well. The way men relate to one another doesn’t require much gentleness and softness of tone. We’re men; we can handle a few jokes and a little roughing up.

But when a woman comes along, it changes everything. Her gentle nature smooths out His rough edges. Suddenly he needs to learn how to handle something gently and with compassion, even if he’s angry. When angered enough, a man can sometimes act more like a grizzly bear than like Christ.

Yet God remains gentle with His children. There are times we may have angered

the Lord in our conduct, but He still gives us opportunity for repentance and grace. He handles us gently and with compassion—as a father toward his son, or a shepherd his sheep.

The very nature of a woman can teach a man to be more Christ-like in the way he behaves, lives, and approaches others. It is almost as if God made us to need a woman's touch. Even the Lord said,

“...‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.’” Genesis 2:18

But a woman needs a man who can lead her, gently and lovingly. As husbands, it is our responsibility both to lead her and to nurture her in the water of the word. We are given the honor of protecting her from all harm, especially spiritual harm. As the leader in the family, we are meant to be the image of God's love, faithfulness, and truth.

By leading her in the truth of the word and by having the same mind in Christ with her, we can protect her from false doctrines. Her heart is sensitive and has both strengths and weaknesses. This does hold true for men as well, but how a woman is weak is different from how a man is weak.

Looking at her weaknesses, we see that emotion can take a hold of her. As a result, she may make decisions based on emotions, being a naturally emotional creature. The issue with this is that not all of our feelings are from God, though they may appear to be.

But even as the Scriptures say,

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” Jeremiah 17:9

Therefore, living by our own hearts can lead us down bad paths. Being naturally emotional, a woman can easily become misguided by her own heart. We are called, then, to lead her in the Spirit as God leads us. It is easier for us to hear God because the voice of our own heart and emotions isn't yelling as loudly.

This is how God designed men and women, and this is how He determined our roles. He created the roles of marriage, and we are called to take them up in obedience. Seeing that God will always lead a marriage this way, dwell with your wife in love and understanding. As it is written,

“Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that

your prayers may not be hindered.” 1 Peter 3:7

And as we stated before, she is considered the weaker vessel because some of the decisions she makes may be more prone to emotion than a man’s would be. Many of our emotions originate from the flesh. But the flesh is corrupt and desperately in need of a Savior. So if we rely on our inward feelings, then we will struggle in weakness. If we live by what we feel, then we are guided by our own hearts rather than by Christ. But if we learn the voice of God and wait for it, denying our own hearts as we wait for His word, we will find strength.

Due to her particular weaknesses, a woman is more likely to be ensnared by false doctrine. That a woman is easily deceived is evident, for it is written,

“And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.” 1 Timothy 2:14

And also,

“For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” 2 Timothy 3:6–7

Notice how it says “gullible women”? Why doesn’t it say “men and women”? Because women, according to the word of God, are more easily deceived. Therefore, we are called by God to be their protectors. Why? Because there are many who would seek to deceive her, keeping her from the knowledge of truth, as we just read in 2 Timothy 3:7. As God’s chosen leaders, we are called to lead them to the truth constantly.

In today’s culture, it is a difficult and taboo thing to suggest that a man should lead a woman. It is often described by others as a reflection of the culture “back then, but not now.” The issue with this statement is that it suggests people are living according to the culture now, which is the culture of the nation in which they reside rather than the culture of Christ.

More particularly, the cultures of the nations today are secular, unbiblical, unethical, unloving, unforgiving, and unfaithful. These are the attributes of those who live according to the flesh. But we are called to “[c]ome out from among them and be separate,” as we read in 2 Corinthians 6:17. We are the culture of Christ, not the culture of this world. We are of the nation and kingdom of God. Our King is Jesus; our capital city is the New Jerusalem to come; and our culture is defined by the word of God.

