

LEARNING TO REST  
IN GOD'S LOVE

*Grace Walk*



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# Preface

IF YOU STRUGGLE with same sex attractions or other addictions, you may find some answers to your struggles within these pages. While anyone will benefit from these pages, Christians in particular may find some great reminders and truths to live a life more abundant than perhaps they see in their day-to-day world.

As you read through the book, you will notice two distinct writing styles. The first part of the book is really my story, the journey I took and the challenges I faced along the way. In the second part, you will find less of a narrative and more an exhortation about understanding how God's Word partners with us in daily life. You will find a number of appendixes that you may find interesting including "That Gay Thing," which could be developed into a book in its own right.

Finally, I need to thank a few people who had a huge impact on this book. The ministry of Joseph Prince was instrumental to helping start to connect the dots. Ken Paris for his unconditional love and acceptance. Allan Tanner for being one of the first to catch the vision and for putting me in touch with Sarah Gill who has helped me take the manuscript from a business document into something that others can enjoy. Finally to Shelly Slemph and James Kinghorn, both of you have blessed and encouraged me by your love of God and your ability to see His hand in these pages. I love you all.

# A Special Note

THIS BOOK WOULD be a total failure if all you got out of it were my opinions. While I am sure it might benefit some, it is much more important that you hear God's voice for yourself. So I urge you to seek God after each chapter and ask Him, what do you want me to get from this? How does this apply to me? And, What do you want to say to me? If you are not use to hearing God's voice for yourself, please take a look at [Appendix E](#), 4 Keys to Hearing God's Voice by Mark and Patti Virkler. If you try Mark's guidelines, I can just about guarantee that you will be hearing from God for yourself.

# Something Missing: Joy of My Salvation

BEFORE I GET too far along, here's just a little background about me so you know who is talking to you. My Dad was a merchant seaman who was a bit of a forward thinker. While most of the family was on the east coast seeking their fortunes in New York, my dad saw California as the land of opportunity. So he moved to Hawthorne, California, the home of the Beachboys and a suburb of LA. For him, the Pacific Far East was his ticket into the future. A few years later, oops! and here I came as a native Californian. I say "oops", because my sister is 22 years older than me and my brother is 11 years older.

Dad's marriage fell apart; there were too many women in other ports, and he was alcoholic who was unwilling to stay at home: he loved the freedom of the sea. Mom was a bit of a party animal herself, so when the courts decided on custody, I went with my dad. Dad remarried his brother's ex-wife who was quite a bit older than him, mostly to watch over me. She was German and like I said a bit older, so while she got one last chance to be a mom, Dad got his freedom to sail, and I got a loving step-mother who felt more like a grandma. But what did I know? I was cared for.

I got sent to the local Lutheran church, more because it got me out of the house for a while than anything else. The church was OK and while I had some spiritual inclinations, I don't think anything stuck. After I finished high school, through a co-worker on my first real job, I was led to the Lord. He introduced me to reality of the spiritual world. Being originally moved more by fear than anything else, I figured I would join the winning side. Fear was replaced by love, but more from an intellectual knowledge than an experiential understanding. I spent the next 30 years leading a relatively normal Christian life, some great ups and some really low downs, but overall I lived what I might call a normal Christian life.

But as we all know, we were not called to be “normal” or to live a mediocre life. In fact, as Paul says in Philippians 3, we are called to *press on* to take hold of Christ, to *strain* forward, and to *press* toward the goal, which is Christ. The moment of spiritual awakening began at a critical time in my life when I began to realize something was missing in my heart. Despite having seen God bless me in uncountable ways over my 30-odd years of being a Christian, I began to see that the things I had learned were supposed to be true about God and Christian living didn’t add up to what I was experiencing. Sure, I’d had some amazing experiences along the way, even hearing how God even used me in spite of me to establish His church in the Sudan among the Dinka tribe<sup>1</sup>. But something was still amiss.

For years, I had been drifting along in auto-pilot mode. While I wasn’t technically doing anything that should have kept me from experiencing life more abundantly<sup>1</sup>, I also wasn’t putting forth any effort to make an impact for the Kingdom of God. It was in this lukewarm atmosphere of my heart that life started to go downhill in a big way. Things were spiraling downward fast, and I didn’t even see it until it was too late.

I once heard a speaker – I don’t even remember his name – who impacted my life in a big way by sharing his testimony. He talked about his walk with God, and how he had an intimate walk but had somehow lost it, not to regain that intimacy until years later. It wasn’t his words that hit home, but rather the cry in his voice, that stuck with me. It was a sense of desperation of not being in the Presence of God. He had experienced a level of God that I had no idea about. His story and the stories of others that I met over the years always became the benchmark for me of what a real relationship with God was all about. Be it that man’s intensity about his relationship with God or the authority and familiarity with God a woman at church prayed with all began to show me that I knew that I didn’t really have a clue what a real relationship with God was all about.

The unraveling of my life that I mentioned before started at home. After twenty-two years of marriage, my wife decided that she’d had enough and didn’t want to stay with me. Over the years, I’d lost several jobs and the new ones I landed required moving my family around the country. I misread her signals and comments, thinking I had her support, but didn’t hear what

she was really trying to tell me: She didn't feel secure and didn't want to start from scratch again.

A short time later, my son made some poor choices while in the army and had a hard time properly dealing with the consequences of his actions. Eventually, he responded to his situation by trying to commit suicide – twice. Feeling like your own child can't reach out to you from the midst of their situation is a unique kind of pain and hurt to walk through.

In a matter of less than a year, I went from a job making over \$100,000 to having a hard time finding work at all. I eventually found a job working in retail, even though it was during the worst of the economic downturn in the U.S. I was making an hourly wage much less than what I was used to, but I was at least one of the fortunate ones to have a job at all. When my wife left, she took the kids, so I was single again. The divorce left me filing bankruptcy and paying child support that made it challenging to make ends meet. I sold my car and started walking, needing roommates just to afford rent.

I found myself thinking that this was not at all what I thought I was signing up for when I became a Christian. I signed up to be blessed, to have an intimate relationship with God, to experience His blessings, to know the joy of my salvation! And I wanted to do this with a wife and family that all served and loved God. But boy, oh boy! My life sure didn't look like that.

I knew in my heart that if I wanted to make it through the valley and live to see the other side, I needed to seek God and press into Him more than I ever had before. Even though I knew that, my choices did not align with my desires. Somehow, in God's amazing grace, some of my choices actually set me up to learn lessons about God that have brought me closer to Him. But not all of them. Some of them were just plain dumb. And while some chapters in this book are focused on the good choices, the set-up for those happened in the bad ones. So while I'm not crazy about sharing about this season of my life, if by sharing my weakness God can be glorified, then I will let His grace speak for itself.

Sex is just one of those life mysteries I don't think we'll ever fully figure out. It's a gift from God, beautiful, and yet can become such a stronghold of



the enemy in so many people's lives. Had I been born in a different time, say 30 years later than I was, things would have been different. I'd probably have ended up way worse off than I did, struggling with same sex attraction. I can't tell you when or why it started happening, because it was always just there, all along. As a young man growing up, a guy would catch my attention now and then. The attraction wasn't blatantly sexual, more along the lines of admiring a certain type of guy and wishing I was more like him. I never gave it much thought, and continued in life focusing on heterosexual relationships with girls. In hindsight, I can see the beginnings of what they call Same Sex Attraction (SSA). I never thought of myself as bi-sexual or gay, but there was this part of me I wasn't fully aware of hiding beneath the surface that whole time that found other men attractive.

Over time, I did some soft-core sexual exploration with some guys. Clearly, my tendencies were a little deeper than I first gave them credit for. As I said, I never considered myself gay or bi, but it was still fun to experiment with. While I knew it was wrong and maybe wasn't even what I really wanted, the experiences didn't gross me out, either. My dabbling maybe three or four times in fifty years may be pretty tame by today's standards, but it was still there, underneath the skin of my life and my marriage, not helping anything. I loved my wife and we had a normal, healthy sex life. But nevertheless, when I was gone on a business trip or was super stressed, I found myself drawn to porn. It may have started visiting straight porn sites but it always eventually eased into bi- or gay sites. Certain types of guys still caught my eye.

One of the challenges I faced in my struggle was receiving judgment from other believers. I once approached a pastor about the subject, and while he was very compassionate to my face, I later learned he had talked about me behind my back. The rumors he started grew way beyond reality, and it was very painful to find myself betrayed by the very people I should have been safe talking to about my tendencies. This experience caused me to keep things to myself, trying to deal with it on my own terms. Instead of gaining freedom from the struggle, it just got buried deeper and lingered for years.

As my marriage ended, a guy living in the same apartment complex had his life fall apart at the same time after he found out his wife was cheating on

him. I had been there as he and his wife got started in life, so now as things were unraveling, he sought me out for advice about what he could do. Though he came from a Christian background, he decided to respond to the situation by going the route of getting even with his ex by sleeping around with other women the same way she had done to him. He found a lot of excitement and enjoyment doing this, and was soon experimenting with other sex acts including gay sex and eventually selling himself for a quick buck.

He would often drop by and talk about his many exploits, which of course did nothing positive for my loneliness since I hadn't been with anyone since the divorce. We would have a few drinks, and would end up masturbating together for some relief. It was nice having someone to talk to about loneliness and sex. Since he wasn't from church, I didn't feel judged because of my sex drive. In fact, since he was so laid back about sex in general, I found it easy to be around him. And as one thing always leads to another, our habit of getting together to relieve ourselves eventually led to more.

Since I had almost no experience with gay sex, I asked a lot of questions that led to some experimentation. I had no business going there, but at the time I wasn't dealing with life very well. An outlet to be with somebody – anybody – was a welcome relief. At some point, I gradually woke up to the realization that if I wanted to press into God, I couldn't be experimenting with all that at the same time. It had to be one or the other. By God's grace, I chose to pursue God rather than my own passions. I have gained victory in this area of my life, although it didn't happen the way I expected.

At the time, I was actively participating in a Tuesday night men's bible study. As one of the senior guys there who had walked with God longer than anyone else in the group, I often found myself being sought out as the answer man. Often, after I shared, someone would come up afterwards and let me know how God had touched them through my words. I was being used by God, yet living a double life. Can we say hypocritical? This double life is not what I wanted and not what I thought God desired. I knew was better than that, and it was rough realizing I was in fact one of those guys the pastor would talk about who showed up in church on Sunday and was

out sinning on Monday. Ouch. That was never supposed to be me, but it just happened. I needed to get my life and relationship with God back on track, but it didn't happen the way I thought it would and the destination I find myself in today was definitely not part of the plan at the time.

# Keeping a Right Relationship With God: Oops, Missed Something

I KNEW MY only hope of getting my life back on track was to get right with God. I stopped the experimenting, and while there were no major breakthroughs, life was starting to settle down as I learned to be single again. I confessed my sins to God as I taught in 1 John 1:9, and began regularly attending weekend church services and a men's Bible study. My oldest son was doing better and after six months we started to communicate again. I was so happy just to talk, and valued the time we spent together.

