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A Fresh Start in Life Now That You Are a Christian

Elmer L. Towns

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start
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NOW THAT YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN

by Elmer Towns

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HOW THAT YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN

From The Library Of
ELMER L. TOWNS

Prepared —

to strengthen Christians
to win the lost
to glorify God

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PREFACE

People like fresh things . . . fresh fruit . . . fresh mornings . . . fresh air. When you become a Christian, you have a fresh new life. A friend recently paraphrased II Corinthians 5:17: "If any person is in Christ, he is a creation of God; all things are fresh and new."

Now you need to grow. You can't hear growth nor see it in progress. Growth is quiet like the lawn. You can't see grass grow but the pile of clippings in the drive convinces you of its growth. The first section of this book is designed to help you grow.

The next section will help you walk with God. Receiving Christ is just the beginning of a lifelong journey. You have left the starting block, now go on for God.

Don't carry garbage into your new life. The third section tells you how to throw away all the habits that made you a failure. Since you have the opportunity to start life anew, make the most of it. Don't park at yesterday's corner.

The last section deals with your character. A friend who has trouble with his temper recently prayed, "Lord, help me be cool - it's so easy to get hot." He wanted self-control, which is foundational to becoming a well-rounded person.

May this book help you to grow in Christ. Read each chapter carefully and look up the Scripture references. May you enjoy your fresh, new life just as thousands before you who have received Christ. And, like them, may you walk with God.

- ELMER TOWNS

Introduction

A FRESH START IN LIFE

A Personal Testimony¹

When I was twelve, I really wanted to do whatever you were supposed to do “to get right with God.” I didn’t love God, but I had a deep respect for Him.

At that time my family was going to a church where the main emphasis seemed to be that you had to be baptized for remission of sins. I thought that if I was baptized, everything would be okay - that would make me a Christian and that’s what “good people” were.

The important thing seemed to be baptized, but I was afraid to get up in front of all those people and I didn’t want to get wet and ugly. We were told that Jesus had died for our sins, but I really didn’t think I was a sinner because I’d always tried to be a good person.

I knew the procedure from watching from the pew on Sunday mornings. The minister would ask for people to come forward. I don’t remember how he did it, or what he said, but I knew once you were up there, he’d ask you if you believed Jesus was the Son of God. You would say yes and get baptized. It all went very quickly. The congregation waited while you put on a robe; then you were brought into the baptistery and submerged before them. So I went forward, said yes and was baptized.

I also found out afterwards that in being baptized I had become a member of the church, but I really didn’t care about that at the time. I was just relieved to have the whole experience over. Now I felt like an official “Christian.”

I did have a pretty white Bible with my name on it that I enjoyed carrying around at church. I still didn’t read my Bible and couldn’t understand it. My major experience with Bibles had been memorizing verses for gold stars when I was younger.

We didn’t spend any more time at church than we had to. We’d go for a morning service on Sunday, then leave as quickly as we could get through all the handshaking and smiling. The people looked friendly, but I didn’t like being there. The outside church door meant freedom.

Years passed and I was in college. I studied hard and was still a good Christian person, in my own mind. However, by this time I wasn’t so sure about God, and “Jesus”

¹ This testimony shows the change that comes from an encounter with Christ.

had become a name in history. Just in case, I kept praying and ended the prayer by saying “in Jesus’ name.” I never understood why; it was just a formula.

In college, my friends and I became interested in palm reading, astrology and astro-projection, “played” with an Ouija board, knew someone who used Tarot cards, and were fascinated by ESP. Two of us signed up to check out the Rosicrucians. We researched reincarnation and looked into the Baha’i faith. I still considered myself a Christian, but I had no idea about what the Bible said. I didn’t know then that our extra-curricular interests could be of Satan. I didn’t even believe there was a real devil. After all, he was a red guy with horns and a tail, like kids dressed up on Halloween.

I graduated from a state university. I taught first grade for several years and a learning disability class for one year. I liked the children, teachers, parents and everyone, but I was really restless.

By now I knew by observation and experience that job security, money, possessions and friends were not enough to make me happy. Although I was single, I knew enough married friends to see that marriage didn’t guarantee happiness. So what was the point of it all? Why were we here anyway?

People thought I was a happy person, but the only time I was really happy was when I was alone in the mountains with the quiet and the trees. Even there, the questions kept coming.

I quit teaching and went back to college, majoring in art. I asked more questions, but no one seemed to know satisfactory answers. There were a lot of students doing their own thing and going on head trips, but I saw that just doing what you thought you wanted to do didn’t really make you happy either.

While I was still enrolled as an art student, my friend Nancy became very depressed. We talked a lot, but I couldn’t think of any way to help her.

Meanwhile, another friend told Nancy about a Bible-believing church and suggested the pastor could help her. This seemed like a good idea; we sure didn’t have any answers. I thought if God was real, maybe He would help.

Nancy talked with the pastor, started going to church and - unknown to me - accepted Jesus as Savior. And she invited me to visit the church.

Because Nancy was feeling better and the people seemed to be friendly and to care about other people, I thought I’d try it. I don’t remember what the pastor said that day, but I knew he believed what he was preaching. It wasn’t a dry lecture - he was actually teaching from the Bible. And the Bible didn’t seem to be a lot of dry words; it was exciting and the words answered questions. I was hungry for more. I hated to leave that day and waited in anticipation for that night. Then we found we could come on Wednesday. With Sunday school class, then church in the morning and evening, I couldn’t seem to get enough.

A few evenings later, I was alone at home reading, checking the pastor's quotations against the Bible I had; I didn't want to be tricked. For the first time I understood how a person actually became a Christian! I didn't understand why the Bible said the things it did, I just knew it said them. That night I really believed the Bible was from God.

I only knew God as the Father so I talked with Him, reading I John 5:11-13 and I John 4:23. I read more of the Bible and there was Jesus all over the place. He was really God's Son. I didn't know all of that was in the Bible.

So I sat at the dining room table and said okay to God. The pastor said all you had to do to have Jesus come into your life was to ask Him; you didn't have to feel anything, but just know that He'd come because He said He would.

You had to admit you were a sinner and ask Him to forgive you (I John 1:9) and He would. I didn't "feel" like a sinner, but the Bible said by God's standards I was, so I asked Him to forgive me. To the best of my understanding, I asked Jesus into my life. I was afraid, but I asked God to be in charge of everything. I explained to Him that He would have to prove everything to me because I knew so little and this was all so new.

The pastor said you didn't have to feel anything, but I did. I felt relief and I felt protected. I felt like I belonged to God, and I felt safe from Satan. God had led me right up to the entrance into His family, showed me how to get in, then helped me trust Him so He could come into my life and bring me into His Life. He had always been there to help me - I just hadn't known it!

At first the church and the pastor and the fellowship was my lifeline. Gradually, I learned to have the Lord teach me directly through His Word, along with life experiences. My church is still my favorite place on this earth except for the times I'm alone with the Bible and the Lord.

When I first asked Jesus into my life and understood that He actually loved me, I hoped He would come right away so somehow I could be with Him. Really, the only reason I could see for staying on earth was because some other people needed to know about Him. I was ready to go.

Now since I've known the Lord, He's been doing real changing in me. I can see why; I needed to be doing some growing and learning. He is still changing me and I am becoming a new person. This is the most exciting adventure of all. It is not easy because I try too hard to get in the way. I also seem to be fairly stubborn in some areas.

I've really had some great teaching at the church and I feel my understanding growing. The whole process is fantastic and it's Him. One of the best things that has happened is that I am now learning to relax a little in Christ and maybe let Him do whatever needs doing a little faster. As I said, I'm a real "do it yourself" type, only that's not how He works.

How can I say thanks for a new life? And where do you begin? I praise the Lord for His people and His pastors. I'm glad I had a fresh start in life! All I can say is, **Praise the Lord!**

The true story of one who found Christ.

Chapter 1

ACCEPTING THE SAVIOUR

During the Second World War, Joel Ortendahl knelt in the bottom of a foxhole. When the Germans advanced, he was scared. Remembering enough of the Bible that his grandmother had read to him, he received Christ as his Savior and testifies that he was saved at that moment. However, it took him several years before he began to walk with God, and he ultimately became a preacher.

James Mastin sat in New Testament Baptist Church, Miami, with a number of other junior boys. A Sunday school teacher asked him if he wanted to go forward. Being embarrassed, he went forward, not because he wanted to get saved but because he was taught to respond to adults. Even though the motivation was wrong, young James sincerely received the Lord and he too became a minister.

Amanda Horsley described herself as being “on the bottom rung of the ladder of society.” She drank incessantly in the trailer where she lived back in the woods of Virginia. She contemplated suicide and went so far as to take the pistol and go to a small gravel pit where she planned to kill herself. She decided instead to give God a chance. For two or three weeks she listened to every radio preacher she could find and did everything they all commanded. She repeated the “sinner’s prayer” but knew in her heart she was not saved. Finally she went to Thomas Road Baptist Church, Lynchburg, Virginia, and during the invitation she started forward. She later testified, “God saved me as I turned from the pew to walk down the aisle.” Even though she repeated again the “sinner’s prayer” at the altar, she knew God saved her the moment she responded and began to walk forward. The act of faith did it.

Ruth Jean Forbes received the Lord when she came home from Sunday school where the teacher had talked about “having a dirty heart.” She wanted Jesus to clean her heart and, as a five-year old, she knelt by her mother’s knee and received Christ as her Saviour. She must have known what she was doing because she grew up to live for Christ.

Each of these stories is different, yet God does not save people differently. Some were saved after someone talked with them; others were saved when they were alone. Some listened to a sermon; others had not heard a sermon in years. Some were embarrassed; others were afraid. What are the ingredients of salvation? Amanda Horsley prayed the right words, but it didn’t work for her. Why?

Salvation is as simple as a relationship with Jesus Christ. You put faith in Him. The Bible says, "Look and live." When you look to Him to answer your sin problems, you will live for eternity. Yet some theologians have made salvation complicated. Not every church member will go to heaven, yet most of them have declared their faith. "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not . . . in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: Depart from me ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:22-23). Obviously, some people who think they're going to heaven will not make it. They know the religious answers, but that's not enough.

You have saving faith when you know the message of the gospel, your feelings are stirred, and you say yes with the will. The three aspects of man's personality - intellect, emotion and will - respond to the gospel.

"Gospel" means good news, and the greatest news ever is that God saves man. The gospel has two aspects: propositional truth and personal truth. First, the gospel is God's plan. Paul defined it, "I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved. . . . that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (I Cor. 15:1-4). The gospel simply means the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We write these truths into our doctrinal statements. Those who agree are usually called Christians, but mental agreement with doctrine never prepared a man for heaven.

The gospel is more than propositional truth; it's personal truth. The gospel is Jesus Christ. You do more than give mental assent to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The gospel becomes effective in your life when Christ comes into your heart. "But as many as received him (Christ), to them gave he power to become the sons of God" (Jn. 1:12).

Some have a correct doctrinal statement but if they do not have the person Jesus Christ in their hearts, they are wrong, dead wrong. Others claim to know Jesus as a person, yet when their experience is not backed up with correct doctrine, they too are wrong.

Salvation is pictured as a road and you take steps along this road to get to heaven. Jesus said, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be who go in thereat; because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7:13-14). In the book of Acts, early Christianity was referred to as "the way" (Acts 9:2). It is "the way" to God. Approaching God, you must take four steps. You need no more and can take no less.

1. The first step - **Knowing your need**. People do not turn to God until they feel a "need" for Him. And this compulsion is not felt until they realize that their paths will lead to destruction. God says, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). The word "all" includes every human of all ages. A minister once tried to convince a small boy he was a sinner but he wouldn't admit it.

“Have you ever lied to Mommy?” The boy shook his head no.

“Have you ever taken anything that didn’t be-long to you, or fought with your brother and sister?” Again he shook his head no.

“He’s sinning to you now,” observed his older brother.

A man will never turn to God until he realizes he is a sinner.

2. The second step - **Knowing your punishment.** In our society we don’t worry about people who break the law until they hurt someone else, but God’s laws are different. He said, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). Because you have sinned, you must pay the penalty. When you break a speed law, you don’t get caught for every offense. If you speed through a radar trap, unless you’re a good talker, you pay the fine. You never escape God’s radar, for He catches every offense and the penalty is “death.”

“Even for **one** sin?” a woman asked at the church altar. The soul-winner showed her, “Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10). One sin makes you a sinner. You give an excuse to the patrol man, “I was just speeding down this one hill.” He assumes you’ve been speeding all day and gives you a ticket.

“The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). You get wages for your work. Wages is what you have coming to you. This verse means you have death or hell coming because you have sinned. In contrast, “The gift of God is eternal life.” The gift is free and undeserved; it’s not wages. You get death for your sins, but God gives you life as a gift.

3. The third step - **Knowing God’s provision.** “But God commendeth his love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). The word “commendeth” means to give. God has given His Son to die for our sins. This is the gospel. Christ received our punishment - His life for our death, His death that we may live. The meaning of Calvary is that Christ was our substitute.

4. The fourth step - **You must respond.** Knowing Christ died for you will not get you to heaven. Even if you are doctrinally correct, you do not have eternal life. Satan knows doctrine: “The devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19). Yet they are not saved.

You will end up in trouble unless you do some-thing about it, when you travel down the expressway and the needle says the gas tank is empty. You must find an exit and go off to get gas. Belief in Jesus Christ is finding the exit that leads to heaven. When you find it, you must do something about it. “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Rom. 10:9).

A man in Roanoke, Virginia, confessed to his wife that he had committed adultery. In a blinding rage of temper she ripped the curtains from the window, broke all

the dishes and announced she was suing for divorce. The next Sunday morning the couple attended church and during the invitation he went forward, crying like a brokenhearted lover. A few minutes later she followed him to the church altar. After the service was over, those who stood around were embarrassed by their hugs and kisses. Theirs was an emotional salvation, both before and after receiving Christ.

Pastor Curtis Hutson, Forrest Hills Baptist Church, Decatur, Georgia, visited in the home of Cleo Jenkins, a Certified Public Accountant. After analyzing the gospel, Cleo received the Lord. Later Hutson confessed, "I didn't think he was saved because he didn't show any feelings." Yet Cleo has gone on to be one of the greatest workers in the church.

What place does emotions have in conversion? We should never judge a man's seriousness by his tears at the altar. "Felix trembled and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" (Acts 24:25). His emotions were stirred, just as some who come to the altar and weep but never get saved. You cannot judge the sincerity of a person by the outward display of emotions. The country preacher said it eloquently: "The toot of the car's horn doesn't tell you how much gas is in the tank."

On the other side of the coin, just because a person doesn't cry or show joy, doesn't mean he lacks sincerity. Many people keep their emotions to themselves, yet they feel deeply.

Repentance is necessary for salvation, yet repentance never got anyone saved. Like the bus ticket to Detroit, the first half says, "This half good for passage, not good if detached." Salvation is good for passage to heaven, not good if detached from repentance. The second half of the bus ticket reads, "Not good for passage, keep in your possession until arriving at destination." This ticket stub represents repentance, "Not good for passage for heaven, keep doing good works until you get to your destination."