Therefore, beloved, be diligent to live according to the culture of Christ and to teach your families to do likewise. We are saved by believing and living out the word of God. By suggesting that Scripture doesn't apply because it is old and outdated, being of another culture, is blasphemous. God commands a woman to be led by a man, and for a man to take the lead. By claiming it is an unbiblical culture and not the word of God that must be obeyed, many people are denying their faith and blaspheming the word of God. As it is written,

"...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Romans 10:17

Your faith comes from the word of God. The Scriptures are the perfect, pure, and infallible word of God. Seeing that our faith comes from the word of God and our salvation comes from practicing faith, we cannot be saved if we do not live according to the Scriptures.

Cultures do not change Scripture. Rather, the word of God holds true forever: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." Hebrews 13:8

And the Scriptures are the word of God. As it is written,

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16–17

But is the source of Scripture only godly inspiration? What else do the Scriptures say about those who wrote them?

"...but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." 2 Peter 1:21

So, then, it is the Holy Spirit who wrote the word of God through men. Therefore, beloved, we should be diligent to obey His words, leading our wives with all sincerity. This is biblical, Christ-like, and God-spoken.

Does the word really call us to be leaders? Yes, for as it is written to the wives,

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything." Ephesians 5:22–24

Why would a woman be called to submit to a man as to God Himself? That sounds like a very high calling for men. But when you become married, God immediately steps in to teach you how to lead your wife. He will lay hold of your heart and guide you in the way you should go.

Even Mary, Jesus' mother, was submissive to her husband Joseph. Who did God choose to speak to direct the family? Joseph. God gave Joseph dreams and sent him angels to tell him where to go and when. When Jesus' life was threatened by Rome in Bethlehem, God sent the message to Joseph—not to Mary. God did speak to her; but these messages were not sent to Mary except at the time she conceived, or else it would be written otherwise.

But as a very holy woman of God, she remained submissive to her husband as he led her in a walk with Him. In fact, you never see a time when she questioned Joseph's authority, but rather she followed him in everything. She was the example of what a wife should be, and Joseph was the example of what a husband should be.

God would never call His daughter to submit to a flawed, sinful, weak person unless He intends to take control of situations to lead and deliver His baby girl. We as men need to be disciplined to follow His guiding hand. We are weak and flawed, but when we submit to the Lord, then it is up to her to find the perfect God in an imperfect person. God always knows what is best, and we should pray and inquire of the Lord often for the future and leadership of our families.

But the calling of a husband is much higher than other callings and cannot be taken lightly. Seeing that a husband is to his wife as God is to the church, he is therefore considered the dignitary of his wife. The word 'dignitary,' which appears in the New Testament, comes from the Greek word *doxa*, which means "one who is praise worthy or honorable like God." *Doxa* is where we get the English word 'doxology' from, which is the compilation of worship and praise songs for the Lord.

To put it in layman's terms, a dignitary is a person called to a high office, such as Moses or an Apostle. An angel would never speak against such a person, as the Scriptures tell us, because a dignitary is justified and defended by the Lord. The Apostles were like the continued presence of Christ to the Church. Likewise, Moses was like God to Israel. So for we as husbands to be toward our wives as Christ is toward the church suggests that we are dignitaries toward our wives.

A dignitary does have a high calling, but also a terrifying judgment. You as the leader of your wife must give an account to the face of her Father about how you handled her, loved her, cherished her, nourished her heart, and led her boldly in the Spirit and in truth. If you have slacked in these areas, there is a judgment held against you. If we, by complacency, allow her to go astray, we will be judged. If we don't lead her to truth and she goes astray, or if there is anything

that causes her to sin, we have a judgment. But as it is written,

“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!” Matthew 18:6–7

And also,

“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.” James 3:1

But whether you accept it or not, you are your wife’s teacher. Therefore, beloved, take your walk very seriously. The working of ministry is an overflow of the personal time we spend with God. It is very important to be growing always—both because we love the Lord and want to draw nearer to Him and, also, so that we may lead our wives uprightly.