I was still working retail and money was very tight. This weighed on my mind a lot, and at every opportunity I was seeking prayer for a better job and the pay to go along with it. In my mind, many of my day-to-day challenges could be eased with a bit more money. I was OK with it not being six figures anymore, but since I couldn't afford a car or even enough money to take the bus daily, anything upwards would be a plus.

Around this time, I participated in a class offered by my church called Prophetic Assembly. A small number of members each year can take the class, which is in preparation for a time of being prayed and prophesied over. Those accepted spend time in fasting and prayer leading up to the day they are ministered to. During the ministry time, it's amazing to see how God speaks through visiting pastors who have no knowledge of the members they are praying for. I had seen prophecy before, but never in such a structured environment. I was excited and nervous as they called me up for prayer.

As I prayed and fasted in preparation, there were a few things I was asking to hear from God about – mainly a job and a change in my circumstances. I didn't hear anything like that in the prophetic word I received. Instead, I was hearing about faith and Colossians<sup>2</sup>. Huh? I thought the prophet might have lost focus or something. After the formal prayer, one of the prophets approached me and told me he'd heard another word, but wasn't sure how it

fit in: “Job, job, job.” Great – the biggest thing on my mind was just an afterthought to God! I was a little discouraged, thinking they’d gotten it wrong, but I had to pay attention because of how accurate their other prophecies had been for people I knew.

The pastor who had the “job” word also had another word for me that he didn’t tell me about at the time of my prophetic word. He later told me that because of the nature of the word, he put a fleece out<sup>3</sup> before God because he wanted to make sure it was really God speaking to him. The fleece he put out was that he wanted me to approach him for prayer, since it was something I had never done before. About three weeks later, I ended up going to him for additional prayer and insight about the “job” word. Instead, he brought up the subject of sex. We talked about it, and he urged me to confess it and be set free from it. Although I had no desire to talk about it, since it was out in the open, I repented and actually felt a huge load lifted off my shoulders. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us all our sins<sup>ii</sup> right? Not exactly.

During my conversation with this pastor, he advised me to take some practical steps to help reduce the temptation with my neighbor. Since my neighbor JJ (not his real name) was out doing his running around and had separated from his wife, he took up couch surfing and often sacked out at my place. By no means was every time he visited a walk down the wrong road, but every visit was a temptation for me. So with the pastor’s encouragement, I asked him to move out and not come back. He was actually pretty understanding and honored my request. This more than anything was the beginning of the end of my double life. With JJ gone, I was able to distance my poor judgment from day to day life. Getting the temptation out of the house was key to freeing me up to focus in on what God was up to.

During this same time period, I was getting closer to God and starting to learn more about the gospel and what it really meant. Part of how I began to grow my relationship with God was by listening to messages by many different pastors and reading books. Many of the books I chose to read during this time focused on God’s grace, and they helped me start connecting the dots.

One point I learned about the confession of sin is that 1 John 1:9 was not written to Christians, but rather to the Gnostics, a group of people who were taking the truth of the Gospel and twisting it into a cult that undermined the Gospel. The implication is that John was writing about salvation to non-believers. One book pointed out that in all of Paul's writings, he never once exhorts believers to confess their sins to God after salvation.

This was a lightning-bolt revelation for me. My desire was to get a right relationship with God. One of my pastors was encouraging me to do this by confessing my sins to Him. Once I did, I felt a huge burden lifted, but if I'm not actually supposed to confess my sins to God after salvation, why did I feel such relief?

Our relationship with God is based on the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. After we first believed, all our sins were paid for, the punishment was extracted on Jesus in our place for all our sins - past, present and future<sup>iii</sup>. What a huge amount of freedom that truth brings! Prior to understanding that, I was always seeking to make sure all my sins were confessed so I could maintain a good relationship with God. I was caught in a cycle of sinning, and then thinking my relationship with God was broken. I would confess sin, and see my relationship with God as restored until the next time I stumbled. If I wasn't experiencing blessing, my first thought was that there must be deeper sin interfering with it. It was a roller-coaster of searching for some hidden sin, confessing it, sinning, and repeating the process. Not a fun ride.

The Bible says that "therefore there is now no condemnation...<sup>iv</sup>" I'm no longer under condemnation for sins I might commit? What a freeing thought! Listen to this verse: "Christ became sin so that we might be the righteousness of God<sup>v</sup>" and boldly approach the throne of grace. Practically speaking, this means that regardless of my sins, known or unknown to me, my relationship with God is dependent on the perfect work of Jesus on the cross, *not* on me and my confessions! It all boils down to realizing that since Jesus paid for my sins, I ALWAYS have a right relationship with God.

Righteous living is important and sin still has consequences, but breaking access to the throne room of God is not one of them. So what roll does confession play in a Christian's life? The Bible actually says that we should

confess our sins one to another<sup>vi</sup>. This is consistent with walking in the light<sup>vii</sup> so that we may have fellowship one with another. My confession in front of my pastor wasn't about restoring my relationship with God, it was about bringing something that happened behind closed doors into the light so that I could have victory in that area. Bringing secret things into the light is powerful in bringing victory.

As I think about life, sin, and confession, one thing that strikes me is how much easier it is to confess to God than it is to others. I can't speak for you, but although it used to take me some time to build up the courage to talk to God honestly about my sin or weaknesses, it is a whole lot harder to make the same confession to a flesh and blood person who is in the room looking right back at you. I know God will forgive and has already done so, but what about the person you still have to go to church with? Will they treat me the same, or will they start having weird fantasies about my interactions with them, like wondering if I will hit on them?

Here is the hard part of confession: to find someone that will love you unconditionally even with all the "yuck" that goes with it. They have to be a strong, grace-filled person themselves in order to provide you with the acceptance that you need. To the pastor's credit that talked to me after my prophetic word, I never felt judged and he never did anything to suggest that anything had changed between him and me. I have one old high school friend that also has extended me grace that has helped on this journey. Having someone to talk to and know that you are safe is huge.

Funny, isn't it; here I am writing about things that some of my closest friends and family don't even know. Oh well, if they ever read this, surprise! And you thought you knew me, haha.

# So, What's That Look Like?

OVER THE YEARS, I've been blessed to build strong relationships with people, some of whom I regard as spiritual children. These few have allowed me to speak into their lives, and I've been privileged to watch them grow up and become solid followers of Jesus. I am so humbled to think I may have had a small part in their walks.

When I was first beginning to truly understand these new concepts of grace and walking in life without condemnation, I was talking about it to everyone that would listen. God was very gracious in that nearly everyone I talked to was very receptive to the message. I called up one of my "spiritual kids" to tell him about all God was doing in me. As we talked about living these concepts out in daily life, he asked me, "So, what's that look like?" The conversation kept moving without really ever addressing an answer, but the question never left me.

Sure, God was unlocking some truths in my spirit about Christian living, but how am I supposed to explain that to others? The other part of the equation I kept asking myself was how was I supposed to give away something I didn't actually have – or at least didn't have much of? At this point in my journey, I was still serving popcorn at a retail outlet and walking 2 miles to and from work because I had no car. I was having huge breakthrough in my emotions, but I wasn't seeing much difference in my outward circumstances. So what does this sort of real Christian living look like in the real world?

While I was almost frantically trying to figure out how it all applied, God kept bringing me back to the basic rule of resting in Him. We want to help, to earn, to work hard and be responsible, to earn our just rewards. But that isn't always God's way with us. Often, His way looks exactly opposite of everything that makes sense to us.

I am reminded of Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25 through 27. Rebekah, Jacob's mom, had heard what God promised to her children. But she, like



so many of us, had a problem sitting back and waiting to see how God would do all that he said he would. She decided to help God out a little – to do just a little bit here and there to set things up so that God could make it happen. Eventually, God did bring His will to pass, but we are left to wonder how much easier the road might have been if they had simply trusted God, recognizing that he is in fact big enough and capable of working things out on his own.

Let's recap Rebekah's story here. If you recall, Isaac was Abraham's son. He married Rebekah and after a while because she hadn't had any children, Isaac prayed for her to have kids and God answered with the miracle of twins. While she was pregnant, Rebekah had a difficult time and prayed to God saying she wasn't so sure she wanted to be pregnant<sup>viii</sup>. God's response told her that the older would serve the younger and that one would be the stronger nation. This is important: Don't forget that God spoke directly to Rebekah.

Fast forward to the end of Isaac's life. We see him sending Esau, the oldest son, out to prepare some game so that Isaac might confer a blessing on him, as the firstborn. Rebekah intercedes for Jacob, the younger son, and has him bring in some game pretending to be his older brother. Great story in Genesis 27. Because of this deceit, Jacob had to run for his life and wait out his brother's wrath. I find it interesting that even after Jacob and Rebekah had fooled Isaac, before he left the camp to run away, Isaac blesses Jacob and passes on the promises God had made first to Abraham and then Isaac to now rest on Jacob. Esau went off and married a Canaanite woman just to spite his family. Esau became father to the Edomites, a nation that was always at war with Israel. Jacob finally got his act together and became Israel, finally following God without deceit and becoming the father of the Israelite nation. And the rest, as they say, is history.

The point of the story is this: Imagine, if you can, how much easier it might have been if Rebekah didn't try to help God. Esau and Jacob probably would have stayed together, God would have blessed Jacob, but since the family unit was together, Esau would have benefited too. Long term? Probably fewer wars for the nation of Israel, not to mention the preservation of two brothers' relationship.

I started learning how to not “help” God in the area of my finances. I was living on a very limited income. I hadn’t seen much in the way of raises, and yet my expenses kept going up and up. Sound familiar? Logic would say to cut back expenses and live within your means, or go out and find a better job, or if not a better job, then a second job. I had already cut back as far as I could short of being a hermit. I had Internet and a cellphone just to stay in touch with the world, but other than that, no cable, no car, no vacations. My eating out was even limited to the dollar menu at a fast food restaurant simply for the sake of getting out of the house once in a while.

So when on paper I was faced with a budget shortage, my first reaction was to look around and see what I could sell. But God’s remedy was for me to seek Him first and not worry about the bills<sup>ix</sup>. This smacked in the face of the advice I was getting from a lot of people, even believers: God helps those that help themselves<sup>4</sup>, you have to do your part before God does His, etc. But I resolved to try it God’s way. By faith, I was going first and foremost stay faithful to tithing, and to then be responsible by keeping on budget and working at my job. But I was going to trust that God knew my situation, down to the penny of what I needed to pay bills that I didn’t have.

At first, nothing really seemed to happen. But one day I noticed a recent bill that didn’t make any sense to me. I called my insurance agent and found out there was a setting on my account that wasn’t set up correctly. One click later, my insurance bill was reduced by 30%. While that didn’t amount to more than \$10 a month, it still helped! The next day I got a notice from the power company that they had reviewed my account and I was eligible to have my bill reduced if I was interested. Who wouldn’t say yes to an offer like that? This time, the reduction was nearly 50%, or about \$75. For me and my budget, this was huge! I had expected to see God work in my situation by providing me with surprise money or a change of jobs or something along those lines. Instead, He started taking care of my bills by reducing them. Not how I thought it would go, but it was God at work in my situation.