Repentance is usually tied to emotions. "For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation" (II Cor. 7:10). In the book of Acts, Peter and Paul both preached repentance.

Your salvation does not begin with repentance, for these are dead works that cannot give you merit before God. Your salvation begins with the preaching of the gospel. It is God's Word that stirs the heart.

Conviction which stirs the spirit to respond to God, begins from the Scriptures. "For the Word of God is quick, and powerful . . . and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). The Word of God lays bare the sin that is hidden in the thoughts of man. Your sin is never hidden from God, but the Bible convicts by illuminating the mind, showing an individual his sinfulness.

Conviction begins in the mind and moves to the surface. A man becomes aware that he has offended God. The effect is that he cries, trembles or becomes reflective. Sad stories or persuasive arguments will not bring conviction. It comes from the Word of God by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit convicted you of sin (Jn. 16:8). This is because you

have not believed in Jesus Christ (Jn. 16:9). He also performed the same work in your heart concerning righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-10).

Tears will not convince God of your sincerity, nor will your smile convince others that you have an inner peace. The stirring of emotions is a necessary concomitant of salvation, but not salvation itself. You must respond.

Your mind knows the facts of the gospel and your emotions motivate you, but your will must respond. Paul describes this, “Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine” (Rom. 6:17). Other descriptions are used to show a man’s response: Receiving Christ, accepting the Lord, asking Christ into your heart, placing your trust in Christ, or taking Christ by faith. Each of these statements means a person has made a volitional act of his will in turning his life over to Jesus Christ.

A young man was dealing for the first time with a seeker at the church altar. He told the person to pray, “Dear Jesus, come into my heart.” When they got up, the soul-winner thought of an extra prayer. They returned to the altar where he instructed the seeker to pray, “Dear Jesus, forgive me of my sins. As they returned to the first pew, he thought of a third prayer. “Dear Jesus, take me to heaven.”

Actually, people get saved by using any one of the three formulas. God is not as interested in the words of your mouth as He is in the attitude of your heart. You must **know the content** of the gospel, **respond by your emotions** and make a **decision of your will** to turn your life over to Christ.

Chapter 2

KNOWING YOU ARE SAVED

“There’s nothing sure in life but death and taxes,” the saying goes. But that’s not true. You can be certain of your salvation. Just as you are sure that you will go down when falling from a tree, you can know that God has saved your soul. Just as you know that a fire is certainly hot, you can know that you have eternal life.

But some people doubt their salvation. The young man goes to bed at night and tosses and turns. He is scared to die. “How will I meet God?”

A teenage boy stands chatting with some friends. Someone tells a story and when the punch-line comes, it’s dirty. The teenage boy laughs, but inwardly he thinks, “Christians shouldn’t laugh at dirty stories . . . am I a Christian?”

While riding his motorcycle down the street, a young man sees a girl sunbathing on her front lawn . . . in a bikini. He looks two or three times. Then thinks to himself, “I shouldn’t be doing this. Am I a Christian?”

These people doubted their salvation because of temptation. Others are just ignorant of the Scriptures, or have a carefree attitude.

An unchurched mother was invited to a Bible study where she began learning the Word of God. Many of her questions were answered. Later she attended an evangelistic service and went forward during the invitation. She had a deep experience with Christ and her life was turned around. All the way home she sang the hymns she had learned. She threw her arms around her husband. "Honey, I got saved!" She gathered the family together and told them the thrilling story. A week later she broke her leg on the back steps. Her housework got behind, the kids fought when they took care of the chores and she got discouraged. From the height of her salvation she sank to the depth of despondency. "Was it real?" she wondered. She had let her emotions prop up her Christian life to the point where she depended upon them. Perhaps God was teaching her to put her trust in His Word rather than in her feelings.

Three men were walking down a country path when they came to a log across the creek. The first man "Feelings" stumbled on the log. The second man "Faith" slipped, but the third man "Fact" never lost his footing. You should never base your salvation upon your feelings, never even let your faith in God be your confidence; your assurance of salvation must be grounded in the facts of the Word of God.

The key word in John's first epistle is **know**. He gives many reasons how we can know we're saved.

1. You know you are saved when you want to keep His commandments.

God's commandments are based on His nature; they are what He wants us to do. The natural man has a sinful nature and doesn't want to follow God. When you were unsaved, you did not want to do God's will. However, after you receive Christ, there is a desire to do God's will (II Cor. 5:17), even if you don't always follow your desire.

A young father put off receiving Christ for several months. The pastor went by to talk with him on several occasions and he always said, "Later." Finally he told the pastor that he came from a family that always had beer and wine with their meals. "When I go back home to eat with the family, I know I'll drink alcohol, though not excessively." The pastor showed him the victory that was promised in Jesus Christ and the young father was saved. A year later, the father came to the altar one Sunday morning crying. He wouldn't let anyone deal with him but the pastor. "I have been drinking with some buddies; I must not be saved." The pastor prayed for wisdom in handling the situation.

"Do you remember drinking wine with your family on New Year's Day right before you got saved?" the pastor asked the young man. He said yes.

"And do you remember drinking wine on Christmas right before that?" Again he said yes. The pastor pointed out that the young man did not feel convicted at that time by showing emotional upheaval and tears.

“Why are you crying over drinking now?” the pastor asked. The father saw the point. Christ lived in his heart and he could no longer go back to his old habits without offending Jesus Christ.

John tells us, “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not” (I Jn. 5:18). If you are saved, this does not mean that you will never sin once. It means that you will not sin **continually**. Some go forward in church and make an open profession, but there is no work in the heart. There is only an outward change. You can take a pig from the mud and scrub him up and paste on lamb’s wool so that he gives the appearance of being a sheep, but when you turn him out into the pasture, he’ll go to the mud with the pigs rather than eat grass with the sheep.

2. You know you are saved when God answers your prayers. The Lord has promised to answer the prayers of His children. “If ye shall ask anything in my name I will do it” (Jn. 14:14). Of course there are conditions to prayer, but when you meet those conditions, God will answer your prayers.

Elmer Towns tells the story of attending only one prayer meeting in his life before he was saved. The windows were open because it was a hot summer evening, and bugs flew in during the message. As they were leaving, someone said, “Let’s pray for screens.” There were 32 windows in the church and they got on their knees and asked God for 32 screens. Getting up from their knees, the pastor said, “Let’s don’t tell anyone, and watch what God does.” During the following Sunday service, a man interrupted the announcements to donate four screens. Several others volunteered and all 32 screens were bought. Towns walked out of that building saying, “These people must be Christians, they can pray; I must not be a Christian, I can’t pray.” It was that event that led Elmer Towns to salvation.

The Bible teaches that God is not obligated to hear the prayer of the unsaved man. “Now we know that God heareth not sinners” (Jn. 9:31). This same truth is repeated in the Old Testament, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Ps. 66:18). Since God does not hear the prayers of the unsaved, yet he has obligated Himself to hear Christians; you should have no doubts about your salvation if God has answered one of your prayers.

“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (I Jn. 5:14-15).

3. You know you are saved if you understand the Bible. Once again John promises, “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding” (I Jn. 5:20). When you have an inner understanding of the Bible that is proof that you are a Christian. Why? Because unsaved people are blinded to spiritual truths. “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God” (I Cor. 2:14). This is again described by Paul, “Having their understanding darkened” (Eph. 4:18). Just as a blind man cannot see the world about him, the unsaved man is blind to God’s Word.

He cannot understand the message of the Bible. Oh, he can tell the meaning of words and tell the plot of a story, but the spiritual message of redemption is withheld from him.

Before you were saved, the Holy Spirit convicted you of sin, righteousness and judgment (Jn. 16:9-11). The word “convict” means to cause to see; the Holy Spirit made you see or understand God’s plan of redemption. This is the work of God in your heart to bring you to salvation. Those who reject are further blinded. Now, if you have a desire to read the Bible and understand God’s message, you are saved. This does not mean you could pass a test in Bible knowledge, but you understand the plan of salvation.

4. You know you are a Christian when you love the brethren. Another proof of your salvation is love for Christians. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death” (I Jn. 3:14). Love does not mean mushy kisses and home-churned ice cream. It manifests itself first in fellow-ship. When you are born again you want to be around other Christians. Since God is Father to both you and other Christians, there is a common bond among Christians. Love manifests itself in a burden for other Christians. When you see a Christian sin and it bothers you, that is a sign you’re saved. When you see Christians have need and you want to help them, that also is a sign that you’re saved. When you see victorious Christians, and you want to live like them, rejoice for your name is written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

A minister recently went to a mission church to preach for prayer meeting. The host pastor and his wife prepared a steak dinner with all the trimmings, including apple pie for dessert. The crowd was small, with only 26 present. The love offering for the guest preacher came to \$26.00. When the visiting preacher found out the financial pressures in the mission church and that the pastor only had a can of beans left in the cupboard, he gave him the \$26.00. Both gave evidence of the fellowship of salvation: the mission pastor and his wife because they gave all except a can of beans, and the visiting pastor because he gave all in return.

Love of the brethren is a proof of your salvation but it does not mean you are not saved if you get mad at one Christian. Paul and Barnabas got mad at each other. Some Christian may do you wrong and you’ll lose your temper. This should not make you doubt your salvation. Remember the Bible says “Love the brethren” (plural), not individual brothers. You should have an attitude of love in your heart toward Christians in general. If you like to fellowship with Christians at church, you’re probably saved. If the people you love most in this world are Christians, you’re probably saved. If they’re not, you ought to ask yourself why.

Love is giving yourself to the one you love. When you give yourself to a group of Christians (the assembled church) and together you give yourselves to the Great Commission, then you should have confidence that you are saved.

5. You know you are saved if you have the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. When you became a Christian, the Holy Spirit came into your heart to create a new nature within you (Rom. 5:5), and to seal you until the final day of redemption (Eph.

1:13). The Holy Spirit dwells in every Christian. One of the telltale clues that a man is not saved is when he doesn't have the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:11).

The indwelling Holy Spirit witnesses that you are saved. He doesn't speak through the hearing of the ears or the seeing of your eyes. He communicates from His heart to your heart, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Rom. 8:16). This is innate knowledge (that which doesn't need proof). You just know. Ask a girl walking down the aisle if she loves her husband-to-be and she'll say, "Yes, in a thousand ways." In her excitement she can't name one of those ways. The same is true of a Christian; he knows he is saved but just can't explain it. Many a man has walked down an aisle and knelt at an altar to receive Jesus Christ. He has little knowledge and almost no experience, yet he walks away from the altar knowing he is a child of God. His confidence was planted by the Holy Spirit who is his witness.

Chapter 3

FINDING THE WILL OF GOD

Now that you are a Christian, you will want to do the will of God. When you were a child, you did the will of your parents. Sometimes you didn't understand why you were doing what they wanted; other times you didn't want to please them. Some even rebel against the will of their parents.

A young boy didn't like practicing the violin and didn't understand why he had to stay cooped up in the house when his friends were playing outside. Later he made first violin in the symphony orchestra and was grateful for his mother's determination.

The will of God is "good" (Rom. 12:2), but that does not mean we always enjoy our circumstances. God knows what is best for His children, and those who listen to Him are rewarded. God's will for us comes out of His nature. He wants us to be like His Son (Rom. 12:2).

You can look to Jesus as your example in finding the will of God. His entire life was dedicated completely to the Father's will. He once said, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me" (Jn. 4:34). Again He prayed, "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). Doing the will of God is simply doing what God wants you to do. When Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy will be done," it simply means we do what God expects.

1. You can find God's will. The psalmist says, "The meek will he guide in judgment; and the meek will he teach his way" (Ps. 25:9). Every man can find God's will. Every man!! Not only full-time preachers can find God's will. The little boy in the first grade must know that God wants him to develop his abilities and grow as Jesus did.

God expects us to know and do His will. Paul exhorted, “Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of God is” (Eph. 5:17). Two facts arise from this verse: first, the will of God can be understood; and, second, those who do not know the will of God are not wise. Some search for the will of God like looking through a ring of keys, using the trial and error method. But God does not hide His will like the miser hiding his money, hoping no one will find it. Every Christian, meaning you, can know and do the will of God.

We can find God’s will if we seek His guidance in our lives. Jeremiah said, “It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). We should not leave our future to our own decision. We must seek God’s will and God’s Word. We have to be sure that our will, heart, affections and desires are wholly surrendered to Him.

2. You must desire to know God’s will and be willing to do all that is involved. God’s will is like groceries: they don’t come from the store and place themselves on the table. You must go get a job and work diligently. Then use your money to go and purchase groceries. Even when you get your food to the house, it must be prepared. Laziness is inconsistent with God’s will.

The will of God cannot be forced on the un-yielded Christian, just as a boy’s love cannot be forced on the uninterested young girl. The will of God is revealed to those who wholly desire it. It is found when you surrender your will to God. Jesus noted, “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine” (Jn. 7:17). The student who wants to write the best term paper spends endless hours in the library searching for material. Just so, the Christian who wants the perfect will of God must search for it with his whole heart. Paul noted, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice . . . that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:1-2). The word “present” means to give. The father who gives a bicycle to his young boy has yielded it for his son’s use. You must yield your life to find the will of God.

You do not discover the will of God by idle curiosity. A little boy lived next to a cemetery and was curious if there were ghosts there at night. One night he went to explore the graveyard and ran when he thought he saw the ghost he knew wasn’t there. In the same sense, Christians run from the will of God. They are afraid that the will of God will hurt them, just as the grown man is afraid of getting his tooth filled.

The will of God is found like looking for a job; you must be ready to go to work the moment you find it. Most employers won’t put applicants to work at their whim. God doesn’t show His will to those who just want to see it, only those who want to do it. Almost every father in the world has driven a nail with his shoe. When his wife announces, “Hang this picture,” he looks for the nearest thing at hand because he is too lazy to go to the basement and get a hammer. So drives it with his shoe because it’s available. God doesn’t walk through the universities looking for the polished hammer. God is looking for available people. Any young person who is willing to do anything can be used of God. Dwight L. Moody had an eighth grade education. He shook America with one hand and Great Britain with the other because he was willing to do anything that

God wanted. When Curtis Hutson was a postman he prayed, “Dear God, you can have me from the crown of my head to my little toe.” Hutson built the largest Sunday school in Georgia with only a twelfth grade education.

Some people are faithful to God like the small girl who loved her rag doll. When she was in her room, she hugged the doll and talked to it. But she cared for the doll only when it was near. When she was gone, it was out of mind. People love God when they are singing in church or praying with others. When the church is out of sight, the thought of God is gone.

3. Your motives must be absolutely pure in seeking God’s will. Jesus noted, “The light of the body is the eye: Therefore when thine eye is single thy whole body is full of light.” The word “single” means to look only one way. We must have an eye single for the glory of God. When self gets mixed up, our eyes become blurry and we miss the glory of God. God won’t hear your prayers when you harbor secret impure motives.