But how shall we lead our wives, and what does God require of us? This is further expounded upon in Ephesians 5:25–27:

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

Just as Jesus is doing for the Church, so God wants you to do for her. Cleanse your wife in the water of the word of God. Lead her in the Scriptures and teach her, that you may be able to present her to God as a glorious woman. Teach her so that she would not have “spot or wrinkle nor any such thing, but that she would be holy and without blemish.”

Therefore, since you must present her to God as holy, you have an account to give for her. Lead her carefully in the truth, lest you yourself be condemned. As it is written,

“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.” Galatians 1:8

It is imperative to lead her in perfect doctrinal truth, so take this charge seriously. But how do we find the perfect truth?

“However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth...” John 16:13

Seek the Holy Spirit, and He will grant it to you. It is already His desire for you to have perfect doctrine. And seeing that He wrote the word of God through men, let Him interpret its meaning to you. That way, by being led in the Holy Spirit, you may find truth and so save your wife. As it is also written,

“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.” 1 Timothy 4:16

Take your doctrine seriously and let the Lord lead you to truth. Then, as the Spirit speaks to you, speak also to her. And how He leads you, lead her also. God will direct your heart and incline you in the things you should do.

But above all, you must lead your wife in a gentle and compassionate way. Remember how Christ is with us: Is He not gentle even when we make mistakes? As we read previously,

“Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding...” 1 Peter 3:7

So be disciplined to cherish your wife, to nurture her, and to be gentle with her. It is easy to become harsh, especially in a fight. Yet do not let anger, but rather Christ, rule in your heart. Be the image and example of His love. Take your walk seriously. You will have to give an account both for how you lived and for how you led. Moreover, as we are further exhorted in Ephesians,

“So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church.” Ephesians 5:28–29

Therefore, take her walk seriously and be an encouragement to her to seek the Lord constantly and to grow in Him. Seeing that the Spirit leads us to all truth, you must constantly abide in His presence and encourage her to do likewise.

The closer we get to Jesus, the closer we grow to each other in our marriage. Since we cherish our flesh, we ought also to cherish our wives. Remember to kindle romance often and spend much time with her. Spend time with her in fellowship and in romance. Cherish her and hold her often. Find time to sit alone with her and to embrace her sweetly and softly. A woman is comforted by touch.

So comfort her often. This world is a dark and desperately wicked place. We live amidst a spiritual desert waste land, so it is easy to become emotionally and spiritually dried up through the desert of life.

Give her what she needs to be filled with the Spirit. Give her time alone with God and comfort her often when she’s in your presence. Always have sweet

words for her, and comfort her by saying nice things to her and about her. We should always be filling the emotional tanks of our wives. It is easy to overlook each other's needs when we are stressed and tired after a long day of work, but Christ is never too busy to cherish you. Neither should we be too busy to cherish our wives the way they need.

It is easy for anyone to be dragged down by the things of life. But if you comfort your wife in Christ and encourage her to rest in Him and seek Him daily, she will be able to continue in the Spirit and be strengthened by Him.

Take the time to pray with her often. Sit down with her and write a list of some things that need to be addressed in prayer. Then fellowship with her in prayer and read the word together. Encourage her to read alone, that she may hear from the Lord and be edified by Him, but also have Bible studies with her and teach her as God leads you. It is important for you both to read alone and together.

Take the time to read with her, daily if possible. Fellowship with her often in the word, in prayer, and in worship. You are both heirs of eternal life together; therefore, as brother and sister in Christ, become best friends by fellowshipping often.

Furthermore, treat her to dates once a week. Do something free if you don't have money. If you have young children, set some time aside when they are napping or in bed to be alone with her, romantically, just the two of you. It can be difficult to have romantic dinner dates when you have small children, so adapt to the circumstances and have romance in another way.

Always woo her with your ways. Share a blossoming friendship with her and lead her in the Spirit. Discipline yourself to be an example to her in your conduct, and cherish her in Christ.

Above all, love her tenderly and gently in the Lord.

Chapter Six

Disciplined in Fatherhood

God has created the family as an ultimate means to relate to Him. The way we relate with our children helps us to understand better, by experience, how the Father relates to us. When we learn and grow as fathers, we come to respect the work of the Lord in our lives more.