It is kinda funny how God works sometimes. At times he meets us where our faith is at and at other times He just goes and does something off the wall. I think about the Centurion<sup>x</sup> and contrast that with the story of the

Jarius and his daughter. The Centurion came to Jesus and asked that Jesus just say the word, confidently implying his trust that Jesus just *said* the word, he knew his servant would be healed. Jesus did just that – said the word – and the servant was healed. On the other hand, the Jarius asked Jesus to come to the house his child was laying in to heal him. And you know what? Jesus healed her too. He met each of them where their faith was at. He never condemned Jarius for a lack of faith; rather, He just met him where he was at. Likewise, He met the centurion where he was at.

So at times our faith is where Jesus meets us, yet at other times he just does his own thing. In my case, I thought I was exercising my faith to see a solution to my situation, instead He just reduced my bills. I think about the blind man that came to Jesus seeking to have his blindness healed. Maybe he was expecting Jesus to just say a word like He had done before, or maybe to lay His hands on him like He did the lepers. Nope, none of that: Jesus spits and makes mud and puts that on the blind man's eyes. Why on earth would Jesus do that? I have no idea, but the blessing is the same: the man got his sight restored. I guess the bottom line here is not to try and figure out how God will answer your prayer, but rather to just rest in Him and allow yourself to be surprised at how He does it. In my daily devotions today, I saw a quote I liked (my paraphrase): "If you give something over to God, the creator of the universe, what do you think you can add to the solution that Jesus can't?" Better to leave it with Him, I think.

In this same season, my right eye began to bother me. The thought never crossed my mind to pray for it. Instead, I dutifully went to the eye doctor only to learn that while it was scratchy and sore, he couldn't see anything particularly wrong with it and attributed my discomfort to the fact that I was getting older and the eye was drying out. Nothing could be done, outside of using eye drops. Not the news I wanted to hear!

About a week later, I was meditating on Matthew 6:33, which says: "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well<sup>xi</sup>." I awoke one morning shortly thereafter with some crusty stuff in the corner of my eye. Wiping it away without thinking much of it, I suddenly realized my eye wasn't sore or itchy anymore! I could hardly believe it so I sat in bed trying to make my eye hurt just to make sure

it was OK. But sure enough, it was no longer troubling me, and hasn't again since then. Seems like God's grace is there just because.

With all these extraordinary experiences happening to me, I couldn't keep them to myself. I began to share what God was doing, and an amazing thing started to happen. When people heard what God was doing in my life, they wanted to know more. My two oldest kids had walked away from God and the church a while back, and even they were interested in hearing about what was going on. Amazing that doing nothing on my part to reach out to them was being more effective than all my striving efforts had accomplished in years.

Throughout the time I spent waiting for my job situation to change, I chose to confidently believe that change was on the way. I trusted that in God's time according to His plan, it would come. I rested in Him and chose to not worry about it. Learning how to do this has been a journey of learning how to truly "take every thought captive<sup>xii</sup>."

Sometimes it looks a little odd exercising this discipline, but it gets better. For example, one day I noticed there was a problem with my paycheck. My inner thoughts went something like this: "OK, Lord, I'm going to rest and let You handle this...When I talk to them, I'll bring up it was *their* mistake...Wait, I'm supposed to be letting God handle this...It's in Your hands, Lord... Maybe I'll have to call the state...No worries, Lord; I give it back to You... again!" And so it went for almost an hour before I was able to actually *leave* the problem in His hands without picking it up again. One call resolved it, and there was ultimately nothing to worry about. But the process beforehand of being able to leave it in His hands was critical in getting my heart to have the right attitude and continue being at rest in Him.

That principle can be applied to any situation when your thinking needs to be changed. Practically speaking, my train of thought might look something like this, similar to what I outlined above:

"Gosh he is a jerk for doing that...that's not very Godly... Satan, this is not from God, so it has no place here." And then I move on. Sometimes moving on means keeping that conversation going a little longer, or it may mean

thanking God, or simply disciplining my mind to change the subject. It is not hard, but it is powerful.

It has been interesting learning how to take every thought captive and resting in Him. Like many, I used to think in terms of only taking every thought captive when I was headed astray, headed toward sin, or dealing with temptation. While that's a powerful way to apply this principle, there's also so much more to it than that. Taking every thought captive is a conscious process of keeping God involved in every area of your life, not just when temptation comes knocking.

If I find myself with a smile on my face about something like looking a great sunset or listening to the birds sing or some small thing, my first thought is along the lines of "cool!" and I move on. But when I take a thought captive, I look beyond the "cool" response and recognize the Person behind the gift which leads to a response of giving thanks and praise to God.

It can be so easy to buy into the world's way of thinking. "So-and-so is so full of themselves," or joining in on the putdown bandwagon of certain celebrities. Around my kids they are into "Bieber bashing," and while I can go along with the joke or not say anything, the reality is that God loves him and as I recently found out, he too confesses Jesus as Lord. I have no business bashing him because of a haircut or because his music is different than what I prefer listening to. Instead, I should take those thoughts captive and turn them into praying for him and thanking God that He has blessed him.

Listening to the news, I can easily become depressed or anxious hearing all the negative things that go on in our world today. But that is another area where we can take our thoughts captive and remember that we have nothing to worry about because God is still on the throne and He is still watching over us and meeting our needs. I don't need to worry, because I can take those thoughts captive and bring them in line with what God's word says about world events.

While I was applying for jobs, I decided not to be desperate about it. I only applied for jobs that were in line with my passions, and not what the world

said my experience and schooling qualifies me for. If God can promote Joseph from being a prisoner to running Egypt in less than an hour, then I got nothing to worry about.

If you remember, Joseph got sold into slavery by his “loving” brothers. He went from being Dad’s favorite to being sold and taken to Egypt as a slave, a place where he didn’t know the customs, the language, or what was going to happen to him. I expect that his experience was similar to most slaves: chained, beaten, forced to move with little creature comforts. He was probably paraded naked in front of buyers and checked out like a piece of meat. He would have been beyond embarrassed. Yet, God put him with Potiphar and Joseph was soon running the whole household. Again, from a favored position, he found himself back in jail because he chose to do the right thing and wouldn’t sleep with Potiphar’s wife. It’s in the midst of all this that God said He was with Joseph, even while he was still a slave<sup>5</sup>.

The story goes on and although the circumstance that Joseph found himself in probably didn’t feel or look like God was with him, the word itself says that He was. A couple of years later, Joseph saw the blessing and God was able to bring about salvation of the whole nation of Israel.

This story illustrates to me the absolute truth that God is with me and is for me. Knowing that He was faithful to Joseph even though at times it sure didn’t look like it gives me a sense of comfort knowing God is with me even if I don’t see how all the pieces are going to fit together someday.

# Victory Over Addictions

BAD HABITS ARE an inescapable part of being human. We all have them and are generally at least vaguely aware of them. And if we are aware of them, we all really wish we could kick those bad habits to the curb and leave them behind us. But it's rarely so simple. As I mentioned earlier, I have been able to get victory over many of the bad habits I had held onto over the years thanks to Christ and His work on the cross. But that victory came not as I had envisioned, but rather by applying some insights I gained from others and my own study.

Over the years, I'd gone forward at alter calls during regular weekend church services or even at some conferences, asking for people to pray for me about my struggles with sin. I think I was envisioning God zapping me a good one, instantaneously freeing me from my addiction so I could go on and live life with no more temptation ever. Nope, it never worked that way for me. While I am sure He can deliver people in a moment like that, more often than not it is a slower process that doesn't always go how we think it is should to work out.

Gaining victory over my habits really didn't happen until I allowed my thinking to be completely changed. I had to give up the majority of everything I ever thought I knew about overcoming sin. Figures, I always have had to learn things the hard way. One of the most foundational pieces of this was coming to truly believe that there is no condemnation in Christ<sup>xiii</sup>. That alone started to pry open the fingers of the things that had a grip on me.

My old way of thinking looked at the law of Moses and saw where I fell short – or where I *thought* I fell short – and determined not to sin again. Thing was, I would then go sin *more* than if I hadn't put so much effort into trying *not* to sin. I was living out the words Paul wrote in Romans<sup>xiv</sup>!

Scripture tells us that sin has its strength in the law<sup>xv</sup>. If you think about it, nobody has ever been saved by following the law of Moses. The law, from

the 10 Commandments through all the sacrifices and Levitical rules, were put there to show us that we can't make ourselves righteous on our own. Paul tells us that if the law hadn't told him what covetousness was, he would not have known it on his own<sup>xvi</sup>. Because the law defined what covetousness was, sin took advantage of that knowledge and produced all kinds of wrong desires. If you take away the rules, you take away the very thing that gives energy to sin.

In other words, the very thing I was looking to as my salvation to overcome my sins and addictions (the law) was actually the very thing giving them strength. Instead of putting out a fire I was adding fuel to it. Looking to the law for deliverance only brings defeat. True freedom is found only by abiding in Christ.

So what does that look like? Instead of putting so much effort into not sinning, our focus should be on Jesus. Resting in Him means not worrying about the sin. It's easy for us to give more attention to our sin than it deserves, even by trying to avoid it. Only God deserves our full, undivided attention. When God has His proper place in our lives, everything else starts to find its proper place – including sin. I found that the more I focused on Jesus, the less I was aware of my SSA or any other addiction.

Let me be clear here, I still have some SSA, although nowadays, I can go months without a stray thought. The difference is that it no longer defines me or takes up so much of my focus that it has a life of its own. It is there and is something that I can't control just as I am sure many homosexuals would say they can't control their feelings toward others. Probably very true. But here is the key: it does not need to define who you are or what your actions are. My identity is in Christ and Christ alone. When I seek Him and focus on Him, He can start to transform me into His image. I can choose His righteousness and holiness and it becomes a joy to live life instead of one great big trial trying to be something I am not or, even worse, trying to be what I think I ought to be.

The most freeing part of all this is that when we do fall short, we know that we can go boldly to God. We stand unashamed because our righteousness is found in Christ, and we are loved and forgiven because of His work on the Cross. We can be confident that nothing is out of place with God. It's all



because of His work, not ours, that we experience blessings, relationship with Him, and any other good thing. As Christ becomes more in our lives, sin becomes less. The more we focus on Him, the less room sin has to occupy our lives. The sinful desires start to be replaced with new desires that are God-centered<sup>xvii</sup>. It goes against logic, but God's ways will always confound the wisdom of this world.

With the focus of life being Christ, there really is no time for ungodly addictions. Over time, I still find myself hit with the occasional thought, but it is so out of place that I can easily identify it as not from God. Then I can take it captive<sup>xviii</sup> and resist the Devil, and the thoughts really do just disappear.