In a recent Miss America pageant, a contestant was asked what she wanted to achieve. “I’d like to be happy . . . that’s all.” The will of God was never that you be happy, but rather that you be holy. The Constitution guarantees you the right to happiness, but those who seek it never find it. There is nothing wrong with being happy, but happiness is a byproduct of holiness. John Wesley said, “I’m not sure they understand love. They come to church to enjoy their religion rather than to get holiness.” God wants you to be separated from sin. When you seek His will, the spin-off is happiness.

A Sunday school teacher told the class, “I have Jesus in my heart.”

“Take Him out and let us see Him,” the little girl replied. The Christian will have to let Christ rule his heart, then shine out to the world.

4. Wait patiently for His leading and do not move forward until you know you are obeying the Bible. When you follow God’s leadership, you know where you’re going. The phrase “blind faith” is often misapplied. To make a decision because you are frustrated is not faith. Neither is it faith to step off on your inclination. Faith is obedience to the Word of God and you should never be blind to the Bible. You must have open eyes to your circumstances as well as God’s Word. Your mind must understand the consequences. God doesn’t lead out of a vacuum; He leads out of full knowledge.

Once in a while we hear a story of someone who stepped out on faith and moved forward. On the other side, we seldom hear the stories of those who stepped out only to find themselves following their blind prejudice. A Bible college student refused to work for a living. He maintained he must live by “faith.” His wife left him because the baby was starving. His was not faith but stupidity.

Wait for God’s will. Sometimes the more haste we make, the less speed we generate. He who waits on God loses no time.

5. When you contradict the Scriptures, you are not in the will of God. The Bible is the most vital element in finding the will of God. Saturate yourself with its principles. Those who know the most Bible usually stray less from God. A wise grandfather once observed, “A Bible that is falling apart usually belongs to a person who isn’t.”

The following principles of Scripture will warn when you step from the will of God, just as a policeman’s whistle keeps small children from stepping from the curb.

a. The principle of purity (11 Cor. 6:14-18) tells us that we should not let unsaved companions make our decisions concerning God’s will.

b. The principle of secrecy (Matt. 6:3) tells us that the will of God is found in secret prayer as we seek His face.

c. The principle of charity (Rom. 14:19; 1 Cor. 8:9-15; 10:31; Rom. 14:21) tells us that we cannot offend younger Christians and be in God’s will.

d. The principle of mastery (1 Cor. 6:12) re-minds us not to let anything other than Christ be-come our ruler. We are to master our lives for Him.

e. The principle of duty (Prov. 3:27; James 4:17) reminds us to fulfill our obligations.

f. The principle of adaptability (1 Cor. 9:19-23; Phil. 4:11-12) tells us to do the best we can for God, no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in.

g. The principle of suitability (1 Cor. 10:23) tells us that many things are all right for others, but not for us.

h. The principle of mental toughness (Rom. 14:22-23) tells us that after we have thoroughly examined an issue, do everything to the glory of God.

6. Opportunities are tied to the will of God. Many good things may come in your life; these may be the will of God. A college scholarship may be God’s provision for a young person’s education. Being born to well-to-do parents may be God’s provision to the next student. The next student may have to work his way through college and in the process learn the lesson of sacrifice. Each opportunity comes from God.

Watch out for opportunities; not all may be God’s will. A proposal of marriage to the 36-year-old single girl is not God’s will if the young man will pull her away from God. Yet her desire might influence her understanding of God’s will. Not every opportunity, no matter how attractive, may be good for you. Test opportunities by the Scriptures.

God is more concerned about your character than your circumstances. At times God will give you an easy time; rejoice. At other times He will lead you through deep waters; still rejoice. It is God’s will that you become like His Son. “And be not

conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:2).

The will of God is to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. This verse tells us, “Be not conformed,” meaning we are to turn away from the things of this world. You are not following the will, of God when you are dominated by this world. Instead, you are to be transformed into the image of Christ. You are to undergo a complete change of both heart and conduct. The word “transformed” means to be transfigured as Christ was on the Mount of Transfiguration. “And was transfigured before them; and his face did shine like the sun, and his raiment was as white as the light” (Matt. 17:2). Transformed is the cocoon becoming a butterfly. Transformed is not legalism where you drop off bad habits. Being transformed is letting the Holy Spirit work through you to possess your mind, heart and actions. The Holy Spirit brings you into conformity to God’s Son. “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (II Cor. 3:18).

Chapter 4

MASTERING THE BIBLE

The Bible is the most indispensable instrument for your life as a Christian. You can’t be Christian without it. The Bible brought you into the Christian world, and will cause you to grow and will prepare you for heaven.

“The Bible will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from the Bible,” a young man was told after getting saved in a church service.

“I don’t understand,” he replied. As a matter of fact, he didn’t understand much that happened that evening because it was his first time in the church. But he knew in his heart something happened to him.

Since he wasn’t grounded, he started cursing again because he hung around with his drinking buddies. He went to church, but soon lost that desire and drifted away.

“Why did you give up?” the pastor asked the next time they met in a downtown market.

“I just couldn’t hold out,” he replied.

“I’ll help you to grow in your faith,” the pastor promised.

The defeated Christian agreed to “try” the Christian life again. This time the pastor helped him study the Bible. He began on the Gospel of John. Staying up late at night, he devoured the pages of Scripture; like a hungry man, he couldn’t get enough. As the Bible changed his desires, his drinking buddies lost interest in him, and he in them.

The lesson was hard to learn, but the Word of God will keep a person from sin. “Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee” (Ps. 119:9). The Bible keeps you from sin by its instructional power. It teaches the correct way of life. “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Ps. 119:105). Historian Arnold Toynbee noted, “It pierces through the intellect and plays directly upon the heart.”

The Scriptures are like a vaccination, protecting you by cleansing your conscience (Jn. 15:3), giving you joy (Jer. 15:16), correcting wrong teaching that would allow deviation (II Tim. 3:16), and producing a “hedge” against sin in your life (Heb. 4:12).

When you got saved, it was through the Bible. Paul describes Timothy’s salvation, “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (II Tim. 3:15). Many children, like young Timothy, grow up in a Christian home, but it is the Scripture that brings them to Christ.

Elmer Towns tells how his sister, Martha, received Christ. She had her devotions “religiously” each night and never had become involved in sin. Towns felt that she had not experienced salvation. He typed 100 verses on 3 X 5 cards and promised her a new Scofield Reference Bible when she could repeat them perfectly. As she quoted each verse, he instructed her in its meaning. Halfway through the project, she went to camp. Phoning long distance, Martha told of conviction that led to salvation because an evangelist quoted the verses she had been learning.

But God’s Word does more than bring children to Christ. It reaches the hardened heart. Two men struck up a conversation at a Billy Graham Crusade in London. Both were critical of Graham’s methods. The evangelist kept repeating the phrase, “The Bible says . . .” At the invitation one man said, “I don’t know about you, but I’m going forward to get saved.” The other hesitated a moment, then reached in his coat and replied, “Here’s your wallet I took; I’ll go with you.”

The Bible will give you assurance of your salvation. John writes, “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God, that you may know that ye have eternal life” (I Jn. 5:13). Oliver Cromwell had such a conviction throughout life. On his deathbed he heard Philippians 4:11-13 read, and then proclaimed, “He that was Paul’s Christ is my Christ too.” If you have trouble understanding your salvation, the Bible will help you grow in faith. If you are ignorant of the Scriptures you cannot be strong in faith, so apply yourself to know the Bible. Then, as you know God’s Word, you will love God’s Son.

The Bible makes you grow in Christian character. Character is the skeleton where you hang Christian Service. While the world is interested in improving the physical condition, the Christian should be interested in improving his character. The world seeks happiness, but it is not found with better surroundings. Happiness grows out of a person’s attitude to his surroundings. Paul sang in prison; he never prayed for deliverance, he rejoiced in God—that’s character.

Peter tells us, “As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (I Peter 2:2). The young Christian may just take a few verses a day and digest them. Older Christians chew on the meat of the Word (Heb. 5:14). Time, diligence and concentration are needed to grasp the doctrines of the faith.

There are several symbols used to picture the Bible as food for growth. It is milk for the body (I Peter 2:2), meat for the growing Christian (Heb. 5:12-14), bread for the hungry (Jn. 5:51), and honey for satisfaction (Ps. 19:10).

The Bible will bring peace when your heart is troubled. For many years, the Gideons have placed Bibles in hotel rooms. Their files are filled with stories of men who have contemplated suicide, divorce or an act of violence. Picking up the Bible, they have turned to the guide “When in Trouble” and found the Word of God gave them encouragement and hope.

The Christian hears the Bible with the ear of his heart. God speaks to him through the Scripture. Chiang Kai-shek testified, “The Bible is the voice of the Holy Spirit.” A mother sat toward the rear of the church auditorium. When a slight noise of children playing came through the wall, it didn’t bother those around her. She got up immediately and went out; it was her child crying. In the same way, the Christian recognizes his Father’s voice when he reads the Scriptures.

A city farmer went to his first auction of cattle. He couldn’t understand a word the auctioneer was chanting. He asked a friend to bid for him and told him the limit. “I suddenly understood every price the auctioneer quoted,” the farmer observed. “The auctioneer was talking about my money.” When our eternity is invested in God, we understand what He is promising in the Bible.

But what about the unsaved? What is his response to the Bible? First, the Scriptures work in his heart to bring conviction (Jer. 23:29). But many unsaved persons don’t respond to God’s call. What about them and the Bible? They corrupt the Bible (II Cor. 2:17), use it deceitfully (II Cor. 2:17, disobey it (I Peter 3:1), add to it (Rev. 22:18) and take away from it (Rev. 22:19).

You take on the characteristics of Jesus Christ as you study the Bible. Paul tells us, “We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory” (II Cor. 3:18). This verse illustrates a man standing before a mirror, which is God’s Word. In the mirror he doesn’t see his image, but a reflection of Jesus Christ. The more he studies the mirror (the Bible), the more he becomes like Jesus Christ.

Some bad habits will disappear immediately after conversion. Others will linger. The Bible is your source of help to overcome all habits. As God’s Word becomes a part of your thinking, in turn you will think like God and overcome undesirable habits. The Word of God will change your life if you give it an opportunity.

Take Christianity seriously. Set aside a time each day to **read, study, meditate** and **memorize** the Word of God. These four words are stepping-stones to master the

Bible, hence overcoming bad habits. The Bible gives you new desires, “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature” (II Peter 1:4).

First, **read** the Bible daily. Don’t leave Bible reading up to your inclination or don’t wait until you are ready to study the Bible. Some days you won’t feel like reading Scripture. You will have to discipline yourself if you are to grow in Bible knowledge. General Douglas MacArthur claimed, “Believe me, sir, never a night goes by, be I ever so tired, but I read the Word of God before I go to bed.” Develop a daily Bible reading plan. You can read the entire Bible in one year if you read four chapters a day (see Appendix for daily Bible reading plan. Check off each chapter as it is read.)

Second, **Bible study** is more than reading Scripture. As a young Christian, you are like those in the first grade. You don’t know the material nor how to study. An effective plan is to begin with a basic Bible study book, one with questions that will make you think your way through each verse. This guide will give you a systematic approach to personal study. Reading will give you breadth, study will give you depth.

Begin your study by reading a passage several times. Read the portion in several versions. As you go over the passage, ask these questions, “**What is it saying?**” Don’t read your thoughts into the verse. Ask what the author meant. Interpret each verse in its context.

Next question, “**Where else does God say this?**” Use the center column reference in your Bible to find other places teaching the same truth. You may have to use a concordance to find a parallel passage. But comparing Scripture with Scripture will expand your knowledge of the Bible.

Next ask, “**What are the problems in the passage?**” You don’t want to center your life on problems, but don’t overlook any. You solve them by a clear understanding of the problem. Write it out. List what you think the answers might be. Then look in a Bible commentary. The author’s explanation may give you an insight in finding the answer.

The final question, “**What does it mean to me?**” Here you apply the Scripture to your life. Think of the ways you could apply these verses to your life. Then write out the principles so you have a clear understanding of the practical application.

You will grow as you analyze words. Look up their meaning in a dictionary. Then look up the word in a concordance to see the way it is used in other references. In-depth word study is an excellent means to grasp biblical doctrine.

When you come to unclear circumstances, look up the geography or social backgrounds in an encyclopedia. Don’t let anything escape your grasp. When doctrinal problems face you, search for the correct interpretation in a book on doctrine.

The third step in Bible study is **memorization**. The psalmist declared, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Ps. 119:11). You will want to

memorize portions of Scripture for various reasons. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He quoted Scripture. If you have the Bible in your heart, you can quote the Scripture in an hour of trial. When Philip, a deacon, wanted to witness to the Ethiopian in the chariot, he knew Isaiah 53 and used it to lead the eunuch to salvation. Also, when you must make difficult decisions, God's Word will guide you into God's will.

Memorize Scripture by first marking the verse in your Bible. Underline the verse so it will stand out the next time you study the passage. Next, write or type the verse on a small card. Carry the cards with you for review in free time. Plan a systematic way to review the verses you have already memorized. Without review you can't remember the exact words that you memorize. You may even forget the whole verse. But you will grow in the process of applying diligent effort to master the verse and its meaning.

"The Bible runs through my mind like a sieve," a person once observed. "Why should I memorize?"

"The Bible is like water; at least it keeps the sieve clean."

"The Navigators" were born during the Second World War when Dawson Trotman challenged servicemen to memorize great numbers of texts. One sailor left his packet of verses lying around and Trotman picked them up to see if its owner could repeat them all. When he stumbled repeatedly over familiar verses, Trotman said, "That is why the Lord hasn't saved the 240 men on your ship. You do not take the Bible seriously." When you memorize the Bible, you show God you mean business.

The fourth step is **meditation**, which is "going over and over" the words in your mind. The psalmist indicated that the growing Christian is like the growing tree, prospering because of meditation. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate"—(Ps. 1:1-2). The psalmist continues, "He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of waters, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season" (Ps. 1:3).

You should meditate on the Bible because it is a message from God. A college sophomore got a daily letter from his girl friend. When he quickly opened and read it in front of the mailboxes, the other guys teased him. He got in the habit of going to his room so he could give full attention to every word she said. That is the way to meditate on the Bible.

Because each word has significance and none are there by error, you should meditate on every word. You can spend a lifetime studying the Bible and never exhaust its depth.

Chapter 5

GETTING ANSWERS TO PRAYER

Recently a middle-aged minister met a former high school friend on the street. He remembered thinking she was pretty but they had remained casual friends. After reminiscing about old friends, she asked,

“Why didn’t you ever ask me for a date?”

“I didn’t think I was good enough,” he stammered.

They continued talking. He explained, “You dated the football heroes and fellows with the fancy cars. I didn’t think girls cared about me because I was going to be a preacher.”

She shook her head in amazement, “I wanted to date you because you were so nice, because you were going to be a preacher.” She told how she walked by his house, hoping he would come out the door. As they talked, the minister remembered the words of Scripture, “Ye have not because ye ask not.” He could have dated the girl but didn’t ask. Many Christians miss the good things God has for them because they don’t ask.