When hardships come upon us, we realize that the loving hand of God is there to hold us through it all. He teaches us and corrects us in all situations of life, that we may become more like Him. We as fathers likewise train our children to be like us in all that we know.

But when we come to Christ, we have much growth to do before we understand the nature of God. Throughout our early years in Christ, we find ourselves struggling with understanding Him and overcoming weaknesses. But this is reflective also of the nature of children. Then we as fathers have the blessing of guiding our children through life, that they may come to a better understanding of who God is, why we exist, how we should behave, and how to live a wise life in Christ.

Therefore, a man must be disciplined in his approach to parenting. For some, it can be easy to overlook issues with our children due to the busyness of life. Stress can wear on us, and much-needed attention is given to other things. In such cases, we need to prioritize our lives to put our children's spiritual growth above other things. Yes, marriage and God come first, but there are times when children need us to nurture their hearts lovingly—even when it is not convenient for us.

Every father wants to raise his child right. There is no Christian who would consciously ignore his children's needs. But sometimes, due to being overworked, overly busy, and subject to other stresses of life, a child's behavior may go unnoticed. We need to approach parenting with a disciplined and vigilant mind. By having a mind awakened to the conduct of our children, we will see their areas of need for spiritual growth.

As fathers, we always try to provide the best for our families. We understand the importance of proper discipline for behavior. However, Christian parenting is not about behavior modification but, rather, about gently and lovingly leading our children to Christ. Yet many well-meaning Christian parents discipline a child's

behavior while forgetting the need for teaching spiritual discipline.

But as it is written,

“Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him.” Proverbs 22:15

In all things, children are creatures of the flesh. They are born into the flesh and know nothing but the behaviors of the flesh. All they know is their own heart and their own desires, and that’s all that matters to them. But by faithful and loving rebuke on which they can depend, we can nurture their hearts to become godly. Then, as they become older, they will display more conviction, having been taught to make the right decisions and having received the Holy Spirit through coming to Christ.

Proper behaviors and a Christian walk are taught to a child simultaneously. A father needs to remain self-disciplined in watching his children and observing their conduct often. By becoming fruit inspectors, we can determine what their actions are, why they are behaving the way they are, and where their behaviors are coming from. Children are tempted just as we are, and it is important to isolate the source of every action of a child. Children will display both conviction and temptation in their behaviors. But we are called to isolate what is good and what is evil and address it through proper parenting.

For example, if you see your child is convicted, support conviction. Stay on God’s side always. When you see that they are tempted and denying conviction, discipline them not only as a consequence for the sinful act but also for correction of it. This is the difference between training and punishment. When children sin, we shouldn’t only discipline and hope they will learn from the consequences of their behavior; we should stay by their side until they repent—every time. The goal of discipline is to train a child to repent from his or her heart.

Giving children discipline doesn’t necessarily teach them godly discipline. But when we see their spiritual needs, we discipline for those and the behavioral needs fall in place. Teach them to obey conviction, and when they don’t, then discipline them accordingly.

For example, if a young child is told not to touch something so he waits for you to look away before touching it anyway, do not discipline for touching but, rather, for not listening to conviction. Then when children are old enough to understand, we teach them to listen to their convictions. Ask them what the right

thing is; then, when they correctly answer, ask them why they chose the wrong thing. Ask them, “Why didn’t you listen to conviction? You should listen to it.” Then make it clear to them that they are being disciplined for not obeying godly conviction. Do not discipline out of anger but, rather, train out of love. If you believe in spanking, then make it your aim to spank lovingly, not angrily.

In all of these things, our goal is to discipline our children in such a way that they are being led to Christ. If your children don’t have Christ, then train them in the things that lead them to Christ. And what leads them to Christ? First, obeying conviction. Secondly, believing God. Thirdly, confessing wrongdoings and repenting from the heart. And lastly, but not least importantly, seeking all truth.