Back to the question we're asking to get at the heart of the matter: What does this actually look like? I think we often try to make things harder than they really are by trying to find a definite formula that always works. Really, taking every thought captive it is as simple as it sounds. Stray thoughts that I have that are even remotely inconsistent with Scripture – from SSA to knocking the President's latest policy – I choose to take captive and resist the devil. It's far too easy to live life without God as your life. We are saved by grace and we want all that God has for us... Except we want it our way, in our time, exactly the way we want it to look. We want God to be a *part* of our life without actually *being* our life. As long as you hold back from giving Him your all, you will deny yourself the very thing you ultimately crave: His Presence. Sin can't co-exist with His Presence.

This is where the rubber meets the road if you truly want to overcome anything in your life, from SSA to any other name your-own-poison. Victory is there, available and waiting for you, if only you will surrender your whole self to Jesus. With Christ, all things are possible<sup>xix</sup>. Without Him, second best, no matter how good we think it is, will never satisfy our needs.

You are left with a choice here: You can focus on overcoming your struggles and try to muscle your way through it, or you can let go and let God worry about it for you. If you are willing to hand it over, then

remember to leave it with Him and seek God and His righteousness. The cool thing with God is if you seek Him, you WILL find Him and all the other junk of your life will fall into place. After a time, you may find yourself like I did: surprised to notice that you don't notice any more.

# Rightly Dividing The Word

WE CAN ALL probably agree that we want to read the Bible more than we actually do. And we could also probably agree that we want to understand it better, too. Choosing to deliberately and intentionally study and absorb the Word of God was a big part of gaining freedom in my life, and I believe it will be for you, too. In my journey, there have been a couple principles that really helped me as I began reading and studying the Bible for myself. Let these truths equip you as you dig deeper in Scripture.

One of these foundations is laid out by Joseph Prince in his book, *Unmerited Favor*. Simply summarizing what he says, we read the Scripture viewing it as either Pre- or Post-Cross. It might seem simplistic, but it's so powerful.

We live in a post-cross world. Jesus has already died on the Cross and paid for our sins, placing us in a right relationship with God that is not dependent on our deeds but rather on Christ's finished work. So when we read Scripture, we need to keep in mind which side of the Cross we're living on to better understand how the verses apply to our lives.

Take a look at Peter for an example of what I am talking about. He heard Jesus say that He will deny those that deny Him before the Father. And we know that Peter denied Jesus three times just before the cross. Can you imagine what Peter was thinking about after he did that? "I denied Him, I spent the last three years of my life and now I have no chance because I denied I knew Jesus. Now he will deny me before the Father!" Yet on the other side of the cross, Jesus is not denying Peter but instead builds His church on Peter's life! We face the same human fallacy Peter did: we can look even at the words of Jesus and apply them wrongly because we forget the work of the cross and what it did.

The Old Testament is about a people who started out living in grace, but became subject to the law. And while today we might not abide by the letter of the law in the same way they did (let's face it, blood sacrifices went out

of style a long time ago), many of us still live under the *spirit* of the law. In theory, living by the law is easier than living by grace – clear-cut do’s and don’t’s, black-and-white answers, a measuring rod to use on ourselves and others. But really, it’s a spirit that brings bondage because, as we established earlier, it is impossible for us to fulfill the law. And in fact, the law was never designed for us to be able to perfectly obey.

God’s purpose in establishing the law was to show us the unattainable standards of His righteousness and holiness. In fact, when Jesus walked the earth He went to raise the bar even higher by illustrating that the law applies not only to our outward actions, but to the inner world of our heart, attitudes, and thoughts. No way could any of us ever reach His standard!

The second principle that has helped me in rightly dividing the Word is summed up well in this quote from Miles Cloverdale (author of the *Cloverdale Bible*):

“It shall greatly help thee to understand scripture, if thou mark not only what is spoken or written, but of whom, and unto whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstance, considering what goeth before, and what followeth after<sup>xx</sup>.”

Now lets take these two pieces and put them together. When we read the Bible, first we look to see if the passage is pre- or post-cross. Second, we look at who the intended audience was. Of special importance to us is whether that original audience was made up of believers or non-believers.

So many times, verses are taken out of context and applied to situations simply because it sounds good. The sad part is how very inaccurate these applications can be, and how very often they cause disillusionment in Christians. For example, let’s look at this passage from 1 John:

*“<sup>1</sup>That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. <sup>2</sup>The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. <sup>3</sup>We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our*

*fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup>We write this to make our joy complete.*

<sup>5</sup>This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup>If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. <sup>7</sup>But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. <sup>8</sup>If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup>If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us <sup>xxi</sup>.”

Most people I know would say that these verses apply Christians and that this justifies our need to confess our sins to God. When you press the point, you find out that this is the only post cross scripture they use to support their entire argument. Two authors, Joseph Prince in his book “Unmerited Favor” and Andrew Farley in “Heaven is Now,” offer another option that I have come to believe as true.

Back in the beginning days of the early Church, there was a heretical group known as the Gnostics who would often infiltrate a local body of believers. This group believed several ideas that were contrary to the beliefs that formed first century doctrine, which eventually was canonized to become our Bible.

Among other things, their beliefs included a denial of the existence of sin. Most scholars agree that in 1 John, the Apostle is directly addressing the Gnostics instead of Christians. How do we know this for sure? John leaves us some hints. The first clue is how he starts his letter. John, being the Disciple that Jesus loved, was one who loved other people greatly and wrote to those he cared about quite warmly.

When you compare the opening verses of 1 John with the opening verses found in 2 John and 3 John, you will notice that John greets believers directly in the other two letters. In 2 John he writes, “...To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth...Grace, mercy, and peace will be with

you from God... [xxii](#)” and in 3 John, he writes, “ ...To the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth: Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers [xxiii](#).” In 1 John, that warmth is missing. Instead John jumps right in to establishing his authority to discuss these matters.

John quickly goes on to call out the wrong beliefs by saying in verse eight “<sup>8</sup>If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” This statement would have been a direct confrontation to the Gnostic belief system, but to say that same statement to a believer who has already confessed his need to be saved from sin it seems out of place. John goes on in the verses to let the Gnostics know that if they confess their sins, God is faithful to forgive. That is the message of the gospel that we, as Christians already responded to.

If we continue on in 1 John, he goes on to address believers and you can see the shift in his language as he addresses us as “little Children” in John 2:

*<sup>1</sup> (My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.) But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous One, <sup>2</sup> and he himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for our sins but also for the whole world.*

Notice not only of the tone changes, but so does the message. “If we sin” is not followed by go confess and He will forgive, but rather by a reminder that we have an advocate who was an atonement for our sins. Note the use of the past-tense word “was:” the atonement has been completed and is finished.

Let’s take a look at a couple of other scriptures. Revelation 3:20 is one I hear frequently misused to justify coming to Christ while also ignoring the correct audience Properly understanding this verse can have a huge impact on our understanding of confession in terms of grace.

In Revelations, we find a familiar passage that many pastors and evangelists use to invite a person to come to a place of repentance and find salvation;

that is, transitioning from a non-believer to a believer. But this is a wrong application of the verse on two counts.

First, if we look at the whole chapter we can see that it is written to the Laodicean church, which was a group of believers, not non-believers. Secondly, the word translated “come to Him” and subsequently “door” does not mean entrance to a person, but rather to a room or building. So in this case opening the door would mean opening the literal door to the Laodicean church, making this verse directed to a corporate or collective group rather than an individual person.

While I am sure God uses the passage to touch hearts to come to Him, the original intent and message of the verse was not talking to an individual to make a decision to Christ. Instead, it was God talking to a church that had gone astray and inviting them to come back and be in right relationship with Him.

Let me add one final example to really drive home the point. Jesus shared that we must forgive so that God will forgive us<sup>xxiv</sup>. The implication here is that if we don't forgive others, then we don't receive forgiveness for our sins. Contrast this with Paul says in Colossians 3:13, that because of the cross we have the freedom to forgive and extend compassion. In the first case we are looking at rules and consequences; in the latter we see the ability to be used as a vessel of God's grace.

So to recap, the first thing to do when reading a passage of Scripture is to determine whether it is pre-Cross or post-Cross. Then, we establish the various contexts of the verses. Is it talking to believers or non-believers? Is it addressing an individual or a group? And so on. These are pretty simple tools to help when studying the Bible, but they sure make a huge difference. And the best part is that there's always more to learn. However hungry you are, you can still go deeper into the Scriptures. There are classes to take, books to read, and seminars to attend that all can help you learn more about how to rightly divide the Word of God.

# Law vs. Grace: Mixed Messages

THE AMAZING GRACE of God is a spiritual truth we can have a hard time truly comprehending. We read the verses about being saved by grace<sup>6</sup> and can quote them prettily enough, but how much of a reality is that truth lived out in our lives? Our human nature clings to rules and regulations like they're our lifeline, never realizing they are actually the chains binding us from experiencing true freedom in Christ.

We are taught from a young age by school, society, family, and even the Church what we can and cannot do – The Rules. We are praised for obeying the rules, and lashed with condemnation when we miss the mark. Get an “A” in school and your parents are likely to buy you something; get an F, and say goodbye to your friends for a while as you and your room become reacquainted. We are promoted at work for excelling at doing the right things, but mess up too bad and you've lost a job.

The worst of it all is when we hear the law preached from the pulpit in our churches. Whether consciously or inadvertently, human nature always gravitates toward following the rules and living with a works mentality. And while in some parts of life this is a good thing, when it comes to how we approach God it becomes a huge stumbling block. Many well-meaning pastors who desire to encourage us to live Godly lives set us up for failure in the end because of how they present the law of God and the grace of God.

From the most straightforward standpoint, when we talk about “the law” we are talking about all the Old Testament rules and regulations. This includes the Ten Commandments all the way through Leviticus and all the animal sacrifices and rules about mold. Beyond this, there is also “the law” referring to all the implied rules and regulations that others establish in the name of religion: “Don't drink or dance,” “women can't wear short skirts,” or “don't listen to secular music.” Any of these things have an outward appearance of looking Godly, but really they put us in a works mentality that allows us to think if we follow all the rules, we're living a godly life.



This misses one key piece of living a Godly life: God. Living in Grace is a relationship guided by His unmerited favor that is all about Him, not us. Not our ability to comply with rules, not our ability to earn rewards. We can't earn anything, it is all Him. If you ever see otherwise, it's time to stop and refocus.

In Revelation<sup>xxv</sup> God makes a proclamation on the church at Laodicea. Here in this declaration, God through the Apostle John famously communicates His desire for that church to be either hot or cold. Instead, He finds them lukewarm and decides to spit them out of His mouth. I had always understood this verse to be about the level of our passion and zeal for Christ, but another way to look at it may be found in light of Scripture itself.

Much of the Old Testament is spent documenting the story of Israel, and whether they followed the law or not. That's a very over-simplified way of looking at it, but bear with me for the sake of illustration. On the other hand, much of the New Testament is spent telling the good news of what Jesus did for us on the Cross, and the grace that is available to us because of His work. Now, with that in mind, let's go back to our passage in Revelation.