“But I ask and they are never answered,” you might say. Perhaps there is something blocking your prayers, like trash in the fuel line. So you sputter along without full power. New automobiles have a bright red light to warn of a low fuel supply. Perhaps a sin pointed out in this chapter will flash in your mind. Do something about it so you can get answers to your prayers.

1. Your prayers are not answered if you don’t obey God. God is our Heavenly Father, and He loves His children. We go to Him just like a child asks things of an earthly father. A little boy went to see his dad at the hardware store and each time asked for a nickel to buy a cold drink from the machine in the supply room. When dad was angry, he didn’t get the nickel. The little boy was careful to stay on dad’s good side when he wanted a cold drink. “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (I Jn. 3:22). Note that we get whatsoever when we keep His commandments and please God.

A teenage son asked to borrow his father’s car for a date. He felt the family car was more luxurious than his.

“No!” was the answer. The father replied, “The other day I asked you to wash it and sweep out the sand, but you didn’t have time.” Within 30 minutes the boy was back to tell his father the car was clean and to ask to borrow it. The Christian who does not obey God cannot pray to his heavenly Father and get the answers he seeks.

2. Your prayers are not answered if you tolerate known sin. The Bible teaches that our sin stuffs cotton in God’s ears; in other words, sin makes it impossible for Him to hear us. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Ps. 66:18). Iniquity is sin, doing the exact opposite of God’s will. If God tells us not to take His name in vain

and we do, how can we ask Him to answer our prayers? There is another verse that says we plug up God's ears: "Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear; But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isa. 59:1-2). God has the ability to help us and His ears can hear us, but our sin makes it impossible.

Robert was a mischievous boy. When his mother was mad he ran and hid. His favorite hiding place was a dark closet where she couldn't see or hear him. When Robert was hiding, that was not the time to ask her for money to go to the store for ice cream. If you have sin in your life, get rid of it; then ask God for your petition. Only then can you get answers to prayer.

3. Your prayers are not answered if you don't live right. The Bible tells us the prayers of the righteous are effective. We are never righteous by our own efforts. Our righteousness is imputed by Jesus Christ. However, there is a sense in which we are righteous. This means "doing right." If we want our prayers answered, we must do right by paying our bills, ceasing to curse, going to church, tithing and witnessing. "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). The phrase "availeth much" means "makes tremendous things available." When you are right with God, your prayers make the greatest things in the world available.

Too often we send "looney tune" prayers up to heaven. They don't make sense when our life does not back up our request. Our prayers ought to pack a wallop. Instead, some prayers seem to freeze on our lips. Evangelist Billy Sunday once heard a man praying in a meeting. The man drawled on and on. "Shut up! You'll kill this meeting!" the flaming evangelist yelled. In the same manner, Evangelist John R. Rice will never invite people to the platform to pray. He does it himself because he wants to make sure that the blessing of God is upon the meeting.

When a righteous man prays, he reaches up and pulls the rope on the bell clapper of heaven. The Bible says, "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers." This means if you are living right, God keeps His eyes on you and listens for your cry. God is like a mother with children playing in the park, watching everything they do and listening for trouble.

When the righteous pray, heaven is mobilized. If you live a righteous life, your prayers bounce into the shipping room of heaven. God stamps the order with a great big "Rush." The angels cry out, "Pack it up and send it out."

4. Your prayers are not answered if you do not abide in His Word. Jesus promised, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (Jn. 15:7). The word "abide" means to join yourself to God without any obstruction. It does not mean to hang onto God. When a branch is hanging onto the vine, it usually withers. When the branch is growing with the vine, it prospers and has fruit. Just as the branch allows the life-giving sap to flow through it, the Christian

who abides in the Bible allows the Holy Spirit to control him. When you abide in the Bible, you allow its words to flow through you. You are yielded.

Prayer is talking to God; Bible study is allowing God to talk to you. Since God is much more important, we ought to allow God to do most of the talking. We allow important people to do most of the talking and we ask them only the important questions. So when we allow God to speak to our hearts through the Bible, we have a prepared heart to ask the right request.

5. Your prayers are hindered if you don't pray according to His will. God has a will which is His desire for us. It is God's will that we pray for the things He wants us to have. Little Roscoe looked forward to a visit from his Uncle Herman who always brought candy. But the lad had to ask for it. Some-times his little fingers went rummaging through his uncle's pockets to find the candy. It gave Uncle Herman as much happiness to give the candy as it did for Roscoe to find it. "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, he heareth us; and if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him" (I Jn. 4:14-15).

We must pray according to God's will. Once a ministerial student prayed outside of God's will. While going through Bible college, he prayed for money. There was a hole-in-one contest at a nearby golf course and every person who hit the ball in the cup got \$200. The student prayed that God would help him make a hole-in-one. He knelt on the golf tee and asked God to guide his swing. None of the balls went in the cup. This was not God's way of providing for his financial needs. There was the element of gambling in the contest. Also, the student enjoyed playing golf and wanted some glory for getting a hole-in-one.

How can you know the things you ask are His will? Certain things are obviously God's will, such as getting people saved. The Bible says so. God wants everyone saved (II Peter 3:9). If you are not certain an item is God's will, how can you expect the Holy Spirit to guide you? God doesn't hide His will like a needle in a haystack. "All right, dig in and find it." It is not God's nature to frustrate His children. However, we may have to go through several doors to get answers to prayer. To get from the church sanctuary to a Sunday school room, we may have to go through several doorways. Some doors are open, others we have to push open. God tests our sincerity. We need to go through each open door as it appears. It may take a while to get an answer to prayer. But we should pray with confidence like a man walking through the backyard, knowing where he is going. Our heavenly Father doesn't play games with us, hiding His will like Easter eggs, hoping we will find them.

6. Your prayers are not answered if you do not pray with faith. Faith is expecting the answer. A school boy sent coupons off for magic rings, code books and other trinkets. Every day he'd run to ask the mailman, "Did it come today?"

"Not today," the postman would say. "Maybe tomorrow."

He'd get so excited, he couldn't wait for the postman to come. When we pray, we have to believe the answer is coming. "Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24). The sincerity of our faith determines the answers we get. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

A small boy asked his mother for a quarter every Saturday to go downtown. Twenty-five cents paid for the streetcar, popcorn and a cold drink. He never asked for a dollar because he felt she wouldn't give it. But he didn't know that his mother was giving him a lot more than a dollar to take care of his needs. He asked for what he felt she would give him, twenty-five cents. She never turned him down. "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed" (James 1:6). Therefore, it's obvious some of us need more faith, not more time in prayer. Therefore we ask, "How do we get more faith?" One way is to pray for it. Faith is sending off the coupon, then going to the mailbox every day looking for the answer. Expect answers from God. Build yourself a spiritual mailbox. "I got a reply this morning," you can tell your friends.

7. Your prayers are not answered if you don't ask in Christ's name. "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it" (Jn. 14:23:14). When a son borrows a gasoline credit card, he gets gasoline in his father's name. He pulls into the service station and yells, "Fill 'er up!" When they present him the bill, he gives them his father's credit card and signs in his father's name. In the same way, we go to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ. Recently, a minister prayed, "Lord, if you loved me enough to give me your Son to die on Calvary, I want you to give me two souls when I preach this morning." All authority is given to Jesus and He allows us to use it.

A small boy went to the corner store and ordered a loaf of bread, a quart of milk, a pound of bologna and six cold drinks.

"Did your mother send you for all that?" the skeptical grocer questioned the young boy.

"Yes sir, my mother wants all of that stuff." "Did your mother ask for the six cold drinks?" asked the wise man, knowing the poor family might not squander money on soft drinks. He didn't give the boy the drinks, knowing that when he got halfway home he would drink them with his friends. When you pray in Jesus' name, you better be sure that Jesus sent you. Many times we don't get answers to our prayers, even if we pray in Jesus' name, because it is not God's will.

8. Your prayers are not answered if your motives are not right. When we come to God and pray, our desires must be pure. The Bible tells us that we do not get our answers because of our lusts (selfish desires). "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3).

After salvation, a boy immediately began praying for a car. He had been poor all his life. “Dear God, give me a car,” he prayed sincerely. Then added, “If you give me a car, I’ll pick up people and take them to church.” He was bargaining with God. However, God looked through the words and saw the boy’s selfish desire. He wanted a car to take girls on dates and so all the fellows would think he was somebody. God didn’t answer the request. Years later, he became a pastor and still didn’t have a car. In God’s time, the members of the church got together and bought him a car. When your motives are right and you are willing to do anything to accomplish God’s will, God will give you a car or whatever you need.

9. Your prayers are not answered if you don’t give to poor people. We must open up our pocketbooks if we expect to unplug God’s ears. “Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard” (Prov. 21:13). When we pray for money, we must be careful of our motives. God had promised to supply our needs as well as the needs of other people. When there are people poorer than we are, and we do not help them, how can we expect God to look on our needs?

First, we should give our tithes to the church, which is one way of looking after the needy. We can-not pray for money until we have been obedient in giving God His tithe. The more we give to God, the more He gives to us, especially as we ask Him for money.

Second, giving to the church may not be enough; we should give directly to the poor. We give them our time, our compassion, and our money. Most of the bus ministry in Sunday Schools is aimed at the poor. Some sophisticated Christians criticize the bus ministry because it brings in many poor people. Others criticize the great amount of money it takes to bring children in on the bus. But when we give the gospel to the poor, we are making it possible for God to answer our prayers.

10. Your prayers are hindered when you quarrel with your mate. Some husbands and wives fight. The Bible commands that husband and wife live together peacefully so that their prayers can be answered. “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered” (I Peter 3:7). When a husband fusses with his wife about keeping the house clean, how can the children see Christ in the father? Then if the father and mother pray for their child to get saved, their arguments have made it impossible for them to get an answer to their prayer.

11. Your prayers are not answered because you are not persistent. The Bible teaches us to be diligent in prayer, and come to Him on many occasions. Jesus taught that, “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1). Fainting is giving up. Be persistent in your prayers. Jesus commands, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matt. 7:7). In the original language, it says, “Keep on asking . . . keep on seeking . . . and keep on knocking.” When God sees our determination, He gives us what we ask.

However, if you keep on asking and it is not God's will, He will change your prayer. On three occasions, Paul prayed for the thorn to be removed from him. "God, take this thorn from me so I can be a better preacher" (II Cor. 12:8). However, after praying for this healing three times, Paul accepted God's alternative, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (II Cor. 12:9).

Chapter 6

USING YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Now that you are a child of God, you will want to serve Him as did Mardelle Holt. She had been reared in a Sunday School and knew the Bible, yet never received the Lord. As a secretary several years out of high school, she couldn't find a mate. She began searching for answers and her pursuit led her to a gospel-preaching church. She received the Lord and threw herself vigorously into serving God.

"I want to do everything I can," she told the pastor. They gave her a Sunday School class where she visited her pupils, held parties and became absorbed in teaching. After a while her "single" friends told her she was missing life by spending all her time in Sunday School. They suggested she attend the "career" class where she could enjoy their fellowship. Also, they noted she needed to study the Bible.

"I'm not sure I have the gift of teaching," Mardelle said while resigning her class. Yet God was using her in that class. Going into the "career" class, she has made friends but the person taking over her Sunday School class has not been as conscientious as Mardelle. She has gifts but now they are dormant. Some people think Mardelle made the wrong decision.

Everyone should be serving God according to the spiritual gift he has. Paul tells us, "Every man has his proper gift of God" (I Cor. 7:7). And Peter repeats the same truth "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another" (I Peter 4:10).

"If I could sing like her, I'd serve the Lord," is an oft-heard excuse. People envy the gifts of others yet have little guidance in finding their own gifts. Many would like to play a beautiful piano offertory in church, yet they are not willing to practice three hours a day for years.

"Preaching is not my gift," a young high school boy told his Sunday School teacher, "I should not preach unless I am called." There was no desire in his heart to be a minister.

“Everybody ought to be able to preach,” announced his pastor from the pulpit. Which one is right? Confusion about spiritual gifts abounds, yet Paul exhorts, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant” (I Cor. 12:1).

You have a gift. Don’t be afraid of that term or the ability God has given to you. This chapter is written to help you (1) understand spiritual gifts, (2) find your gift, and (3) use it for the glory of God.

A spiritual gift is an ability to serve God. There are three composite lists in the Bible: Romans 12:6-8, I Corinthians 12:28-30, and Ephesians 4:11. Jesus told the parable of the talents. One servant had ten talents, another five, and the last only one. These talents were given, “every man according to his ability” (Matt. 25:15). A talent which was a measure of silver, in the parable, represented a man’s ability.

You don’t have the same spiritual gifts as other people. In the parable of the talents, each man was given a different number of talents - ten, five and one. The man who used his talent faithfully received others. You may have three talents: teaching, giving money, and administration. God expects you to do the very best possible with those three talents.

But then again, every talent gets different results. Paul places them in order, noting, “God hath set some in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers” (I Cor. 12:28). The fact that the gifts are numbered means that some are more important (or more effective) than others.

No wonder some people have difficulty finding their spiritual gifts if no two people have the same gifts and they are numbered in priority. The natural question you may ask is, “How can I find my spiritual gift?”

1. Since a gift is the evidence of the Holy Spirit, you must be in tune with Him. A spiritual gift may be a natural gift with the Holy Spirit working through it. Paul describes a spiritual gift as “the manifestation of the Spirit” (I Cor. 12:7). A young lady may sing beautifully with all the training that a rich, natural voice displays, yet make no spiritual impact in the hearers. The next young lady might have a simple voice with little training, yet when she sings the Holy Spirit draws people closer to Christ. The first girl does not have a spiritual gift, whereas the second does.

Your spiritual gift is manifested when you are filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:17), which is allowing the Holy Spirit to work through you. Those who are filled have separated themselves from sin and yielded their lives for service.

2. The Holy Spirit placed embryonic gifts in you when you were saved. Many things happened in your life when you received Jesus Christ. One of them was the Holy Spirit coming into your life to give you abilities to serve God. The giving of gifts is tied to salvation. “When he (Christ) ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men” (Eph. 4:8). This verse is tied with the resurrection, the point of victory in Christ’s death. In that victory He gave abilities to His followers so that they in turn could

be victorious in service. At the moment of your salvation, this gift was placed in your heart, although not fully developed.

A pastor looking out on a group of teenagers doesn't know which one will be a missionary, doctor, accountant, or housewife. They all have different gifts for potential service. Some will find God's will and serve Christ effectively, others will choke out their spiritual strength. Since you have a spiritual gift, pray for wisdom to develop it.

3. You find your gift by doing the tasks at hand. The Bible teaches "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Eccl. 9:10). This means we are to give instant obedience to service, especially when the opportunity arises. If there is an emergency and a Sunday School teacher is needed, go do the best job you can. Don't ask, "Is my gift teaching?" When someone is needed to help set up chairs at the church, don't ask "Is this my gift?"