When children listen to conviction, they will be willing to confess their sins and repent of them. If we teach our children to be sorry from their heart, then they will seek change. But they need to obey conviction first. So teach them what conviction is and teach them how to obey it.

Then, when they obey conviction, they will be more likely to receive Christ and walk uprightly with Him. If they always obey conviction and never cast aside the voice of the Spirit, they will naturally experience strong Christian walks.

This is not unlike how we teach our children to ride a bike with training wheels. Eventually we take the wheels off, that they can ride without the need of support. Likewise, we need to train our children to lean on Christ and not on us. Parents are a spiritual crutch to them, or training wheels if you will. By leading them to obey conviction, they will be trained to ride through life without training wheels. Instead, they will rely on Christ for guidance and conviction.

One day, they will not have your mentoring. When you die, they will be left behind to fend for themselves physically and spiritually. Thus, we need to prepare them for a walk with Christ without the need of our counsel. But if we teach them to obey the Holy Spirit, He will be all the counsel they will need.

So it is necessary in our discipline to support the convictions we see God giving our children. As we teach them to obey, they will eventually be able to make the right decisions on their own. Even before they come to Christ, they must be taught to obey conviction, confess sin, and be sorry from their hearts. This is what is necessary for them to come to Christ.

Aside from being the example of God’s love to them in everything, we also need to teach them how to respond properly to God’s love. When they can obey conviction, believe God, repent from their heart, and seek and believe the truth

of their need for a Savior, they will find Christ. But without knowing how to respond to His love, they will never find Christ.

We need to be the example of the Father's love, but they need to understand how to respond perfectly to it. When they see that we do all things out of love—especially discipline—then they will see Christ in us and desire Him.

If you came to Christ after you had children, then show them how the Lord has made a difference in your life, by becoming the image of His love toward them. Befriend them, lead them, guide them, and nurture them to find Christ.

If your children already have Christ, then lead them tenderly as you would a lamb. Let them see your affection, but also your firmness. They must respect you at all times. And whether your children have Christ or not, they must be trained to respect and listen to your words.

Your words will be life or death to them one day. If they haven't gone through life respecting everything you say, then they will blow off the important message you give them when the day comes—for from your mouth will come the word of God for their salvation. It is you whom the Lord will use to witness to your children.

If they do not respect the words of your mouth, then they will not respect the word of God from your mouth, either. Therefore, put great emphasis on the necessity of listening to and respecting your words as you raise your children. Then, when the time comes for them to receive Christ, they will take you seriously.

When your children have Christ, if they have been taught their whole life to respect, honor, and listen to your words, then it will be easier to shepherd them in Christ. If they are struggling with sin, we can gently lead them to overcome. If they are making a bad decision, then they will listen to correction.

This is where we establish the difference between the rod and the staff. These are the two implements used by a shepherd in guiding his sheep. If a sheep was prone to wandering away often, he would use the rod to rebuke it. A shepherd would search for the missing sheep, and then when he found it, he would break its legs with the rod.

It may seem brutal—and a source of horror to many animal rights activists—but it served a very noble purpose. The shepherd was interested not in harming the sheep but in saving its life. If it continued to wander off alone, it would soon be devoured by the predators that always shadowed the flocks.

How do predators find their prey? They eat the ones that are sick, weak, young, or separated from the flock. Whatever they can isolate they will eat. They drive the rest of the flock away and keep one sheep cornered so it is easier to kill. This is much like what occurs to believers who isolate themselves. By teaching our children to respect our words, and by becoming their friend, we lead them never to isolate themselves.

The shepherd would break the sheep's legs out of love. He would not leave the sheep alone after that but, rather, lovingly and tenderly nurse it back to health. He would keep it by his side and feed it from his hands, that the sheep may form an emotional bond with him. This is what Christ does for us through hardship, that we may see our need for Him. Then, due to its emotional bond with the shepherd, the sheep will no longer want to run away but will instead stay close by the shepherd's side, where he can protect it.