Could it be that the person God describes as "cold" is really describing someone walking according to the law? This person has not felt the touch of God and has no understanding of grace, but if he truly attempts to seek God through the law only, he is bound to come to the conclusion that he cannot do it on his own and needs a savior. Conversely, could the person God calls "hot" really be referencing a person who fully understands the message of the Cross, embraces grace with his whole soul, and chooses to rest in the finished work of the Cross?

If so, then the lukewarm person God despises would be someone who mixes grace and law in their relationship with God. These people live in the cycle of repenting for deeds that have already been atoned for, who are more concerned with their actions (works) than their relationship with Jesus. This person is the schizophrenic Christian we talked about earlier, whose life is such a mixed bag of grace and works that Jesus is prevented from being able to fully work in his life. Looking to the law – be it the Ten

Commandments, or any other way of measuring ourselves up – will only lead to failure, each and every time.

By contrast, looking to grace means we only need to find ourselves in Christ<sup>7</sup>. As such, when God the Father looks at us, He sees us in Christ and therefore doesn't see our failures OR our works but instead sees Jesus. In Christ, the price He paid fulfills our punishment and negates all our attempts at gaining righteousness on our own.

Remember the time in my life when I was constantly examining my relationship with God the Father to see if it was broken or not? That is the result of mixing grace and law: we become unclear on where we stand with God. And as far as Scripture tells us, we have a secure place with God through Christ Jesus. I knew I was saved, but when I looked at how I lived up to my idea of what a Christian should look like, I always fell short. This sucked me into that cycle of repenting in an effort to restore a relationship that was never broken in the first place. Instead of living a victorious life in Christ, I settled for lukewarm. I was so distracted by trying to make sure I was performing correctly and fixing my works that I missed out on the true reality of knowing God better, walking with Him, and becoming “hot.”

Beware of the sneaky ways this message of works over grace is communicated to you, even from the pulpit. Sometimes it's subtle, something to the extent of: “you need to position yourself to receive God's blessings by...” and you can fill in the blank with your favorite rule: don't cheat, don't steal, don't murder, etc.

Now, grace is no excuse to simply do whatever you want. The book of Galatians deals extensively with Christian freedom, but in chapter 5 verse 13, Paul very directly commands them not to use their freedom in God's grace to indulge their sinful desires. So don't go overboard with it!

In theory we can sin and it does not affect our relationship with the God of the universe. So why not sin as much as we want? Let's define “grace” a little more thoroughly. What grace *does* mean is that our sin isn't counted against us, and that we can live in freedom of needing to follow a bunch of rules to gain God's love. What grace *doesn't* do is erase the consequences of sin. If you are married and have sex outside of marriage, then there will be

consequences! Maybe your marriage will end, trust will be lost, etc. Kill a person and you will find yourself in jail with a less-than-great future ahead of you. While God can use all these things to His glory, a little common sense will go a long way in saving us from heartache and pain. Joseph knew this and he didn't even have the law yet to follow![xxvi](#)

But the point of it all remains the same: **YOUR BLESSINGS DON'T DEPEND ON YOU! THEY DEPEND ON JESUS AND THE PRICE HE PAID!** Because of His work, we are in Him, and therefore as He is, so are we. Embrace this unbelievable grace and learn to rest in Him, leaving the law behind you.

# Faith Walk

LEARNING HOW TO share the Gospel again has given me a fresh perspective on what Godly living means. As I communicate my faith to others, I find that I can sum up much of the Gospel and keys to Godly living in these four points. These are in many ways my life messages, and I hope that they can help you as you grow in your relationship with Christ.

## **Accept that you are accepted**

The centerpiece of the Gospel is that God loves you and me, right now, no matter what. Despite what we have done or have not done, what our struggles are, what we look like, or anything else we might see as a reason for God *not* to love us, the final truth of the matter is that *He loves us*. Just as we are. No fine print. Our only and reasonable response to such love is to learn how to accept that we are accepted.

Talking to people, I have become very aware of how hard this is for most people to grasp. We view love and grace as very conditional; we always attach a “but” to the end of God’s acceptance. Yes, He loves me, *but*, if He knew how I struggled with gambling, pornography, hate, anger, etc. He wouldn’t really love me. But the truth is that He already knows, and already chose to love you anyway from before the creation of the earth. God’s acceptance of us and gift of love and grace are utterly unconditional.

## **No repentance needed for sinning?**

John the Baptist began preaching about the need for repentance of our sins as he prepared the way for Jesus, and this is a message we see continued throughout Christ’s ministry. The progression is to first repent from sin, then be baptized in water, and finally be filled with the Holy Spirit. For the non-believer, this is the entry point into God’s Kingdom. From the moment of salvation forward, there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God<sup>[xxvii](#)</sup>. We can firmly rely on that promise and stand secure in the

knowledge that Jesus became sin for us so we could become the righteousness of God<sup>xxviii</sup> and be seated at the right hand of God in Christ<sup>xxix</sup>.

These promises along with a good portion of Paul's writings in the New Testament remind us that our right standing with God is based on the finished work of the Cross, not on what we do or don't do. We cannot take away from the Cross, nor can we add to it. As Jesus said as He hung on that tree, "It is finished<sup>xxx</sup>." All our sins – past, present, and future - have been paid for<sup>xxxi</sup>, so there is now no condemnation in Christ<sup>xxxii</sup>.

## **Godly living**

Living confidently in our knowledge that we have a right standing with God at all times, independent of our successes or failures, is what allows us to live a Godly life. We choose to live a Godly life as a statement of our faith in the finished work of the Cross. By not focusing on the law, we are freed to focus instead on Jesus. When He has His rightful place in our hearts, minds, thoughts, and emotions, we are able to live a victorious and Godly life. In this, our joy is made complete in Him and our relationship with Him.

Matthew 6:33 tells us to "Seek first the Kingdom of God and all His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you." In the context of the surrounding verses, Jesus was speaking about our physical needs.

Jesus' final thought on all these matters is to tell us not to worry because our heavenly Father *already knows* that we need them. Before we even ask, God sees our needs and is working on a provision for our life! It's an incredible promise to stand on, and all we have to do is seek His Kingdom and His righteousness. So how do we do that? Let's first understand what we're talking about.

A kingdom exists where a king is present and ruling. The Kingdom of God references the rule and reign of Christ, our King. He is seated at the right hand of the Father who allows us to come boldly into the throne room through prayer.

We seek Him by spending time with Him in prayer and worship, and also as we learn about Him through the Bible, His written word. Doing these things equips us to not only *think* like citizens of the Kingdom, but to *act* like citizens of the Kingdom. We then proceed into the world, extending the rule and reign of Christ on the earth.

His righteousness is a gift that we received because of the finished work of the Cross. We cannot earn it, and nothing we could ever do makes us righteous in and of ourselves. No amount of good works on our part will ever amount to anything. Therefore, seeking and obtaining God's righteousness is a matter of stepping out in faith and living according to the work of the Cross and the free gift Jesus has given us.

## **When sin happens**

Anyone living and breathing on this earth will fall short of God's standards. This falling short is what we call sin. One of the arguments I've heard about living a life under grace is that it gives us license to sin freely, doing whatever we want without worrying about the consequences. Taken out of context and lived to an extreme, that might be so. But the reality of what living under grace means is probably something more like this:

God will always be our "Daddy." We will not be condemned for sin, nor should it cause us to worry about the state of our relationship with God. However, none of that eclipses the fact that there will be consequences for our sin. A recent quote I saw says this very nicely: "We are punished by our sins, not for them<sup>8</sup>." Any time we stray from living life the way God desires us to we may suffer the consequences. Sleeping with another man's wife may not cause you to spend eternity in hell or lose your standing with God, but it will cause untold heartaches and problems. God's desire is that we avoid this hurt. But if we so choose, He will let us go off on our own and sin. But amazingly, He will always stand with open arms to help us overcome our sins and heal the wounds, too.

Our God is a God of love and compassion. He has written His law on our hearts (See Romans 1). We intuitively know what is wrong and what is right without having a rule book of do's and don't's. When we focus on Him and

the righteousness He provides for us, we become an open vessel for Him to work His grace through us. As Christians, the Holy Spirit dwells in us to lead, guide and correct us, enabling us to live a Godly life.

Knowing the great price He paid and tremendous love He has for us should cause us to *want* (not *have*) to live a life that pleases Him, and that is a testimony to the world as a life they want to imitate. And that is the ultimate goal, isn't it? To reproduce in others the same freedom and love we have come to enjoy through Christ.

# Repentance

IN SHARING WHAT I've learned about grace, the one area that seems to give people the most hesitation in embracing the idea of God's grace is the area of repentance. Sometimes, I even still find myself trying to meld God's grace with my responsibility. It can be hard to explain at times. During one of my prayer times, I was talking to God and asking Him to help me understand this conundrum of grace and repentance because people I deeply loved and cared about were still getting hung up on repentance. And as He is so faithful to do, in the midst of prayer I believe He answered me to show me how it all fits together.

A primary source of misunderstanding about these concepts comes from inaccurate use of the word "repentance." We actually mix three very different and distinct concepts together: repentance, asking forgiveness, and feeling guilt over something we have (or haven't) done. We interchangeably use the word "repentance" to refer to all three when the concepts should really stay distinct, even though at first glance they seem very similar.

Let's first start with what repentance is not: asking for forgiveness. As I have stated before, Jesus paid for all your sins on the cross and in that one amazing act a transformation occurred where our sinfulness was traded for God's righteousness. In that moment, a split-second for us, our slates were wiped clean forever. Any sin, that is, any place we fall short of God's standard has already been 100% covered by Jesus' sacrifice. To confess otherwise with our lives, actions, thoughts, or words is to deny the perfection of that act. In summary, then, there is no need to seek God's forgiveness for sin because it already has been taken care of for all time.

Let's turn our attention to repentance. Repentance does not mean to ask for forgiveness, although many in the Church use the word "repentance" in those terms. Repentance by definition means to have a change of mind, to move in another direction opposite of where you were headed. At salvation, we have a change of mind about who Jesus is and how He interacts in our



lives. We see that we can be right with God when we accept the work of the Cross. That acceptance sets our lives in a new direction.

In that first moment of salvation, repentance is connected with forgiveness. The connection is not because of our act of repentance, but rather because of our change of mind (repentance!) about the power of the cross. When we see what Jesus did, we get forgiveness; in other words, that initial change of mind lets us receive forgiveness, it opened the door for us. Repentance in and of itself was not the forgiveness but the mechanism that opened the door for forgiveness.

So the next question we ask ourselves is: “does repentance have a place in our daily lives?” The answer is an absolute yes! But, the key is keeping our definitions straight and not caving in to our tendency to mix two similar concepts that are actually separate. Repentance is not the exclusive response to when we fall short. Remember, repentance is a change of mind, not asking for forgiveness. Let’s consider an example.

Suppose that you get angry with your spouse or someone you love and you say all kinds of nasty things to them. Many would say you need to go to God and “repent of your sin.” But what does that look like from a Biblical point of view? We know that the sin has already been paid for. So asking God to forgive something He already forgave doesn’t make sense.