Obviously this principle can't be applied in every instance. If the piano player is not there, you can't play without training. The same goes for singing a solo. Then, too, people won't ask you to do what they know you're unable to do.

Faithfulness in a small capacity leads to a pro-motion in God's sight. Jerry Falwell preaches to millions over the Old Time Gospel Hour television network, yet he began as a student at Baptist Bible College, Springfield, Missouri, by teaching one fourth grade boy at High Street Baptist Church. He faced the usual discouragements but his faithful ministry to that one boy enabled Falwell to build the class up to 53 students before the year was over.

If you want an opportunity to preach to millions, develop your ability by preaching to the handful of people who need to hear you now.

4. You find new abilities by exercising your present gifts. A spiritual ability is a gift of God and when you exercise it, it is an act of stewardship. You are using what is God's. "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (I Peter 4:10) .

The parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30) illustrates the importance of using the gift given by God rather than letting it lie dormant. The man who buried his one talent was not rewarded; his gift was taken from him. Those with five or ten talents saw their abilities multiplied. Paul told young Timothy, "Neglect not the gift that is in thee" (I Tim. 4:14). If God entrusts you with the gift of teaching, now is the time for you to obey.

When you use your gift, it stirs up your own gift and gifts in other people. Your witness for Christ will help others to have boldness. Your counsel will help someone else through a difficulty.

Your gift is not stagnant; it can grow. Just because you can teach, does not mean that is all God wants you to do. "Covet earnestly the best gifts" (I Cor. 12:31) means the Bible expects us to grow in our ability to use our gifts or to get more gifts. Don't be satisfied but grow in service.

5. You find your gift by the “hot poker” method. To get a poker hot, you shove it in the fire. You will have a warm heart for God by associating with people who are doing God’s will. But you get more than heat by such associations. You will become like your friends and you will have gifts like those who train you.

Paul told Timothy that he got his gift through preaching. “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy” (I Tim. 4:14). When Paul preached he was using his gift but it had an impact on Timothy. Paul’s preaching made Timothy a preacher.

The gift of love is acquired when someone loves you. You develop a gift of teaching when you enroll in a training course and allow someone to prepare you for service.

6. Since the Holy Spirit magnifies Christ, spiritual gifts emerge as you lift Him up. A spiritual gift is the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, “He shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you” (John 16:14). One of the main duties of the Holy Spirit is to magnify Jesus Christ. He wants to use your abilities to do that.

You’ll find your gift when your motives are pure. God won’t give you a greater ability just to enhance your ego. He will give you greater abilities as you enhance Christ. The psalmist promised, “Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart” (Ps. 37:4).

Chapter 7

DEALING WITH SIN

After you are saved, you will have to answer the question, ‘What’s right and what’s wrong in life?’ One Christian thinks it’s wrong to say **heck**, calling it a swear word. The next says it is a sin for a boy’s long hair to touch his collar. It is wrong to attend X-rated movies downtown while you watch the same production two years later edited for television? A mother says it’s wrong to sip a cocktail, yet will use a little liquor in her cooking. What’s right for a Christian . . . and wrong? This chapter will try to stay away from pronouncements, calling acts and attitudes sin. Rather, principles will be laid down from the Word of God by which each Christian can determine God’s will for his life.

1. You must do what God directs. The Westminster Confession of Faith asks, “What is sin?” The first part of the answer is, “Sin is any want of conformity.” Sin is anything that does not conform to God’s Word. You are commanded to win souls (Matt. 28:19). Are you an obedience son if you are not a soul-winner? When a mother says to her son, “Got to the store and get bread,” what should be her reaction when he disobeys?

When she finds him playing soldiers in the corner lot, she can't be happy. He has disobeyed his mother (Eph. 6:1) and if he continues, a serious flaw will develop in his character.

There are certain commandments that are easy to obey, meaning there is no question about what the Christian is to do. You are to tithe (Mal. 3:10), attend church (Heb. 10:25), confess your sins (I Jn. 1:9), and love other Christians (Jn. 13:34). The same can be said for reading your Bible, praying, and watching for His second coming.

Perhaps the sin of omission is not as great as the sin of hardhearted disobedience. When father asked his 12-year-old boy to wash the car and he forgets, it is not as bad as his twin brother's throwing mud at the car. The father is displeased with both and he deals with both offenses differently, but he can't overlook the one who didn't wash the car. The Scriptures teach, "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

2. You must not do what God says is wrong. The Ten Commandments are negative warnings beginning, "Thou shalt not." You sin when you go against God's commandment. God says it's wrong to kill, lie, steal, commit adultery, and have idols in your life (Ex. 20:3-17).

The commands of God are not grievous. He did not take away the "fun" things to do. Some have mistakenly thought, "All the pleasure is gone, now that I am a Christian." God is not a mean Father who keeps his children locked up in a closet all day. Jesus said, "I am come to give you life, and life more abundantly" (Jn. 10:10).

But like a wise Father, God knows some things will harm His children. What parents would allow their children to play near a busy highway or in a field with snakes? When God says no, don't rebel or see how close you can get to the edge without going over. Try to see why God said no. When you understand the purpose of God, you can obey with enthusiasm.

3. You must obey your conscience. Your conscience is a moral regulator that flashes information to the brain. It tells you what it thinks is right and wrong. Like the thermostat upstairs, when things get chilly it starts the furnace in the basement. The old adage, "Let your conscience be your guide" is true only half the time. When your conscience tells you something is wrong, it's a sin to go against your conscience. The conscience is pure at birth, reflecting the image of God in which you were made. The conscience tells man it is wrong to murder, steal and lie. You have the moral law of God branded in your heart. God recognizes the moral law that He has implanted within man and you sin when you violate your conscience.

This applies even to questionable things. A young man's father had been an alcoholic and the boy grew up hating the misery that was brought upon his family by alcohol. In restaurants he was careful not to purchase food with any taste of liquor. Because of his conscience he felt it would be wrong to violate his convictions, even though other Christians thought nothing wrong with wine flavored cooking sauce.

On the other hand, when your conscience tells you an action is right, it cannot always be trusted; the conscience can be “seared.” This pictures a hot poker burning a scab on the skin. “Having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (I Tim. 4:2). You sear your conscience by continually going against its instructions. A Bible college dean became emotionally involved with a coed. Even though the Scriptures explicitly forbid adultery, the dean disobeyed Scripture and his conscience. When the president found out the situation and brought the dean to dismiss him, the dean tried to justify his sin because Abraham and David had concubines. The dean had seared his conscience and wanted to make sin acceptable.

4. You must not harbor impure thoughts. We live in a “girl watchers” age. Some men enjoy thumbing through **Playboy** Magazine or walking the beaches to look at the bikinis. A lot of wives know this and mistakenly say, “It’s all right to window shop; just don’t touch.”

Sinful thoughts involve more than sex; the whole issue of lust is involved. Some men dream of money and the lust of “things” consumes their mind. Some women spend so much time watching the soap operas that the lust of illicit happiness eats them up.

Eve lusted in her mind before she sinned by eating the forbidden fruit. “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (II Cor. 11:3). The first step toward sin is usually not the act but our minds thinking about the act.

Lust is similar to the thought process that leads a person to buy a new car. He feels he can’t afford the price, but he starts “just looking around.” He enjoys sitting behind the wheel. As he drives the old car, he mentally picks out new cars, whereas he hadn’t been aware of the late models. Subtly, his mind tells him everything that is wrong with the present car and he begins searching for ways to finance the new car. When he’s hooked, he signs a 36-month time payment plan. “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (James 1:13-14).

5. You must not defile your body. Some people have the attitude “My soul lives forever . . . ignore the body.” As a result, they overfeed their fat body, stink it up like a tobacco barn or pickle it in alcohol. You cannot separate your body from your soul until death. But the way you treat your body reflects your attitude to spiritual things, and vice versa. Therefore, harming your body is sin because it destroys your Christian testimony, shortens your life, stunts your Christian growth and mars your character.

A young man fixed himself a drink at a cocktail party. He passed the glass to all of his friends, “Put something in,” he begged meaning some type of drugs they had. He went into convulsions and was blacked-out for four months. After he regained consciousness, a minister led him to the Lord. He spent a year convalescing at a Christian camp. Feeling a call to the ministry, he went to Bible college but continued to experience blackouts when faced with any pressure or tension. Not being able to serve

the Lord, he became depressed, which in turn increased the blackouts. In a fit of depression he committed suicide. The final sin of taking his life began with the first sin of drug abuse.

6. You must not adversely influence others. When Cain killed Abel, he asked, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Many have repeated that question, implying they are not responsible for others. However, John Donne observed, “No man is an island.” We live in a human community where every action is both influenced by and has an impact on others.

The Bible used the phrase “stumbling block” to teach that it is a sin to harm others by our influence. Paul warns, “Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to them that are weak” (I Cor. 8:9). In many New Testament villages the meat sold in the market had been sacrificed to idols. Those who had been idol worshippers refused to eat any meat sacrificed to idols because it was a compromise of their convictions. However, a few Christians thought that hamburger was hamburger, ignoring the convictions of other Christians. Paul agreed to this opinion. “Neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse” (I Cor. 8:8). However, Paul said it was wrong to hurt other people by what we eat (our influence). “If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh” (I Cor. 8:13).

Many feel dancing is an artistic form, reflecting coordination, style and rhythm. However, some Christians have been ensnared by lust through the power of suggestion in touch, rhythmic beat and tempting words. Can a Christian who enjoys dancing destroy his brother for whom Christ died?

What to Do With Sin

Recently a minister’s car began to sputter and lost its power. When it happened he was irritable, and wouldn’t go out on the road because he was afraid it would stop. The mechanic checked out the spark plug, fuel pump, distributor; he couldn’t find the problem. Finally his boss told him to blow out the fuel line. A little bit of trash was causing all of the minister’s problems. There was not enough grit to fill a quarter of a teaspoon, yet the car lost its power.

Sin is like trash in the fuel line. You lost power to do the will of God and fall into bad habits. Sin makes you irritable and keeps you from doing what you know is right. God does not want you to sin but He knows that you will, just as a gardener doesn’t want weeds but expects them. Therefore, God has planned an escape hatch for His sinning children. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I Jn. 1:9).

A bumper sticker on cars announces “Christians are not perfect, just forgiven.” That motto needs to be taken from our cars and applied to our hearts.

Does confession mean we constantly walk around confessing our sins to God? A conscientious student at college had an overriding guilt complex. He constantly confessed his inadequacies. Every time he handed in a paper to the teacher, he went and

apologized for not doing a better job. When talking with friends, he apologized for standing in their way, talking too long or not talking at all. His friends began to shun him. He didn't understand the New Testament word **confession**. It means more than just to say, "I'm sorry!" In the original language, it means to "say the same thing." To confess is to call the sin the same thing that God calls it.

God did not deal with sin by words but with action. He gave His Son to die a vicarious death for sinners. We must deal with sin just as severely as God.

First we must recognize sin for what it is; it condemns us. When Achan disobeyed God, he was stoned. When Moses' sister became jealous, God sent leprosy upon her. When Ananias and Sapphira lied, God struck them dead. You should hate sin just as much as God does. So a light confession is not enough.

Second, God applied the blood to sin. There was no other way to cleanse the spot. Since the blood was applied at one moment in history when Christ died, you must do the same. Don't think about your sin or feel guilty about its consequences. Do something. Immediately apply the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ. "Father, forgive me for my sin and cleanse me by the blood."

Third, keep short accounts with God. Since sin breaks fellowship, get back on speaking terms with God quickly by confessing your sin. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper" (Prov. 28:13). A little boy stole watermelons from his father's patch and went down to the creek to eat them. He always buried the rind and seeds in the swamp dirt.

"Someone's been stealing my watermelons," the father said to the son. He asked the boy if he knew anything about it. The boy said no. Later the father and son went fishing by the creek where they saw watermelon vines growing out of the soft dirt.

"How did these watermelon vines get here?" the father asked. Conviction struck the son's heart and he confessed. The Bible says, "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Num. 32:23).

The fourth step calls for public action. Sometimes private confession of sin is not enough. The Bible commands that we confess our sins, but it doesn't say to whom. Sometimes, but not always, we must confess to others. "Confess your faults one to another" (James 5:16). Some Christians have taken this verse out of context and ruined their lives. A pastor confessed desire of homosexuality, even though he hadn't committed the act. His confession ultimately led to a church split. Five years later, the spiritual scars were not healed in that town. Indiscriminate confession can destroy a person's testimony, get him fired or cause others to lose respect for him. The following rule has been followed by many Christians: Confess private sins privately, sins against a brother to that person, and confess open sins openly. When the church knows about your sin, you should make an open confession.

The fifth step is restitution. Make every effort to set your testimony straight. If you have stolen or "borrowed" property from others, it must be returned. If you have lied

to others, the record must be set straight. Harry Dean was a salesman in Roanoke, Virginia, living a fast and flighty life. A friend cosigned a thousand-dollar note and later Harry Dean declared bankruptcy. The friend had to pay the note. Several years later Harry Dean received the Lord and endeavored to pay every bill he ever owed. Taking the thousand dollars over to his former friend's home, Harry handed it to him. "I want to tell you why you're getting this money back." For the next two hours Harry Dean explained that Jesus Christ makes a difference in every part of a person's life.

Conclusion

This chapter has warned about the dangers of sin in your life. Sin can destroy your life, but just cutting off sin will not make you a child of God. Simply cutting off sin will make you a fake Christian. As they walked through the park, a father showed his son a large lion spurting water from his mouth. He explained, "That lion is not real, he can't taste the water in his mouth. He can't enjoy this park."

God doesn't want anyone to sin, but He gets no enjoyment out of fake Christians. He wants real Christians who can drink the water of life and enjoy His presence.

Chapter 8

OVERCOMING TEMPTATION

"How can I get victory over cigarettes?" a young lady recently asked. Before she was saved, the habit never bothered her. Now she feels guilty about smoking but can't quit.

Now that you are a Christian, you will face new temptations. Perhaps you cursed frequently before you were saved. You never realized you were offending God by taking His name in vain. Because it's a habit, some people have difficulty cleaning up their mouth. Some sins will be easy to give up, others will hang on to plague you. Those habits that hang on will continually crop up, tempting you to sin. Other sins will creep into your life, things you've never done or thought of doing. These will tempt you away from God. Some new sins can be flicked off like a fly off a table. Other sins are harder to rid yourself of; like a hacking cough, they linger.

Temptation is like the person trying to quit drinking alcohol, yet he's an addict. At one time he enjoyed liquor but there came a time when he wanted to quit. The more he tried to quit, the stronger its grip.

Jesus taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (Matt. 6:13). Since Jesus instructed us to make this prayer, He certainly expected it to be answered when we pray properly. God was so confident that you could overcome temptation, that He promised a crown to those who are victorious. "Blessed is the man

that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (James 1:12).