The staff, as we understand it, may have had a hook at its end. A staff would be used not only to ward off predators but also to guide the sheep gently back into the flock. The rod is the physical discipline we use, but the staff is the words we use to corral our children back into God's arms.

By teaching our children through the "rod of correction" to obey the staff, we render discipline less and less necessary until it tapers off altogether. The point behind all discipline is to teach our children to obey conviction. Then, when they obey conviction, all we need to do is speak lovingly and convictingly in Christ, and they will repent.

But we also must form bonds of friendship with our children. God called Abraham His friend, but He was also His Father. Likewise, if we are going to be the example of the Father toward our children, we need to relate to them in a friendship. If our children are connected to us and see that we can understand them, they will have more respect for us. This, in the end, will lead to a more fulfilling relationship with our children.

When children are older, they tend to feel that you're not one of them and that you don't understand them. As a result, when they can think for themselves, they may feel as if they have better ideas than you, rather than listening to your God-given wisdom. But if you form a heartfelt, one-on-one bond with your children, you can do away with these problems altogether. When they feel close and connected to you, it is easier to share the word of God with them and guide them in the Scriptures.

Fathers have been given the privilege of acting as a pastor toward their family.

Your children are Christ's little disciples, placed under your hand. Therefore, let the Lord teach them through you. Seek God with them often. Worship, pray, and read the word. If you set aside some time to pray over the issues of their heart and have them pray over the issues of yours, they will become more connected to you spiritually.

It is imperative for Christian families to be fellowshiping with one another. Unfortunately, this tends to be one of the most overlooked parts of family life. Children do their own thing, and the parents do theirs.

But it is necessary for children to bond with each other in Christ and with you. When they hear God speaking through you, they will perceive the wisdom He's given you and respect you more. When they respect you more, they will be easier to counsel in Christ as they grow in the Lord.

But when you teach your children, do not merely instruct them in what we do as Christians, but also teach them why we do it. Make it real and applicable to them. Show them how Christ leads your life and how this affects you. Then teach them to be led by Christ and show them how He is real and practical for their lives. When they come to Christ, sometimes the influence of friends or unsaved family may turn them away from following the Lord wholeheartedly.

However, if you make a walk with Christ applicable to their daily life, they will see and understand their need for Him daily. Many Christian families struggle to keep their children following the Lord when the children move out. Too often they seem to jump ship, forsaking the faith altogether. Although they believe in God, they won't come to church and they won't walk with Him. But if you raise them to see not only the importance of a daily walk with Christ but also how it applies to their life, they will continue in the Lord.

By disciplining ourselves to see their needs, share a friendship, and lead them gently in Christ, you ensure that they will continue in Him. By becoming their friend and teaching them how to obey conviction, you help lead them to Christ and to a continual walk with Him. Their salvation is in our hands, and we have a very high calling to lead them to Christ. Therefore, it is up to us to have a disciplined heart to lead our children in Christ.

Chapter Seven

Leading a Family in Christ

In everything our families do, we need to keep it Christ-centered. Being our own culture in Christ, we must come out from the world around us and continue in the things of Christ. In this we are called to take the lead and encourage our families to follow after Christ as He leads us.

Your family is the body of Christ and should be treated as a church, making every day a Sunday. Take the time to lead them daily in the Spirit. Pray individually with your wife and children and lead them in the word.

Include them in your daily walk, that when they perceive the grace and power of God in your life, you may be able to encourage them to have a godly walk as well. There are times you should be alone with God, and there are times you should fellowship with your family, that they may see the example of Christ in you.

Your children need your direction and the wisdom God has given you. Without these things, they may have a very difficult time walking in the Lord. But if you make Christ practical to their daily life through your example, they will grow to full stature in Christ. We must make Him practical for their growth and security in Christ.

There are many ways to make God practical to the family. It all starts with a walk with Him, as He reaches out to relate to us. When your children see God relating to them at a personal level, they will want to seek Him more.