In James, we are told to confess our sins to one another, so it is right to go to the person you lost it with and seek their forgiveness and put things right. If your sin was more of a private one, like looking at porn, then going to someone you trust and telling them would be appropriate.

Now let’s fast forward a little and in your prayer time with God, you recognize that “wow, I have an anger problem, I am always exploding and saying things I regret to people I love.” In that recognition is the beginning of repentance. From here you can say, “Lord, this thing that has been a normal part of my life is not what you want for me, so I no longer want it to be normal for me.”

In that moment there is repentance, a change of mind that says “my way falls short and I change my mind, I am willing to do a 180 degree

turnaround and align my life with Your way of doing it.” The words or train of thought may be different, but the essential fact is that there is a change of mind that says “not my way, but Yours.”

From that change of mind, you can go to God and say , “I give this area to You, help me live out this change of mind.” Will you ever get angry again? Pretty much guaranteed! But your change of mind has now pointed you in the right direction and God can work with that.

Another facet of this whole concept of repentance over forgiveness - and I think for most people is the missing piece of the puzzle they need to make repentance work in their every day, practical life – is found in the Old Testament. The words of Micah the prophet say: “He has shown you what is good and what the Lord desires of you. But to love justice and to love mercy and walk humbly with your God.”

The very last phrase of that verse is really the key to understanding forgiveness and repentance, and that is to walk humbly with your God. If we go back to our anger management scenario, when we go to God, we do not need to seek forgiveness because that is already ours. We choose instead to repent because we recognize our normal way of life is not God’s desire for us. Adding the concept of humility and walking with God means adding the piece that recognizes we can’t do it on our own. It means acknowledging that if the changes that need to happen in our life are going to happen, we need Him to bring it about.

This is a right response to sin. It recognizes that the sin has already been paid for, that I have had a change of mind about that sin, and I choose to walk humbly before my God knowing that I cannot make the change on my own and need Him in my life to do it for me.

I once heard the phrase that “right believing leads to right living.” And here I believe that a right understanding of repentance will lead to a life that is victorious. If you fall short, don’t “repent” by saying, “God, I got angry, please forgive me.” Instead, when the Holy Spirit shows you an area of your thinking that is different than God’s, simply recognize and respond by changing your mind(repenting), and then walking with God, dependent on Him for daily help in that area. Pray instead, “God, thank You that You paid

for all my sins on the Cross. I recognize that my actions are not in line with Your heart and I want my thoughts to be Your thoughts. I can't change on my own so I give this area over to You now."

Remember, it is not the words that are important here, but the change of mind. When you acknowledge the work of the cross, you honor God. When you repent and you change your mind to align with God's mind, you honor Him by submitting your life to His. When you acknowledge that you need Him, you acknowledge that He is God and you are not. In doing all these things, your life honors Him. And isn't that really what repentance is all about: a change of mind that says You are God?

# Serving the Church

I HAVE ALWAYS had a firm belief in the Church and the authority of the Church. My focus in the past has always been the mission field, even though I didn't feel particularly called or have a specific burden for any one group of people. My perspective on this was influenced in my younger years by a songwriter, Keith Green, who once stated that if you are not specifically called to stay, the Bible has already told you that you are supposed to go. After hearing this, I did a quick inventory of pros and cons, found that I had no reason to stay at the time, and so went and spent five years as a missionary in Africa.

Now, nearly 30-plus years later, I have had words prophesied over me that I am called to serve the Church. Increasingly, I do find my heart passionate and burdened about something. It's still not a specific foreign mission, although I do have a soft spot in my heart for the Sudan and the Arab world in general. But really, I am burdened for the local church and for those Christians in it who are unknowingly missing out on so much of what God has promised them in their walk with Him. This book is one of the ways I've felt led to act on this burden. By sharing my story, I hope to help other believers like me who might be blithely going along, passing by and missing out on what true Christianity is supposed to be. Jesus will be coming back for His bride, the Church, and sooner than we think. And as a whole, we are less ready than we should be by far. It is well worth all of our time and effort to put every ounce of our focus on our relationship with Jesus.

Let me add a word or two about serving. Back to the core question: What's that look like? First, there is a foundational difference between *serving* the church and serving *in* the church. The question will always come down to your motive: why are you doing it? There's nothing wrong with being a Sunday school teacher or setting up chairs. But if you're doing it to earn good marks with God because you think He'll be happy with you, you've already missed the mark. It goes back to trying to earn your relationship with God and His love. He already loves you, regardless of whether you

serve or don't serve. Our serving the Church should be based on our desire to serve God out of love for Him, not out of an attempt to make Him love us more.

So what is serving the Church? A basic definition of "Church" is the collective sum of all the people Jesus died for and who have chosen to accept His gift. In other words, it is made up of Christians. These folks may or may not be in the same building to worship together or to learn together, yet they are all connected by the One who gave His life for them. So "serving the church" actually means serving the *people* that make up the church. And how do you serve these people? Very simple: you love them. Just like Jesus did, right where they are, and without judgment. Anyone can love another person. Loving someone can be watching their kids during church so that they can hear God's word. Or it can be as simple as taking time to go out to coffee and listen to them. When other people are the focus of your efforts because of love, you are serving the church. Doing the same action because you want to earn God's love shifts the action to self-service, and you're not serving the church. Remember, we love because He first loved us. Any other way and we miss the mark.

Our gifts and talents come into play here, too. Whatever you have been blessed with is a tool God gave you to be used for His glory. But again, the basis of service even if it's a task should be love for people. God's heart is all about love. It's why He is who He is, and why He does what He does. And if we are called to become like Christ, serving out of love should be a way of life for us.

# A Colossians Man

DURING MY PROPHETIC assembly session, one of the words spoken over me indicated that I was called to be a Colossians man. I had never spent much time reading in the book of Colossians, since I had other books that were my favorites. In Ephesians, for example, promise after promise is poured out to the believer and I found a great deal of hope and encouragement reading that. So I wasn't sure what that part of my prophetic word really meant, but I figured that if I was supposed to be a Colossians man, then I should heed that call and spend time reading and studying the book.

Disappointingly enough, reading it through for the first several times, I didn't get a whole lot out of it. No open heavens, no amazing revelations. But as I began to learn what it means to walk in grace, I found that Colossians not only came alive, but also spoke about many of the major points I had been missing in my walk with Jesus. Needless to say, it has since become one of my favorite books of the Bible.

Here, I will share with you some insights into this book. Instead of giving you a whole verse-by-verse commentary on the book, I'll highlight some of the key verses that jumped out and spoke to me, and I pray they will be a blessing to you, too.

# A Colossians Man – Chapter 1

*<sup>5</sup> Your faith and love have arisen from the hope laid up for you in heaven, which you have heard about in the message of truth, the gospel <sup>6</sup>that has come to you. Just as in the entire world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, so it has also been bearing fruit and growing among you from the first day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.*

This section is speaking about the Gospel of Jesus. So many times we hear that word, and sort of tune out what follows because we think that since we are saved, we don't have to worry about it. Yes, Salvation is a crucial part of the Gospel, but there is more to it than that and we get into trouble when we stop there.

In verse 6, Paul states that the Gospel is the grace (unmerited favor) of God in truth. Jesus paid a huge price for us on the Cross. But His goal wasn't just so we could be with Him in Heaven; He also wants us to live as reflections of Him on earth. We do that by knowing Him more and living in the grace He has provided for us.

*<sup>9</sup>For this reason we also, from the day we heard about you, have not ceased praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup>so that you may live worthily of the Lord and please him in all respects - bearing fruit in every good deed, growing in the knowledge of God, <sup>11</sup>being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for the display of all patience and steadfastness, joyfully <sup>12</sup>giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light. <sup>13</sup>He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the Son he loves, <sup>14</sup>in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

Verse 12 holds another treasure that is so good! Be careful, or you'll miss the phrase that says God has qualified us to share in an inheritance. Wow! This reinforces the idea that all the benefits of grace are our inheritance not

because of us, but entirely because of God. He is the one who qualified us by what Jesus did on the Cross.

Verse 14 re-emphasizes the Gospel message: our sins are forgiven. One of my favorite songs by Jimmy Needham sums the Gospel up very poetically and well when it says: “Child you’re forgiven and loved...now there is no condemnation in you<sup>9</sup>.”

*<sup>16</sup> for all things in heaven and on earth were created by him - all things, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions, whether principalities or powers - all things were created through him and for him.*

This includes you and me...we were made FOR HIM. It always blows me away when I dwell on this verse. Somehow, my life somehow brings Him pleasure, especially when I see His grace and respond to Him. He desires to have a relationship with me that is richer, deeper and beyond anything I can imagine and that is why I am here!

*<sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in the Son <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile all things to himself by making peace through the blood of his cross - through him, whether things on earth or things in heaven.*

It’s easy to miss the importance of the Cross in our lives. How often do we stop and just let the reality of what Christ did sink in until we fully recognize how huge it is? The Cross is something so big that it completely changed history and allowed us access to God. That is mind-blowing when we take the time to dwell on it! The sacrifice of one man has given all of us access to the Creator of the Universe. Wow!

*<sup>21</sup> And you were at one time strangers and enemies in your minds as expressed through your evil deeds, <sup>22</sup>but now he has reconciled you by his physical body through death to present you holy, without blemish, and blameless before him - <sup>23</sup>if indeed you remain in the faith, established and firm, without shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard. This gospel has also been preached in all creation under heaven, and I, Paul, have become its servant.*



We are blameless before God – so long as we remain in the faith, without shifting from the hope of the gospel. That “remaining” implies resting in confidence, not letting our faith become distracted from being fixed on Jesus. Peter talks about this in his epistle too, and I actually love the way Peter puts it in II Peter 1:3-11, specifically in verse 9 where he says:

*<sup>9</sup> But concerning the one who lacks such things - he is blind. That is to say, he is nearsighted, since he has forgotten about the cleansing of his past sins.*

Both Peter and Paul point out that in our understanding and acceptance of the gospel, it is God’s unmerited favor that makes us forgiven and loved. If we can rest in that knowledge, a victorious, God-pleasing life is ours. Paul states in verse 23 of Colossians that we should remain firm without shifting.

Here is where we so often get into trouble: we “shift” by trying to add to the gospel. Instead of rest and acceptance in the work that has already been done, we try and mix in living by the law. This leads to looking at our failings and seeing only our inadequacies instead of staying firm in the hope of the gospel which tells us it is Christ who did it all on the cross for us. Our only part is to receive His gift of grace.