King David called upon God for deliverance, “Deliver me according to thy word” (Ps. 119:17). We see a picture of David earnestly praying for God to give him victory over his foes. The phrase “according to thy word” can be interpreted two ways. First, David could mean, “Deliver me as You promised.” God’s Word is the **basis** of victory. God had promised that Israel would be victorious over her enemies, so David expected their defeat. He was praying that God would keep His promise. The second interpretation of “according” means that God’s Word was the **agency** of the victory. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He got victory by claiming God’s Word (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). At another place, God’s Word promises, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Ps. 119:11). In the heat of temptation a young person can quote the Scripture and get victory.

1. You cannot expect deliverance from temptation until you are a child of God. God does not help a man overcome sinful habits until that man gets saved.

A Pharisee and publican went into the Temple, to pray (Luke 18:9-14). The Pharisee was religious, yet his heart was not right with God. He prayed, “I thank thee that I am not as other men . . . extortioners, unjust, adulterers.”

The publican was a sinner, and he knew it. He knew he could not change his sinful habits. Yet at the same time, he was ashamed of his sin. He prayed, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” The *Scofield Reference Bible* interprets this phrase, “Be toward me as thou art when thou lookest upon the atoning blood.” The Bible says that the publican “went down to his house justified.”

God says, “All have sinned” (Rom. 3:23). Therefore, none of us can brag about being perfect. Then the Bible announces, “Our good works are as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6). So, we can’t boast. Salvation is the work of Jesus Christ; it is not our effort. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us” (Titus 3:5).

When you accept Jesus Christ, God makes your record in heaven perfect, just as when you pay your fine for speeding your record on the computer is marked paid. That doesn’t mean you won’t be tempted to speed again. In the same way, our sins are forgiven when we are saved but that doesn’t mean we won’t be tempted to sin again.

2. You will need constant victory over the old nature. Just because you’re a Christian doesn’t mean you won’t have problems. When you became a Christian, your sinful nature did not leave you. This old nature will stay with you until you die. But there is help. When you became a Christian, God gave you a powerful new nature. It can overcome the old desires. Paul tells us, “Put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Eph. 4:22). Romans 7:18-25 is a picture of a Christian struggling for deliverance. He longs to be set free from the

bondage of old habits. Notice Paul's agonizing cry, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24).

Deliverance comes by Jesus Christ who helps the new nature to defeat the old nature. Paul notes, "Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24).

Man's heart is like a wrestling arena, with the old and new man struggling for mastery. Victory belongs to the one who won't give up.

A farmer watched two of his dogs fighting in the yard. "Which one will win?" the stranger asked. The farmer grinned, "The one I say 'sic 'em' to!"

Victory over the old nature comes when we obey the Bible. Don't make a big issue out of obedience, just do it. Obedience and victory is like stopping for the red light. When you first begin driving, you realized there was danger in going through the red light, so you stopped. Now you approach an intersection, there is no great deliberation. You just stop for the signal, you just obey. Probably there is no temptation to go through the red light. Obedience is a "prior decision" in the mind. The same "prior decision" must be made in your heart concerning the old nature. You have yielded your life to Jesus Christ. When temptations come along, don't go through a moral deliberation. Like approaching the red light, just stop.

3. You need special power for deliverance over unexpected temptations. The addict is not surprised with his temptations. It's a day-by-day struggle. These temptations constantly drain his energy like arthritis saps the strength of its victim. It's always a problem, yet there are other temptations that come suddenly. These are like a ruptured appendix. You must respond suddenly. If you are not ready, they will destroy you. Joseph was a servant in Potiphar's house when he was suddenly faced with the temptation of adultery. This was not a nagging problem but a crisis. Running away delivered Joseph from evil. The Bible teaches, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). You may have to grit your teeth and say "No!" But whatever you do, determine in your heart you will not sin.

God has a victory for those who determine in their heart they will not sin. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (I Cor. 10:13). The popular phrase is "biting the bullet" or "toughing it out." However we overcome temptation, God has promised "a way to bear it."

4. You need deliverance from the fear of spiritual failure. Franklin D. Roosevelt once said, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." Fear may be nothing but an illusion but it does destroy our peace and disrupt our normal Christian life. A little boy refused to walk past the graveyard, claiming to be afraid of ghosts.

"A ghost can't hurt you," an uncle told him with great details and descriptions.

“No, but a ghost can make you hurt yourself,” the scared little boy remarked.

David said, “I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears” (Ps. 34:4). David and his men were in the cave Adullam. He was a hunted man and Saul sought to kill him. Yet David could say, “He delivered me from all fears.” The word all is important. If you listen to God and trust in Him, He can take away your fear. Proverbs 1:33 promises: “Whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell in safety, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.”

Fear takes away much of the joy of life, whether it’s being afraid of losing one’s job, one’s mate, or one’s life.

In spite of our population explosion, many people feel isolated in a crowded world. Apartment dwellers don’t know their neighbors, and workers in a crowded office are only casually acquainted. It almost seems that the more people that are crowded into a small surrounding, the less they’re able to relate to one another. As a result, many experience loneliness, which leads to depression.

Recently, a 33-year-old single girl blew her brains out in her apartment in a tall New York condominium. She left a note, “I just can’t seem to find a husband and no one seems to care.”

Elijah would appear to be one man with no temptation from fear and loneliness. Elijah’s faith had accomplished victories. Food was provided for him at a widow’s house at Zarephath. He brought rain on Mount Carmel. He stood up against Ahab, Jezebel and the prophets of Baal. One would think Elijah would never fail. Then suddenly poor Elijah, tired and exhausted, fled for his life. He sat under a juniper tree and prayed to die (I Kings 19:4). He claimed he was the only one faithful to God (I Kings 19:10). Spiritual collapse can happen to anyone.

First, God reminded Elijah of His power. As Elijah stood before his cave, “Behold the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice” (I Kings 19:11-12). God’s word to Elijah came in a whisper. When you get discouraged, remember God’s small voice is recorded in the Scripture. Study the Bible and remember that God is all-powerful. God loves you and wants His best for you. When you accept the power of God, you can have victory over fear.

Next, God gave Elijah a job. He was to anoint one man king and another to carry on his ministry. If you are discouraged, start serving God. When you begin binding the wounds of others, you forget about your own cuts.

Finally, God reminded Elijah that he was not the only faithful one in Israel; there were seven thousand who had not bowed their knee to Baal. Quit feeling sorry for yourself. God has promised, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee, be not dismayed for I am

thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; Yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isa. 41:10).

Steps to Victory Over Temptation

Temptation falls into two categories; first the desire to sin, and second the temptation not to do right. Temptation is a desire to slip into an X-rated movie, commit adultery, drink just one beer, walk out of a store without paying and a million other things you know are sin.

Temptation also is wanting to stay home from church services, criticize the minister, not tithe, and a second million things that you also know are wrong.

“I don’t get mad and fly off the handle too often,” a wife once justified her temper.

“Our car loaded with kids has to skid into the ditch only once to hurt someone,” the husband replied.

Don’t justify your faults, do something about them. Jerry Falwell often repeats, “The test of a man’s character is not what trips him up but what keeps him down.”

1. You can have victory through the Bible. Jesus was the only person never to sin (II Cor. 5:21), yet he was tempted (Heb. 4:15). His steps to overcome temptation are a pattern for us to follow. He quoted the Bible, “It is written” (Matt. 4:4). Jesus memorized the Scriptures as a boy and defended Himself with them as a man. The Bible can defend us. “For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12).

The Bible is not magical, so don’t rub it like a rabbit’s foot when tempted. That is not the way to get victory. First, constantly study the Bible. It will give you strength of conviction to stand against sin. Second, if you are caught in lust, quote the Scriptures. It will remind you of God’s will and put your thoughts back on God. Third, constant study of the Bible will keep you clean. The Bible is called “water” (Eph. 5:26) which washes away dirt. When you cut the grass, the blade sprays dust that gets in your clothes and covers your skin. A relaxing shower revives you and makes you feel good all over, just to wash the dirt off. In the same way, the Bible cleans up the tempted Christian. Jesus said, “Sanctify (cleanse) them through thy word, thy word is true” (Jn. 17:17). Again the psalmist said, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Ps. 119:9). After working around filthy-mouthed men all day, you might be influenced by them. Read the Bible; it’s like a refreshing shower.

2. You can have victory through faith. The problem with this principle is that faith is usually weakest in the throes of lust. The tempter knows how to turn eyes away from Christ. Temptation is looking at the things we shouldn’t see. So it is difficult to have faith in temptation.

Your faith can be stirred when you know how everything will work out. A mischievous boy wouldn't turn out the lights when his mother told him to go to bed. He loved reading Dick Tracy thrillers. His favorite detective would be captive in a dungeon filling with water and inhabited with alligators. It was hard for him to obey when Dick Tracy was in a predicament. You will find it hard to obey when temptation threatens. The little boy learned that if he read the last chapter, everything came out all right. The Christian can overcome his temptation when he knows God will work all things to his good.

But faith is more than looking at the last chapter. Faith is looking to Jesus Christ now. Paul claimed his victory by faith. He knew Christ had died for sin. "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14). Daily, Paul took his place in Christ, the world was crucified to him. The secret is simply Christ in you and you in Christ. This is a faith-promise that you must claim.

When purchasing a car you usually ask, "What is the horsepower?" Power is necessary to move a ton of steel down the expressway. We have God's power in us - Jesus Christ. Faith releases the power to overcome.

3. You can have victory through resisting the devil. God blesses old fashioned hardheadedness. A snaggletoothed old bachelor asked the single school-teacher why she had turned down his 25 proposals of marriage. "Because I don't want to marry you!" she replied. You should have that determination. Know the type of person you want to be and stick to your guns.

The biggest two words in the English language are, "Do right." Dr. Bob Jones, Sr., used to add, "Do right even if the stars fall." Your spirituality is not measured by how many tears you shed at the altar, how high you jump or how loud you shout "Amen!" Your character is measured by how straight you walk when you come down and how often you talk about Jesus.

The Lord never forced His cross on anyone. It's your responsibility to take it up; this involves resisting the devil. The Lord never promised He'd take a stick and run the devil away, like the old farmer had to run the dogs out of the yard so friends could come visit. It's your job to resist the devil.

Sometimes resisting the devil means running away. A former drunk shouldn't try to resist the devil in a bar. A man who has committed adultery with his secretary should not let her work in the same office. He shouldn't leave temptation around. A son met his father at the door and proudly announced, "Today, I beat a snake."

"Did you beat him with a rock or a stick?" the father asked.

"I beat him running!!!" the proud little fellow replied.

You have the promise that when you resist the devil, "he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Be careful where you run when you leave temptation. The next verse

commands, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you” (James 4:8). The ultimate victory over temptation is in Jesus Christ.

When you get victory over temptation, you will grow in Christ and others will be drawn to Christ through you. Gypsy Smith tells the story of a lady who came to him to pray for her unsaved husband. The evangelist talked with him about salvation. He declined, “My wife has a temper and when she gets mad, she’s no Christian.”

Two weeks later Gypsy Smith saw the man come forward to be saved. He asked why.

“I was going fishing and knocked the lamp over in the hall. She said, ‘That’s all right; we’ll get another one.’” The repentant man said, “Now I know she is a Christian.”

Chapter 9

POWER FOR LIVING

A hundred years ago, A. J. Gordon, who was filled with the Spirit, prayed, “Be thorough with me, Lord, be thorough.” He wanted God to point out every small flaw that prevented a godly walk. Cordon built a great church in Boston, Massachusetts, because he wanted the Holy Spirit to influence every part of his life.

D. L. Moody was walking the streets of New York when he felt an urgent need for prayer. Borrowing a room from a friend, he prayed for two days lest the power of God should smite him dead. Dwight L. Moody was filled with the Spirit and shook two continents for God because the Holy Spirit completely controlled him.

When Welshman Christmas Evans sought the filling of the Holy Spirit, he wrote a thirteen-point covenant with God. Evans told God what he would do if filled by the Spirit. Because of his sincerity, Evans kept his word with God. In return, God filled him with power and revival came to all of Wales.

When you read of the experiences of great men, be encouraged. What God has done for them, He can do for you. But be careful; don’t let the experiences of others be your guide. When you seek the filling of the Holy Spirit, don’t attempt to imitate their experiences, such as writing a covenant or praying for two days. Follow the principles of Scripture that tell you how to be filled with the Spirit.

Some make their experiences the standard for others, seldom quoting the Word of God. When you lead people to Jesus Christ, don’t force your experience on them because God saves people in different ways at different times. Some are saved in Sunday School, others in Bible classes, some through revivals and many as a result of personal work. Getting the experience is not the issue. Getting the Person (Jesus Christ) is important.

Curtis Hutson once said, “I wanted the fullness of the Holy Spirit more than I wanted to live.” As a result, Hutson was able to influence many lives through his preaching.

Paul exhorts the believers, “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). Since God commanded a Christian to be filled with the Spirit, everyone should seek Him. But many Christians are confused and fearful about the filling. They are afraid to seek it. Yet, every Christian is commanded to be filled with the Spirit. This verse tells that if getting drunk is wrong, then not being filled with the Spirit is just as wrong. When you are drunk with wine you are controlled by the “spirits in the bottle.” The “spirits” from the bottle control your walk, talk and eyesight. When you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you are controlled by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, your walk, talk and sight are controlled by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the power you need to live for God. The Holy Spirit will make you Holy and Spiritual. He will give you the ability to overcome a nasty temper or depression. He will help you win souls. Consider the following outline to understand the filling of the Holy Spirit.

1. The Holy Spirit indwells every believer. When you were saved, the Holy Spirit came into your life. Most people picture salvation as only asking Christ to come into their life, but the Father and the Spirit also entered at salvation. As a result, the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer. “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal. 4:6). Again, the Scriptures teach, “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom. 8:9). This verse shows that if you don’t have the Holy Spirit, you are not saved. When the Christians at Corinth sinned, Paul never threatened them, “If you sin, you will lose your salvation.” When Paul saw sin in the lives of Christians, he was shocked. “What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God” (I Cor. 6:19). His message was, “Quit sinning, because you have the Holy Spirit.”

When you were saved, the Holy Spirit came in-to your heart and gave you a desire to clean up your life. The unsaved are pictured as dead bodies, and a dead man doesn’t have desires. He doesn’t even want to quit sinning. The Holy Spirit motivates him to seek holiness.

<p>You don’t get better to get saved, You get saved to get better.</p>
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You can’t get half of the Holy Spirit when you get saved, you get all of Him. You can’t have any more of a person than the whole person. When you marry, you get all of your wife. You don’t get an arm one day, a foot the next, and later, her hair. When you say “I do” she belongs to you and you belong to her. Therefore, you don’t beg to get more of the Holy Spirit. You have the Holy Spirit who came into your heart at salvation. You need to act on His power that is already there.

2. The Holy Spirit will never leave you. Jesus promised to send us the Holy Spirit. “I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever” (Jn. 14:16). The word forever is applied to individual Christians. Paul repeats this truth when he tells the Ephesians to quit sinning because it irritates the Holy Spirit: “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed until the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30). Obviously, your iniquity grieves the Holy Spirit. He will dwell in you until the second coming (Eph. 1:13, 14). “Ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance unto redemption of the purchased possessions.” Once a friend mentioned that he was seeking the Holy Spirit.