Prayer is one of the most powerful ways for them to experience God at an intimate level. Whenever there are family issues that need prayer, include your children in asking of the Lord. For example, if you go through a tight spot financially, have some family prayer time once a week regarding the issue.

Then, when the Lord has delivered you, point out to the children how God delivered you and answered their prayers. Encourage them to pray on their own as well.

Take the time to pray with your children. Let them make a list of the things they would like to pray about, then pray over the issues of their hearts with them. When the Lord answers, point it out to them. When they see God answering them and relating to them at a personal level, they will want to be more personal

with Him. They first need to experience His love, however, in order to desire to love Him back. As it is written,

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

If we take our children by the hand and guide them in a spiritual walk, it will be easier for them to relate to the Lord. They will see firsthand how He works in their lives and how He cherishes them. When they experience His love, they will fall in love with Him.

In doing this, we should make it a priority to fellowship with our children. Create Bible studies for the family in a group setting. Every week, have a day set aside for seeking the Lord together as a family. Make it something everyone can depend on so that everyone can schedule around that day. It must be a priority for everyone to come to a family fellowship night; do not allow any excuses.

When we fellowship, it forms bonds of friendship between us. But by sharing in the Spirit, we create bonds of intimate kinship as well. True fellowship is not characterized by a gathering, for there are many who fellowship around food, movies, games, or other activities. But fellowship is not only the sharing of a friendship. Rather, fellowship has purpose and common cause.

True fellowship, by definition, involves a body of people coming together to share a common goal or interest. As Christians, our goal is to draw nearer to the Lord, and our interest is Christ. Yet some people make fellowship about friendship while forgetting the Lord.

But beloved, do not forget your first love, who is Christ. Remember Him in your fellowship and make seeking Him the center of your family fellowship. The closer we get to Jesus, the closer we will be to each other. When His love works in us and among us, it binds us closer to each other.

Hate is the act of pushing away, but love is the action of pulling near and holding dear. Therefore, if we immerse ourselves and our families more deeply in the love of God, we will draw nearer to one another. So make it your aim to be well-pleasing to the Lord in the conduct of your family.

Encourage your spouse to seek Him daily. If you have younger children who are noisy, then handle them for a while and keep the house quiet for her. Give her time to be alone with God, that she can be refreshed in His presence. Then have her return the favor for you.

Sometimes when we seek the Lord, Satan causes external things around us to

create much noise. This, of course, is to keep us from seeking the Lord. If you pay attention when you are studying or seeking God, you will see that there are times when your environment grows noisy.

There will be times when you sit down and pray, then open the word, and magically one of your children ends up hurt. Or suddenly the baby wakes up out of a dead sleep and starts screaming. Sometimes your neighbor will make noise at precisely the wrong time, revving his car engine or mowing his lawn.

But none of this is coincidence. As often as these distractions happen, the statistical equivalent would be to get struck by lightning and a meteorite, then win the lottery. Therefore, it is obvious in these circumstances that an intelligent force is at work behind the scenes.

Bearing this in mind, we need to be vigilant in our study times and in others' study times. If Satan is rising up to create distractions when you want to seek the Lord, then ask your spouse help you "keep the demons at bay." Quite simply, have her look after the children and keep the house quiet for you while she prays for the peace of the Lord over the house. God will answer and will show up; then there will be peace over the house for you.

Yet keep a vigilant eye also for your wife's sake. When she's seeking the Lord, watch for distractions that may be rising up around her, and help her in keeping them at bay. Be diligent to quiet things down for her, and encourage her to seek the Lord. If either of you ends up not seeking the Lord, you risk working in the flesh.

Rather than "being in the flesh," help her "get in the Spirit." Strengthen her in Christ, and so find yourselves drawing closer to one another. If either you or she is acting in the flesh, it will eventually cause fights and divisions. But if you are acting in the Spirit, you will always have unity, love, peace, and grace. This will only happen if you seek the Lord, both individually and together.