*<sup>25</sup> I became a servant of the church according to the stewardship from God - given to me for you - in order to complete the word of God, <sup>26</sup>that is, the mystery that has been kept hidden from ages and generations, but has now been revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup>God wanted to make known to them the glorious riches of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. <sup>28</sup>We proclaim him by instructing and teaching all people with all wisdom so that we may present every person mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup>Toward this goal I also labor, struggling according to his power that powerfully works in me.*

As I look at my calling as a Colossians man, I see my personal purpose. I believe God has called me to serve the Church by reminding believers about the gospel and what it means to their lives. We struggle and strive so much for what is already ours, if we would only stop our struggling and

learn to rest in the finished work of the cross. The reality is, as Jimmy Needham's song says, "Child you **are** forgiven and loved" (emphasis mine).

# A Colossians Man – Chapter 2

*<sup>2</sup> My goal is that their hearts, having been knit together in love, may be encouraged, and that they may have all the riches that assurance brings in their understanding of the knowledge of the mystery of God, namely, Christ, <sup>3</sup>in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

Paul goes to such great lengths in this book to emphasize calling God has on each of us to learn to rest in Him. In a sense, as Christians, we are *all* called to learn how to rest in our relationship with Him, and to share the good news of what He has done and the incredible freedom that comes from learning to rest in that already accomplished work.

*<sup>8</sup> Be careful not to allow anyone to captivate you through an empty, deceitful philosophy that is according to human traditions and the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. <sup>9</sup>For in him all the fullness of deity lives in bodily form, <sup>10</sup>and you have been filled in him, who is the head over every ruler and authority. <sup>11</sup>In him you also were circumcised - not, however, with a circumcision performed by human hands, but by the removal of the fleshly body, that is, through the circumcision done by Christ. <sup>12</sup>Having been buried with him in baptism, you also have been raised with him through your faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead. <sup>13</sup>And even though you were dead in your transgressions and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he nevertheless made you alive with him, having forgiven all your transgressions. <sup>14</sup>He has destroyed what was against us, a certificate of indebtedness expressed in decrees opposed to us. He has taken it away by nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup>Disarming the rulers and authorities, he has made a public disgrace of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*

Paul reminds us to be on guard against being led astray. He had plenty of experience seeing how easy it is for believers to become deceived! If you listen with a careful ear, you'll hear how a message of works creeps in to mix with a message of grace. Our human nature loves to take the credit for

things, and I think it comes out in this tendency to promote a gospel of works. We want to believe that our bountiful lives have something to do with what we did to earn, and oppositely, we want to know there's something tangible we can do to fix any problems that arise.

The problem is that in living with that mentality, we are trying to be the driver of our relationship with Christ when in reality, He is the ultimate initiator. It is only by His work on the Cross that we have anything good in our lives. Read verse 13 again; it serves as a reminder that Jesus paid the price for all our sins, and that we stand forgiven. Not just the sins from before we came to Christ or the ones we remember to confess, but ALL of them, including those we haven't even committed yet!

*<sup>16</sup> Therefore do not let anyone judge you with respect to food or drink, or in the matter of a feast, new moon, or Sabbath days - <sup>17</sup>these are only the shadow of the things to come, but the reality is Christ! <sup>18</sup>Let no one who delights in humility and the worship of angels pass judgment on you. That person goes on at great lengths about what he has supposedly seen, but he is puffed up with empty notions by his fleshly mind. <sup>19</sup>He has not held fast to the head from whom the whole body, supported and knit together through its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God. <sup>20</sup>If you have died with Christ to the elemental spirits of the world, why do you submit to them as though you lived in the world? <sup>21</sup>”Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!” <sup>22</sup>These are all destined to perish with use, founded as they are on human commands and teachings. <sup>23</sup>Even though they have the appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship and false humility achieved by an unsparing treatment of the body - a wisdom with no true value - they in reality result in fleshly indulgence.*

Often, the world looks at Christians and wants no part of who we are or what we represent. Among many reasons they have for avoiding our way of life, a big one is our penchant for following the rules. With more clarity than we have, they don't see any benefit from living that way. It's part of the reason so many churches lack power and authority in making an impact on their community.

Our strategy instead should be to show what real freedom in Christ is all about: being free of fear and condemnation, living a life of hope, joy, and the freedom to love and be loved. How could anyone not see the benefit in that?

# A Colossians Man – Chapter 3

*<sup>1</sup> Therefore, if you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>Keep thinking about things above, not things on the earth, <sup>3</sup>for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup>When Christ (who is your life) appears, then you too will be revealed in glory with him.*

A key concept this verse unveils is that we are hidden in Christ. This can really revolutionize our thinking, if we fully grasp it. What does being hidden in Christ mean? It means that when the Father looks at us, He doesn't see us the way we see us, with all our faults, problems, and poor choices. No, when He looks at us, He sees Christ. Christ effectually covers over all of our blemishes, so that when we stand before the Father, He sees us as He intended us to be: pure, holy, and righteous before Him. Christ's perfect obedience in dying on the Cross trumps our sin and failures, every time.

*<sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and exhorting one another with all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, all with grace in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup>And whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

It's easy to miss the depth of living that Paul is implying in these verses. He isn't just talking about living a good life, believing in Jesus, and going to Heaven. He's talking about *everything* in our life being for the glory of God. Not just Sunday mornings or Wednesday nights, but every moment, every action, every word. I find that my Christian friends reflect opposite mentalities towards Christian living.

Some, we share the same values of being believers in Christ, and when we get together we have a good time and talk about life. There's nothing wrong with this, and I value those relationships greatly. But there are other friends that I get excited to spend time with. We talk about meatier things – about

God, what the Word has been speaking to us, how a song has blessed us, how the Holy Spirit is guiding us. Those conversations and relationships are centered around God in our lives, not necessarily just things we have in common.

For example, many years ago I went to Bible College for a semester. During that brief time, I made some amazing friends I'm still connected to, even if it's just online. Last year I had the opportunity to reconnect with one of my friends from Sweden who I went to school with. Because of his schedule, we were only able to visit for a short amount of time. Sure, we updated each other on big events like kids and what we're doing for a living, but the best part of the visit for me was hearing what God was doing in his life and seeing the journey of faith and grace he was on.

When Jesus is purposefully at the center of our relationship, there is an incredible depth and connection you can experience with others. Choosing to live a life centered around Christ and His purpose opens us up to experiencing a whole new level of living, where we can experience true relationship with Him and others.

# A Colossians Man – Chapter 4

*<sup>2</sup> Be devoted to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup>Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunities. <sup>6</sup>Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer everyone.*

We can all agree that prayer is important, at least in theory, yet at times we don't really expect our time in prayer to be as dynamic as Christ desires it to be. Paul's reminder to be alert when we pray seems to indicate to me that we should be waiting and anticipating something to happen. Prayer is our connecting point with God. It is in our times of prayer that He sends answers to our prayers or speaks to us directly through the Holy Spirit. But if we aren't alert, we'll sleep through the whole experience.

*<sup>12</sup>Epaphras, who is one of you and a slave of Christ, greets you.*

Even though this is just an aside at the end of the book, I find it so impacting! Epaphras was known as a slave of Christ. What an incredible reputation to have, that Paul would even speak that of him. It's easy to forget that God has called the last to be first and the first to be last, and that even Christ came not to be served but to serve. Our calling is the same: to be slaves to the purpose and will of God for our life. Would that you and I could have a reputation of being true slaves of Christ!



# Faith to be Healed

A WHILE BACK, I made a list of things in my physical body I'd like to see fixed. These ranged from my Rosacea to weight loss. And while those might not seem like "important" things to be healed from, what I read in Scripture tells me God desires to make us healed and whole... and I can only assume that would include things like a skin problem and a few extra pounds.

The Bible tells us that "by His stripes we are healed<sup>xxxiii</sup>," but I don't know that I'd ever spend much time asking God for healings for myself. I've prayed for others and from time to time, God showed up in an obvious way and did a miracle. I've also been in places to witness "big" miracles – you know, the blind seeing, the lame walking, and all that. I'm blessed to have been a part of it all. But even through those experiences, there has always been a bit of a disconnect in my mind. My attitude has been more of an "I hope God heals" than a firm belief that He actually does.

Let me put it another way. On the one hand, I know that God heals. I've seen it and on a small scale, I've even been part of the process. However, my ability to truly grasp the concept wasn't complete. Prior to beginning my journey to a greater understanding of His grace, my approach to healing prayers was all about finding just the right formula. Often, my prayers went along the line of "if it is Your will, please heal this person." At the time, I didn't realize just how incorrect this was. And to all the people I ever prayed for that way, from the bottom of my heart, I'm sorry.

The first step in setting things on the right track was realizing that God is willing. All the time, every time, for every person. The Greek word used for "healing" shares the same root with the word for salvation (Sozo), which essentially means to be made whole. God's desire is for every one of us to be made whole, both physically and spiritually, in every area of our lives. We should never doubt that part of the equation. That said, there are many reasons people don't get healed just like there are many reasons people don't get saved. But that doesn't change the fact that God desires for

everyone to be made whole. As a side note, I would recommend reading “Healing” by Fr Francis McNutt for a great view of why people don’t get healed and how people can remove possible barriers to healing.

The second step was understanding the true role of faith in the healing process. I had always believed healing was based on faith. In other words, so long as I was able to muster up enough faith, then the healing I was asking for would happen. Even Jesus rebuked His disciples for not having enough faith to heal<sup>10</sup>. But the problem wasn’t with faith in and of itself, but rather what my faith was being placed *in*.

Faith for healing is actually much simpler than we make it out to be. The most freeing realization is that healing *doesn’t* happen based on my faith for the healing. Healing comes out of my faith that Jesus is who He says He is, and that He did what He said He did. Do you believe, that is, have faith, that Jesus paid the price on the Cross to make us whole? Yes? That’s all it takes.

The object of our faith is Jesus and the Cross, not the person or disease that is in front of us. My faith has already saved me and moved me from a destiny of hell to a destiny of Heaven. I not only have access to the King of all kings, but I am a co-heir with Christ and a friend of God. Having our faith anchored in that reality is what connects us to God’s healing power, not our ability to muster up false confidence.

So now that I know God is willing to heal and I know that having faith isn’t the barrier to healing, where are all the healings? Again quoting Isaiah, “by His stripes we are healed.” By His stripes we ARE healed. *Are* healed, not *will be* healed or *may be* healed. We *are* healed, past tense, it’s already done. Then the question begs to be asked: where is the evidence of that healing? For me, one look in the mirror tells me I still have Rosacea making me look like Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer.

Understanding healing requires a shift in our thinking, just as understanding much of Christianity demands. Even in healing, just like in other areas of life, it still comes back to learning how to rest in the finished work of the Cross. For instance, when I gave over my finances to God and stopped worrying, I found myself having a hard time keeping track of all the little

ways God provided for me and met all my needs. The moment I stopped trying to force and figure out my relationships and left them to Him, my kids became more interested in God than they had been in years and co-workers began approaching me to talk about God. It's never happened so effortlessly before in my life. It seems the more I am able to focus on the fact that I am forgiven and loved, simply enjoying my relationship with Jesus, the more all the other things in my life fall into place. Hmm, sounds like I've read somewhere... [xxxiv](#)

The same principle applies to healing. We must come to the realization that we *have* been healed. As we rest in that knowledge and stop worrying about whether God is willing or if we have enough faith, then our healing will start to come to pass. Jesus has already paid the price with His perfect work on the Cross. As we choose to rely on that rather than being so concerned with when we see evidence of our healing, it's only a matter of time before we wake up one day realizing the symptoms of our sickness are no longer with us.