“I fasted . . . tarried . . . and I’ve thirsted according to the Bible. Why can’t I get the Holy Spirit?” The sincerity of the question was evident.

I told him, “The Holy Spirit is in you and He will not leave you. The Holy Spirit is a person who wants to control your life more than you want to control your life. You’ve already got the Holy Spirit in your heart, now yield to Him so you can realize the potential that is yours.”

The Holy Spirit is like the full tank of fuel in an automobile, just waiting to be ignited. But somewhere between the tank and the engine, there is trash in the fuel line. To blame the Holy Spirit for our empty lives is like blaming the full tank of gas in a car because the engine won’t run. We have the fuel of the Holy Spirit in our hearts; now let’s get Him working so we can get going for God.

3. The Holy Spirit is a Person, not a substance. Many Christians treat the Holy Spirit like a substance that can be poured into a glass. The Holy Spirit is a Person. Also, some treat the Holy Spirit like a ubiquitous spirit, such as the spirit of communism or the spirit of Americanism; the Holy Spirit is a Person. When Ananias and Sapphira sinned, Peter charged them, “Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God” (Acts 5:4). The Holy Spirit is called “He” when Christ predicted “He shall glorify me, for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you” (Jn. 16:14).

When the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, we have a new Person within us. Recently, a Congress-man entered a room. All conversation immediately silenced and everyone rose. Men walked over and shook the Congressman’s hand; others stood around and watched him. The power of the Congressman’s personality dominated the room. In the same way, the power of the Holy Spirit should dominate your life. The men in the room could have ignored the Congressman and gone on with their conversation, but he was so important that they couldn’t do so. In the same way, Christians can ignore the influence of the Holy Spirit, but it grieves Him (I Thess. 5:19).

The Holy Spirit who is in you has a strong desire to control you for righteousness. The Bible teaches, “The Spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy” (Gal. 4:5). The word “lusteth” does not mean to coax into sin, but means to desire. The Holy Spirit desires to make us holy. Continuing this argument, Paul said, “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other” (Gal. 5:17). This means the Holy Spirit is fighting against our sinful flesh. He is striving that

we might live holy lives. Our predominant characteristic is flesh, which means we are selfish. The predominant characteristic of the Third Person of the Trinity is spiritual. He wants to make us spiritual Christians. God will not force the fullness of the Holy Spirit upon you. You are a free moral agent and can choose whom you want to control your life.

A young lady has two invitations for a date to a college banquet. She may choose either boy to escort her for the evening. The choice she makes is determined by the kind of girl she is and what she knows of the young man. The choice she makes will determine her enjoyment of the evening. You can choose to let the Holy Spirit control your life, which is being filled with the Spirit. Or you can choose to let the flesh control your life, which is your own selfish desire.

A minister recently prayed, "Lord, I'll do anything You want me to do; I want to do Your will. If you don't show me Your will, I can't do it. From now on, if I don't know what to do, it's Your fault if I don't do it." This is the prayer of a surrendered Christian.

Once you have made this prayer, Satan will mock and tempt you. It is one thing to surrender, but another thing to stay surrendered. He will say, "You didn't mean it," or "Things are going so poorly that God has forgotten about you." You may have gone to the altar and surrendered to God. Then you backslid. When you went to the altar and wept, you were sincere. You may have been embarrassed, thinking, "Every eye in the auditorium is staring at me." After you left the church, you slipped into sin. It is not God's fault that you slipped into sin. Don't blame Him. Surrendering is only the beginning of the surrendered life. You must make up your mind always to do God's will.

How to Be Filled

The first section of this chapter showed that you can be filled with the Spirit. Now, let us examine some practical steps that will lead you in a Spirit filled life.

The first step to Spirit power is **desire**. You begin by wanting to be filled with the Spirit. God will not force His Spirit on you, or anyone else. Just as the old adage maintains, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink," you cannot force the filling of the Spirit upon anyone.

When you desire the filling of the Spirit, it's the same as thirsting. On a hot summer day after working in the sun, you are really thirsty. Jesus described the process, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink . . . this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive" (Jn. 7:37, 39). You get the Holy Spirit by wanting Him. But not everyone who is thirsty gets a cold drink; not everyone who desires the power of God gets it. You must seek it correctly.

The second step is **yielding**. This is saying one big yes. The big yes is when you submit your will to God. When a young girl receives a proposal for marriage, she says yes if she wants the man. But that initial yes doesn't guarantee marital happiness. The couple must work at it. She must daily submit to the demands of marriage, just as the husband must yield to his new relationship.

This daily yes to Christ keeps you in the center of God's will. The child of God prays, "Today I give myself to Thee to be what You want, to go where You lead and to speak what You command."

You need to surrender your attitude, which is nothing less than letting the Lord lead your life. The young teen wants to drive the family car, but he is too young for a license. Some teens sit behind the wheel of the parked car and pretend they are driving. But the moment of truth comes when the parent surrenders the steering wheel to his son. This is the same as "yielding yourself to God." You let Him control.

Remember, the filling of the Spirit is simply letting the Lord control your life. You get it through a yielded life.

The third step is **asking**. If you want God's power, you must ask for it. Jesus spoke the parable of the pleading neighbor who came at night when his friend was in bed. Jesus commands us to "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you" (Luke 11:9). Then Jesus explains the thing we should pray for, "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke 11:13).

If you are defeated, ask God to give you victory. If you have never won a soul to Christ, ask God to fill you with the Spirit so you can serve Him with power.

Some go forward during the invitational hymn. They yield at the altar and ask God to fill them with the Holy Spirit. Another might bow his head as he studies his Sunday School lesson and pray, "God, fill me with the Holy Spirit so I can teach this lesson as you would teach it." Still, another Christian might kneel beside his bed during devotions and ask for power to overcome an explosive temper.

There are different circumstances in the filling of the Holy Spirit, but the only power is in His Person. There are different methods in seeking the Holy Spirit, but one pattern given in Scripture to get it. Don't seek the experience, ask for the Person of the Holy Spirit and God will answer your prayer.

Chapter 10

BECOMING FAITHFUL

One of the greatest abilities in life is stickability. The Bible teaches that stickability is faithfulness. It is "required in stewards that a man be found faithful" (I Cor. 4:2). Faithfulness is obeying Jesus Christ.

A conductor began his new appointment to an orchestra, "I'd rather have 10 members of an orchestra who were faithful than have a 100-piece orchestra that I

couldn't depend on." Following this theme, a minister announced he would rather have a church of 200 people who were faithful in soul-winning and prayer, than a church with 1800 members in which only a handful showed up for prayer meeting.

Faithful Christians get a crown. Martyrs, faithful unto death, were given the crown of life (Rev. 2:10). When the sword was pointed in their direction, they did not deny Jesus Christ. Perhaps they were told to stop witnessing in the name of Jesus Christ, but continued. The Scripture doesn't tell us how many souls they won; it tells us they were faithful to death.

Many Christians think they cannot serve God. They look at their talents and feel they have so little ability to serve Him. A minister once said, "You may not be much, but you can be faithful." The greatest need in the church today is people who are faithful - faithful in living, service, prayer and tithing.

A bus worker at Thomas Road Baptist Church, Lynchburg, Virginia, had very little education; as a matter of fact, he slaughtered the Queen's English. Every Saturday morning, he faithfully went out with an old-fashioned tie, a salt-and-pepper suit and scuffed shoes. Rotten teeth showed from his ever-present smile, and he had difficulty talking. When asked how he brought in over 100 people on his bus, the worker replied, "When I can't think of nuttin' to say, I jist quotes de Bible." He was faithful to his ability.

God uses the thermometer of faithfulness to test the temperature of our love.

You don't accumulate faithfulness like saving money to spend on a vacation. Faithfulness is not what you get as a result of being good. Faithfulness is what you are. We cannot prepare to be faithful, nor can we educate ourselves into faithfulness. Your basic question to ask is, "How can I become faithful?" Becoming faithful starts with new motivation. It can't be worked up - Christ makes you faithful. When He naturally lives His life through you, you are becoming faithful. Faithfulness is the by-product of duty. A Christian does not worship faithfulness; he makes Christ the center of his life and that makes him happy. The same truth is found in the businessman who said, "I never set out to make money; I determined to build a good business and just happened to make money." The following points will carry you on the road of duty, hence making you faithful.

1. Faithfulness begins to grow when you follow the clear command of Scripture. Some things ought to be first because God said so. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). If you want to be happy, you must seek or pursue the things of the kingdom of God. This is seeking God's righteousness for your life. When you come to the place where you can say, "I want God in my life more than I want anything else in the world," you have made the right decision.

2. Faithfulness grows when you have an honest appraisal of yourself. An enthusiastic ministerial candidate once said, "I'm a streamlined train going 75 miles per hour." A wise grandmother heard the boast and thought otherwise. "Be careful, your

boiler may blow up,” she warned the young man after the meeting. “I’ve been living the Christian life for over 40 years and it’s tough.”

Within the human heart are two natures. The old nature seeks after selfish desires; the new nature seeks after the things of God. Recognize that these natures wrestle in your heart. You are the referee; make sure you call a clean bout. If you are going to grow in faithfulness, your good nature will have to win daily. Jesus said, “Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:13). He recognized that people would wrestle with their priorities, whether it would be money or Him. You can have only one master.

To grow in faithfulness you must become like God because, “Faithful is he that calleth you” (I Thess. 5:24). God will keep His word, He is faithful. If we could be steady as He, we’d be faithful. But we waiver and seek God only when it is convenient. “If there’s a God, I wonder if He’s happy being a fad rather than what the Bible plays Him up to be,” noted Harry Reasoner on television in January 1972.

“I am so ashamed I’m not more like Jesus,” a Christian once confessed. He had a healthy view of his spirituality. He concluded his remarks, “It would thrill me if someone thought I was Jesus.”

When you are wise, you know how to put priority on the correct things. “I enjoy getting my shoes shined,” a businessman once said, “It’s not the most important thing in life. It’s a small thing, but I like to look neat.” He placed things in their proper perspective. You don’t put diamonds on your shoes, you put them on your fingers. Neither do we place diamonds among rhinestones. Everything has its set-ting. Golf, dating and driving a new car have their place, but driving a new car to the sacrifice of an education is a mistake. You must know yourself, and faithfulness begins when you are yourself.

3. Faithfulness is personified in your determination. Faithfulness is doing your duty because it should be done. Antipas is buried in the Christian “Tomb of the Unknown Soldier” because he was faithful. Nothing else is known about him. We don’t know if Antipas was a preacher, evangelist, or church janitor. We don’t know if he was a new Christian or had lived a long, faithful life. All we know is the Scriptures say, “Antipas was my faithful martyr” (Rev. 2:13). Because Antipas was faithful, he was killed. A minister once said, “Out of all of the martyrs God knows (and God knows them all), He wanted to include Antipas because he was killed for his faithfulness.”

Faithfulness is doing what needs to be done. If an announcement was made from the pulpit that the church lawn needed mowing, the faithful man would do it.

Recently, a pastor phoned one of his deacons at 1:00 A.M. to make a hospital call with him. When asked why the pastor called him, he said, “Because I knew I could count on you.” He was faithful.

When the Bible gives a standard for choosing a deacon, it indicates their wives must be “faithful in all things” (I Tim. 3:11). Before a man can be a deacon, his wife must attend Sunday School, church and evening service. She must be there on

Wednesday night, at visitation and go on visitation. She must read her Bible, pray and live a godly life. She must be “faithful in all things.”

Faithfulness is a mental attitude that you will never give up. The French Foreign Legion is supposed to have said:

“If I falter in battle, push me forward.

If I stumble in battle, pick me up.

If I faint in battle, revive me.

If I retreat from battle, shoot me.”

A county boy was hired to work on the railroad. He was told, “Take this steel pole and go by and hit each wheel on every train that comes into the station.” He was looking for trouble spots. For 37 years, he took his pole and hit every wheel of every train that came into the yard. When he was retiring they asked if he knew what he was doing.

“No, sir,” he responded.

Asked why he did what he did not understand, he replied, “I don’t know why I did it, I just did what they told me.”

While we might not admire his intelligence, we can applaud his faithfulness.

You might question why God allows some of His people to go through hard times. Sometimes God is testing their faith to make it grow. Other times He is trying to find out if any is there.

A farmer had trouble with tourists stealing sweet apples near the road. Even warning signs couldn’t keep them out of his orchard. Finally, he planted sour apples next to the road and the sweet ones were left alone. The sweet life is in the center of God’s will. When you first start living for Christ, there’ll be a few sour apples, but it’s worth it to keep going.

4. Faithfulness must add wisdom to determination. Bullheaded determination will not make you faithful. The man who butts his head against the wall usually gets bloody. You are faithful when you do the proper thing for the proper reason. If you have failed many times, this does not mean you cannot become faithful. Everyone has failed in some things. Don’t let your defeats discourage you, even though no one learns as much from success as from failure.

Edison was once asked, “Why didn’t you quit after 780 failures?”

“I’ve not failed 780 times, but learned 780 things that don’t work in a light bulb.” You can’t stop a spirit that won’t quit.

Faithfulness is not always just hardheaded determination. John Wesley met an agnostic on a narrow footbridge. He glowered at Wesley. "I never step aside for a fool."

"I always do," answered Wesley. He was faithful to God, yet wise enough not to get involved in a needless fight.

Jesus was faithful. The Bible says, "He went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). He seemed to be always knowledgeable of what He was doing. Jesus seemed to be in perfect control of circumstances because He was in perfect control of Himself.

The young man who finishes college has been faithful. He told the world, "I feel my education is more important than a nice car."

There is nothing wrong with competitive sports, but when placed ahead of soul-winning, prayer and Bible study, sports are wrong. The man of God must learn to push pleasure down on his priority list. When Sunday afternoon football squeezes out Christian service, it's questionable. You must take an active grip on your sports program and push it down on the priority list.

"Doing things you don't desire will build character," said Bob Jones. A young person heard him and said, "I do things each day I don't want to: get up and go to bed."

Every choice you make molds your future. Past choices have already affected you and present choices will affect your children. Sir Walter Raleigh owed \$600,000 at age 55, but made a determination to pay it off before he died. He did.

Conclusion

Solomon says, "A faithful man, who can find?" (Prov. 20:6). In a day when men change with the blowing wind and chase every dog that barks, it is hard to find a man who is faithful to God. But those who are faithful to God have His blessing. "A faithful man shall abound with blessings" (Prov. 28:20). To get the anointing of God upon our lives, we don't have to be flashy or sensational . . . just faithful.

There was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. No one remembers the bride, what she wore, or who attended the ceremony. Yet, Christ's presence made it the best-known ceremony in all eternity. Just as Christ's presence immortalized the wedding in Cana, so His indwelling will make you faithful. People will forget what Sunday School class you taught and the size of your paycheck, but your faithfulness can live forever.