Be sure to seek the Lord with your wife privately on a daily basis. Worship with her, just the two of you, and let the Spirit fall on you together. Be unified in the Holy Spirit and grow in Him continuously. Take time, weekly if possible, to pray with her about the situations in your lives and your family. Read the word with her daily if possible and encourage her to read on her own.

Spend much time with each other in Christ, and fellowship over God rather than over idle activities. Do likewise with your children, and fellowship with them individually. Seek the Lord with them as often as possible in a one-on-one

friendship, and so encourage them to walk with God. But also maintain a family gathering once a week.

I like to call this “family fellowship night.” During this time, we may have pizza, soda, and other things to keep it fun for the children, but we make it about seeking the Lord. We will dig into the word, pray, or worship together. Sometimes, for the children, we may watch a movie pertaining to Christ that teaches them about the Lord. But we still take the time to pray and seek the Lord with them as well.

Engage in whatever activity wherein you feel the Holy Spirit. Wherever you sense the presence of God, be there. Where God is, go there. You will know this by how you feel His presence. If you feel Him in worship, then worship. If you aren’t feeling God with you while you do something, then He doesn’t want you doing it.

This is how He leads and guides us. Although He never leaves nor forsakes us, He doesn’t let us feel His presence sometimes, that we may know what we should do or question what we are currently doing. If we question what we are doing, then we will turn to the Lord and ask Him what we should be doing. This is the logic He uses in approaching us.

So whatever God is blessing, do that for family fellowship night. Make it fun and engaging. If your children see it as something to look forward to, they will enjoy seeking God rather than looking at it grudgingly.

Besides seeking the Lord as a family, it is good to teach the children to seek Him together. Have them pick out a day every week to pray with their sibling. If they become each other’s prayer partners, it will develop long-lasting friendships in the end. Encourage them to read and worship together, but it is especially good that they pray. By actively engaging in a search for the Lord with their brothers and sisters, they are being trained to fellowship with each other when they move out of your home. When they depart your house, try to encourage them to rekindle those bonds and continue seeking the Lord together.

This is how we create a body of Christ out of our families. If everyone in the family seeks the Lord together, one on one and communally, it will produce a beautiful church in your own home. This is how the Lord calls us to lead our families, and it is the prerequisite for pastors.

Pastors should have a family that has been led well in Christ to prove that they can lead the church. As it is written in regard to a bishop, he must be “one who

rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence” (1 Timothy 3:4). Then the scripture goes on to say,

“...for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?...” 1 Timothy 3:5

And why are these things written? Because a bishop, pastor, or anyone else who is over the church must be the ultimate example of a Christian. What is required of them is also required of all Christians. So take note and understand that you will give an account for every deed you have ever done. Therefore, beloved, rule your own household well.

But why are pastors required to demonstrate these things before they rule over the church? To prove that they can lead a body in Christ. With the same measure they lead their own flesh and blood, they will lead others as well. Therefore, as Christians we must lead our families as if they were mini-churches. The entire family in fellowship together is a body in Christ—so treat it as a body and rule your house through the leading of the Holy Spirit.

For indeed, you are training your children to be subject to God. As it is written,

“Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?” Hebrews 12:9

If you lead your children in the Holy Spirit and seek the Spirit with them, your children will be subject to God. Teach them to render their lives to Christ, being obedient to Him as their Father and Lord. Let them see the correlation between you and the Father by being the image of the Father toward them.

Walk in love and lead them well. Lead your wife in gentleness and compassion. Subject yourself to the leading of God in all things and die to yourself. By becoming disciplined in how you govern your family, you will reap a reward.

In all of these respects, as a disciplined man of God, teach your family to be disciplined as you are. Both by being the example and by taking the lead, we can encourage our families in Christ and lead our children to salvation.

I'd Love to Hear from You!

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About the Author

Adam is a preacher, teacher, and #1 internationally bestselling author of over 60 books on the Christian faith. He is a devoted husband and father of three boys. Through his travels, he's seen the need for a new awakening and a new revival—a revival of the heart. Come join Adam on this journey of redemption, and experience God like never before!

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