There were many dusty bushes in the Sinai desert. Today no one cares about them, but we remember the flaming bush where God spoke to Moses. God's presence immortalized one dry bush so that every kid in Sunday School knows about the burning bush. When God indwells our lives, we stand apart from humanity.

Faithfulness is not only worshipping Christ. It involves the active life. Moses communed with God in the burning bush, but that was not enough. If he had simply enjoyed the presence of God, God's people would have perished in bondage. Faithfulness was putting his shoes on and going to Egypt.

Chapter 11

LEARNING TO LOVE

When you become a Christian you enter God's family. You are now His child. One of your greatest tasks will be to learn how to love. Love is the nature of God and you must love, to be like Him. Love is the basic rule of the church and you must love others to be Christian.

In an earthly family, a child recognizes love before he knows the word or understands its definition. Now in God's family as a new Christian, you know God loves you. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son" (Jn. 3:16).

A baby can feel the protective love of his parent. He naturally loves those who love him. Here a lifelong relationship grows between parent and child. Eventually he will say, "I love you, Mommy." You want to learn how to love God and to love others. The following principles will point you toward love but will never produce love. In the same way, a book on loving your wife will not make you love her but will help you analyze your relationship. You express love by holding hands, kissing and sending love notes. In the identical pattern you learn to love God by meditating, praying, reading the Scriptures and doing what He desires.

1. You grow by studying "love" in the Scriptures. Take a concordance and look up every reference to the word love. Jesus commands, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you" (Jn. 13:34). Later He reaffirms this statement, "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you" (Jn. 15:12). You should love other Christians for many reasons, least of all because God motivates you to love others. "Ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another: (I Thess. 4:9). The ultimate indication that you are a Christian is your love. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (I Jn. 2:14).

2. You will spend a lifetime studying the nature of love. Love is an experience; you can't put it in a test tube and analyze it. Like quicksilver, as soon as you think you corral it, love escapes. Maybe the problem is with our definition of love. We place emphasis on the result we seek, rather than on the conditions that bring about the results. We think that love is feelings. But love is deeper than feelings. In reality, your feelings express the love that's in your heart. You can't love the children in your church as you can love your own. Love is measured by our hearts, not our feelings. Ever see a wife get mad at her husband that she loves? Her feelings betray her love. The ultimate test of love is not the feelings of our heart but the deeds of our lives.

When God wanted to love you, he went beyond the deep feelings of His heart, He died for you. When you love your kids, you go beyond the feelings of your heart, you work, teach and sacrifice for them.

Jesus said, "Love your enemies." Loving your enemies is more than having the right feeling in your heart. You must do the right thing toward them. Jesus taught us how to love our enemies. On the cross He uttered, "Father, forgive them." Jesus looked into the faces of those who had spit on Him and crowned Him with thorns. He saw those who had slapped Him in the face, scourged Him and made Him carry the cross to Golgotha. Still He said, "Forgive them." That's love.

Love is not getting, it's giving. Love is giving your life to the one you love. Jesus said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13). This means that when you give yourself, you are loving the other person. John told us how to understand love: "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (I Jn. 3:16). Love is hard to do because it means we give ourselves to the one we love. No one likes to give himself away.

When a young man and woman get married, they pledge their love to each other. They give themselves to each other. This is hard to do, but this is love.

Today's young people think that love is easy, because they think that love is getting. They're wrong. Lust is getting, but love is giving, which is the hardest act to do. You can give without loving, but you can't love without giving. When you love you have to change things about yourself for the other person. At the same time, the one you love will change himself or herself for you. If you love God, you will change for Him (Rom. 12:1, 2).

3. You learn to love by understanding its demands. Love is not tootsie rolls and cotton candy; Love is a relationship of giving. You give up your rights and your selfish pleasures. You accept others, even the ones you don't like.

"But I'm only human," you complain. "It's hard to love my boss."

Don't make excuses for your bitterness and hatred. It is hard to love some people. With other people, love comes easy. Then there are times you have to work at it. But it is never right for a Christian to be bitter.

Christians ought to be different and better. Because you live by Christ's standard, you should be different; because you have Christ in your hearts, you should be better. As a Christian, you should be characterized by love.

At a village in India, a little girl was asked, "What is a Christian?" Her answer was simple. "Christians are people who are different."

No people are more alike than Christians. Is it their love that draws them together? When a born-again believer walks into a crowd, he can usually spot another Christian. As ministers travel from church to church, they meet new people and make friends. A traveling Bible teacher once remarked that when he was picked up at the airport, just getting in the car with a believer he had never met, they became friends. He noted, "We strike up an immediate friendship as though we've known each other all of

our lives. Yet there are unsaved people in my city that I know, and we have little to talk about.” A deep love for Jesus Christ makes the difference. Because He is in both hearts, Christ gives a mutual love one to the other.

The early Christians manifested love. Sometimes it is easier to see a Christian’s love over nine-teen centuries than it is to look across the street. That’s because we see better at a far distance. Josephus who lived among the early Christians said, “Oh, how they love each other.”

William B. Riley pastored First Baptist Church of Minneapolis for 47 years. Toward the end of his ministry, he sat on a chair on the platform to preach.

Once he wept before beginning his sermon, then stated, “I know I have passed from death unto life because I love you brethren.” He could not forget 47 years of tears, struggle and victories.

But there are times that Christians should hate. You should never hate people, but the sins of people. Yet, it is difficult to hate sin without hating the sinner. To put it another way, it is difficult to hate evolution that denies the Bible without hating the evolutionist. Yet love teaches you how to draw the line. A mother shows us how to stay on one side of the line. She spanks her little boy for his naughty act, yet kisses away his tears.

4. You need to forget the “false dreams” of love. The American ideal is for the boy to get the girl and they live happily ever after. Love is portrayed as a lifelong Disney World. But that’s not the truth. Love is cleaning dirty diapers because life is that way. You do for the baby what he can’t do for himself because you love him.

A mother misunderstood God’s love. Her son died of cancer. She complained that God was mean. “Where was God when my son died?” she cried.

“Right where He was when His Son died,” the wise pastor answered, “sitting on His throne.”

God loves everyone. We don’t understand why He took the young boy with cancer. We can’t explain why God left the woman lonely. But God sits on His throne and knows “that all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28).

A “false dream” expects love to be strawberry shortcake. Love does not expect an easy life. Early disciples expected a hard life, not an easy one. When they followed Jesus, they had no idea what the cost would be. He had told them to leave father and mother; as a matter of fact, He said to leave all. Their love led them to endure many trials. But a God of love does not allow us to sidestep hardships. He is more concerned with our character than our comfort. The Bible teaches that persecution brings about character. “Tribulation worketh patience.” We don’t have men of Job’s character because we don’t have men afflicted as Job. God still uses the spade of sorrow to dig the well of joy.

There is a seeming indifference on God's part to the ease of His followers, whereas there is a consuming drive for relaxation and recreation by those who follow Him today. The Bible describes God's hall of fame: "Others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented . . . they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth" (Heb. 11:36-38). Can we say that God didn't love them because their path was hard? No!

There were two thieves on the cross, both enduring the same suffering, both staring death in the face. The unsaved thief wanted deliverance from where he was, the repentant thief wanted deliverance from what he was. The unsaved thief cried out, "Save thyself and us." The repentant thief cried out, "Remember me when thou cometh into thy kingdom." May God give you the desire to be delivered from what you are, rather than praying for ease of life.

As Jesus approached His last night, the Bible says, "Having loved his own which were in the world he loved them to the end" (Jn. 13:1). When He prayed for His followers, He specifically requested, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from evil" (Jn. 17:15). Because Jesus knew all things, He knew they slept while He interceded alone. Yet he loved them and prayed for their protection. Perhaps the greatest expression of love, apart from Calvary, was this prayer: "Let them be in the world but keep them from falling."

In prison, Paul didn't pray for relief. He didn't even pray for an easy time in jail. His prayer was "For utterance that I may preach the gospel."

The early Christians, who had the hardest times, also had the best times. They were so anointed with the Spirit that on the Day of Pentecost their accusers said they were drunk. They lived in the best of times because they were filled with the Holy Spirit and joy. If they were drunk, they stayed that way through the book of Acts. They outlived and out laughed their enemies. And the disciples' love won their enemies to Christ (Acts 6:7).

In the early days of the Salvation Army, a little boy asked, "Who are those funny-looking people who march up and down the street singing, 'Oh, how I love Jesus?'"

"Those are people who love Jesus," the mother responded. The little boy never forgot that love for Jesus must show in life, and Charles Sonfheldt spent 55 years in one church loving his people.

Chapter Twelve

HAVING HOPE

The three greatest qualities in anyone's life are faith, hope and love. You get **faith** from the Bible and **love** by giving, but what about **hope**? Everyone wants better conditions: a better job . . . a better car . . . a better house. We live with "hope" that things will get better. Is that biblical hope?

God puts "hope" in your heart when you are saved. You exercise this hope by exercising faith. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for" (Heb. 11:1). Hope is the medicine that cures depression and the patience to get us through a rough week.

A salesman waited in the lobby to see a client and worried. The threat of failure plagued him, taking the edge off a good presentation of his product. He had the wrong kind of hope.

A mother saw her small boy walk out on the stage of a kindergarten rehearsal. She expected the worst. Fear of humiliation prompted her to snarl a handkerchief in her lap. She frowns, when her son needs all the support he can get. The hope of the world is Jesus. The world needs hope. The struggling boy needs inner assurance he can get through college, he needs hope. A quarreling couple needs assurance they can live together. Hope can prevent a divorce.

A wife living with a drunken husband needs strength to endure the trials. She lives in hope that things will get better. A bankrupt family can face the future with hope.

The happiest places in town are usually the wedding and the maternity ward - because there is hope. The church should be equally happy.

An artist drew a dreary picture of a rundown shack. The sun was setting and darkness approached. The artist communicated loneliness, but the picture hung in the studio unsold.

"Why won't it sell?" he asked a friend.

"No one wants to be hopeless and lonely," the friend told him. "Everyone's looking for happiness and hope."

The artist took his yellow paint and dabbed the window. Suddenly there was a light in the house that seemed to say, "Welcome home." He sold many copies of the painting to people looking for a little light in their life.

1. You should have hope because you will go to heaven when you die. Christ came into your heart when you were saved. The difference between a Christian and a lost person is not only his destination (heaven) or the fact that his sins are forgiven; the great difference is that Christ is in his heart.

Have you ever noticed how hope makes time pass quickly? A job does not seem dreary to the man who looks forward to his weekend nor to the woman who looks forward to advancement. But those who are locked into a position with no chance of promotion get discouraged. The hours drag. There is no hope.

The Christian is not concerned with “How long can I live?” His concern is “How well can I live?” Hope makes the difference. The more hope you have, the more indifferent you become to problems here below.

Jesus promised that He was preparing a place for us in heaven - that’s hope - and that He would come back to get us when we die - that’s hope abundant. “Let not your heart be troubled: ... I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (Jn. 14:1-3). The martyr testified, “I’d rather live short and die right than live long and die wrong.”

2. You can hope because of Christ’s presence in your heart. Jesus challenged His disciples to “Abide in me and I in you” (Jn. 15:4). The presence of Christ in your heart can help you to overcome anything. That makes life worth living. But more than His power in your heart, you must place yourself in Him. Jesus challenged that we should abide in Him (Jn. 15:1-8). That means reading His Word, fellow-shipping with Him in prayer and obeying His commandments.

Constant fellowship with Jesus Christ is the normal Christian life. We have lived subnormal lives so long that mediocrity is normal. A man walking out of a smoke-filled night club asked, “What’s that I smell?” His friend replied, “Fresh air.” He had become accustomed to pollution and he was surprised by God’s provision. In the same way, many Christians are shocked to find that Christ can give them victory over sin.

You have a desire to succeed no matter what your definition of success is. Aim high, stir up your hope and expect the best. It costs no more to shoot at eagles than skunks.

God wants His children to be successful. He told Joshua, “Be strong and of a good courage: For unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land” (Josh. 1:6). The Lord tied spiritual hope to subduing their enemies. “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein; for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Josh. 1:8). God has no enjoyment when you fail or quit. He rejoices with every success. Hope is enjoying the victory you will receive, worry is self-defeating; it usually guarantees the exact thing you worry about.

A sixty-seven-year-old timekeeper at an assembly plant was so concerned that he would be replaced by a younger man that his worry gave him an ulcer. When the foreman came by, he childishly pampered the foreman, not getting himself job security but only irritating the boss.

Another elderly employee had such hope in Christ that he expected momentarily the second coming. Since the Bible exhorts to be ready for the coming of Christ, he did the best job possible. The company “bent its rules” so he wouldn’t have to retire.

3. You should have hope because “all things work together for good.”

Discouragement is nothing more than the collapse of a Christian’s hope. “Things can’t improve,” a woman says. She fears the future just like the man who maintains “Things are gonna get worse.”

The Bible teaches, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28). God has His hand on the controls. You might not like everything that happens to you but “God is never caught by surprise.”

When you know the Scriptures, you will live daily with the anticipation of God’s working in your life. “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). The total message of Scripture produces optimistic living. You have a bright future with each day’s dawning. Even when circumstances do not get better, God’s grace is sufficient for every need. When your life is in His hand, there are no emergencies that He can’t cope with.

When you apply the Scriptures to your life, you build hope. One friend asked another, “What Bible translation do you like best?”

“I like my mother’s translation best,” he answered.

“Did she translate the Bible?” the stunned friend asked in amazement.

“She’s been translating it into everyday life for fifty-three years.”

When you fear, you cancel out the blessings of hope. A young mother had been called a “fuss-budget.” When her kids went out in the rain, she worried that they would get a cold. On a beautiful sunny day, she worried that warm weather would bring out snakes, so she kept her children inside. As they played in the den, she worried about their climbing and falling. Her habit of worrying put her in bondage to fear. She cancelled the delivery order of peace that God has promised, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee” (Isa. 26:3).

Perhaps you are going through tribulation now. It is necessary for everyone to go through the waters of sacrifice at some time. It mellows us and makes us depend on Him. Under the tribulation, we learn to hope in God. “But if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it” (Rom. 8:25).

Hope is the down payment of the future. The cripple has hope that one day he will no longer need his crutches and the blind knows he will see. Beyond death, they will no longer struggle. “Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope” (Rom. 5:3-4).

4. You should have hope because Christ is coming for you. A little girl went to her mother with a ribbon. “Fix my hair.”

“You usually don’t like me to fix your hair,” the mother said out of perplexity, although she had tried to teach her daughter to look pretty for others.

“My Sunday School teacher said Jesus can come at any time and I want to be ready for him,” the little girl smiled.

The Bible teaches that we should live, “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). Hope that Christ is coming for you will help you get through any problem.

Hope is manufactured out of a realization that God sits on the throne. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28). A middle-aged man drags a steel brace around on his leg because he had polio as a boy. He could have been bitter because he had never played sports. But he accepted everything from God. Each week he anticipates God’s work in his life. He knows that one day he shall walk without crutches and a brace and his struggle with pain will be over. Hope conquers all.