Another piece of the equation is praying for others. In Appendix C, I share an outline of how I pray for people. It's important to remember that the key is not the outline, but rather in walking in the authority Jesus gave us. It's a spiritual authority that allows us to have powerful impact on the world around us... If we choose to utilize it.

When I pray for other people, I have the right and authority to use the name of Jesus to bring healing to their bodies. That isn't to say I'm somehow responsible for the healing, because I'm not. Jesus allows me to participate by healing the vessel He uses; He still gets all the credit and glory. I think in large part Jesus chooses to do things this way to open doors so that the Gospel of grace can be shared and the Kingdom of God established in the lives of those who don't believe.

Does everyone get healed? No. Have I seen all my personal healings come to pass? Nope. But am I worried about it? Not a bit. Why? Because He does the work, not me. He knows the best time and season, and He sees my heart. My healings are here, and I am thankful for them. I will gladly share them with others as they manifest in my life.

And as for the other people I pray for who aren't healed, if nothing else, they will know that I loved them enough to pray for them and maybe that is just the seed they needed to have planted in their hearts for God to use down the road. I will be glad to simply do my part of praying, and leave the results up to Him.

# Disciplines of Life

SOMEWHERE IN MY brain, there's a switch I can't seem to find. It's the switch that flips my thinking from being focused on my works earning me God's favor to being focused instead on God's gift of grace. For all my knowledge that everything I have from God is entirely because of grace, I still find myself looking for the right formula to receive God's blessings. The fact is, I can't earn anything from God. More than that, I already have everything I need from Him because of the perfect sacrifice Jesus made on the Cross.

When I think about grace versus works and how the two don't mix, Peter throws me a curve ball when he says:

“Make every effort to add to your faith excellence, to excellence knowledge; to knowledge, self-control; to self-control, perseverance; to perseverance, godliness; to godliness brotherly affection; to brotherly affection, unselfish love.”

“Make every effort?” That sounds a lot like works to me! So what's the point of tying anything spiritual (faith, godliness, etc.) if all it does is breed a works mentality that holds us back from fully experiencing the grace of God? Let me say this: while it's true that making these disciplines a part of your life won't earn you any extra points with God, there is great value in implementing them – so long as they don't become an end to themselves.

In that same verse, Peter goes on to say: “For if these things are really yours and are continually increasing, they will keep you from becoming ineffective and unproductive in your pursuit of *knowing our Lord Jesus Christ more intimately.*”

Bingo, there it is! Our disciplines are not about earning anything from God, but about helping us get to know God more intimately. It's about getting to see how He works in our lives, seeing how much He longs to see us know him more, about deepening our relationship with Him. By the way, at the

end of that section Peter reminds us that all these “works” come only through remembering that our sins are forgiven (v. 26). There it is: the basis is still the work of the Cross.

In keeping with Peter’s exhortation, I find that these three spiritual disciplines in particular add a lot to our spiritual life, our path to knowing Him better: tithing, Bible reading, and prayer.

# Disciplines of Life: Tithing

TITHING IS ONE of those spiritual things that you can read entire books on, hear numerous sermons about, and still be utterly confused by. In the Old Testament, tithing is a teaching that comes with a promise attached to it – one that God actually challenges us to put Him to the test on<sup>11</sup>.

The Old Testament is full of many examples of God telling His people to bring in the first fruits of their crops to the temple, or to give Him the best from the labor of their hands. Just take a glance through the book of Leviticus – you’ll find at least 20 verses talking about the subject of bringing first fruits to God. A huge focus of this book – and others in the Old Testament – is the subject of tithing. So why, you may ask, should we bother with that if we are no longer under the law but under grace instead? Let’s take a look at what the law of grace in the New Testament has to say on the subject.

In the New Testament, the standard actually gets raised even higher. Instead of a ten percent tithe, we are asked to give everything. Take a look at what it says in Acts 2:43-44: “they held *everything in common*...” At this point in the church, people were bringing all of their belongings to be redistributed to those in need. Makes a tithe seem pretty small in comparison! What pastor today wouldn’t want his congregation to be so concerned about the welfare of others that they are willing to bring all they own to give to those in need?

This may bring up a question of how *much* you should give. In 2 Corinthians 9:6-8, Paul sets out the best guidance on tithing when he says you should give what you have decided in your heart, truly wanting to give and not because you have to. This verse ends with a promise of provision, that in our generosity God will make sure we have more than enough “in every way, at all times.”

Tithing is an expression of faith and worship. It makes a statement that God is faithful, and is worthy of our complete and undivided trust. Tithing sets

us apart from the world and sets us up as examples. But it also serves as a reminder to us about God's faithfulness and provision in our lives. I tithe to honor Him and put my faith into action. It isn't about getting something in return. I simply trust that He can do more with what is left of my money after tithing than I could do if I kept everything.

This is one of the subjects that caused many fights in my marriage. We went 'round and 'round discussing my desire to trust God to provide, and her desire to make sure the kids were fed. It was an endless argument, and one we never resolved. So once I was single, I was determined to make tithing a regular part of my life. It started out as a way to show my dependence on Him and my trust in His provision. More recently, it has become a way that I can honor and worship Him and say: "thanks for being in my life."

In all the reading I've done and sermons I've listened to on the subject, very few give personal, real-life examples. In this section, I'll share what tithes and offerings look like in my life and in my budget. This is by no means the only way to do it, nor is it an authoritative teaching I found in Scripture. It's simply how I do it. My hope is that you are encouraged and inspired to see how you can incorporate tithing and giving into your own budget.

My personal goal with money is to give away more than I keep for myself, and that starts with tithing. Currently, I tithe 25% of my net income to my local church. I tithe on my net income (the income I get after taxes) because that is the money I control and, to be quite honest, it's easier for me to calculate. In time, my goal is to be tithing at least 51% of my net income. I've actually known a few pastors who actually tithe way beyond 51%, and God has honored them by meeting all their needs in some pretty miraculous ways. Yes, 51% is my goal, but the real goal at the heart of that is to know God better and see His Hand in my life. As I mentioned earlier, Paul tells us that God loves a cheerful giver and that you should give whatever is in your heart. The point here is not the amount, but rather that you are giving *something*. As your relationship with God grows, just you see if your desire to give doesn't grow also!

Offerings in the Old Testament were a way for the Israelites to thank God for an answer to prayer or in recognition of His faithfulness. They were always focused on God, who He is and what He has done. They were



spontaneous responses from people, not scheduled or required like the first fruits offerings we talked about in relation to tithing. Leviticus gives an outline of the rules for the thanks offerings, and throughout the Old Testament, we see spontaneous offerings periodically given, such as kings who recognized the battle they just won was only because God was on their side.

For me personally, offerings fall into two categories, neither of which is really in response to an answered prayer, but are both in recognition that God is faithful and on my side. I regularly give beyond my tithe to God's work that is meaningful to me and close to my heart. In most cases, I'm giving to a ministry because I know the people personally and believe God has called them to it and so desire to support them in it. Secondly, I give at other times spontaneously simply because I want to be a blessing to others just because I can. God promises more than enough to meet our needs and bless others, so this second part is just my chance to pass along that blessing.

In my case, my giving is to support a few missionaries. This is an amount of money in addition to my tithe, but for the ease of budgeting, I calculate my offerings as a percent of my tithe. For example, say that I made \$120 this week. I get \$100 after taxes, so my tithe of 25% is \$25. I then give an offering that is 20% of my tithe to three different ministries. 20% of \$25 is \$5, which makes my total giving for that week \$40.

I try to be consistent with scripture by bringing the first fruits of my labors. For me, this means the money that I earn. I don't tithe on monetary gifts. I recognize that every good thing comes from God, and He gets my thanks and gratitude. Unlike my earnings, it feels wrong to me to give a gift back to the giver of the gift. I personally would be hurt to have my kids feel obligated to give me part of a gift I had just given them. A gift given out of a pure motive is meant to be enjoyed as an unexpected blessing. I take part by blessing others spontaneously as part of my offerings. No set person, no set amount, just what seems appropriate or what I am prompted to do at the time.

As a footnote to all this talk, ever since I have been tithing, I have never gone without. I manage my money as a good steward, and things have been

awfully tight at times. But I have never once lacked. Praise God for His faithfulness!

# Disciplines of Life: Reading

READING THE BIBLE is like reading no other book in the world. The more you read of it, the more you want of it. The more you're familiar with it, the more you find the words coming to mind even when you aren't looking at it. It's Divinely inspired, and the Holy Spirit can breathe upon it to speak to us. Few books I know of can be read time and time again, and yet still be fresh like it was the first time you read it. None have the same level of long-term day-to-day impact the Bible can have on you. And few books have the ability to speak just the right word into your life at just the right moment.

In my life, I've seen two benefits to reading the Bible regularly. First, it shows what Godly living looks like and me who Jesus is. As one anagram puts it, the Bible is "Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth." Many of the questions we have in life are answered for us, at least in principle if not specifically, when we take the time to read and understand God's Word.

Secondly, while not the only way God speaks to us, the Bible is one way the Holy Spirit talks to us. Anyone that has read any part of the Bible already knows that from time to time, you sense that God is speaking directly to you through the words on the page. This is the Holy Spirit that breathes life into God's word. He can use the words on the page to speak directly into your life. One way He does this is by quickening that one special verse to us that speaks into a situation or gives us comfort in a challenging situation. All you have to do for this to happen is open the Word, ask God to speak to you, and read it!

The Bible really does give us the most basic instructions on life and Godliness, but there's so much more to it than that. It provides us with guidance about how we are supposed to live our lives, it gives us God's promises, and lays out an eternal hope for us. And yet even though the answers to so many of our questions are found in the Word, very few Christians spend time mining the Bible to uncover those priceless jewels.

One of the best ways to build a habit in your life of being in the Word is to find a structured reading plan. There are several churches and ministries that publish these plans and distribute them for free, often on a card you can conveniently keep in the front of your Bible. Being a bit of a tech-geek, I like electronic things. I have a smart phone, and yes, there is an app for that. YouVersion ([www.youversion.com](http://www.youversion.com)) is a great free app that has literally hundreds of reading plans. This allows you to mix it up a bit, with plans that take you through the Bible straight from cover to cover, walk you through the Bible chronologically, or have portions of both testaments each day. Carrying it on my phone also eliminates my ability to make excuses about not having time. While I normally do my reading in the morning, sometimes work or other commitments get in the way. With it on my phone, I can easily spend time on my lunch making sure I get in the Word.

Ten to fifteen minutes a day is a great investment in getting to know about God and His ways. Even if it's just a few minutes, God can multiply that time and use it as an open door to speak to you. The more you feed your inner man with the Word, the hungrier you'll get for it. Making it a discipline in your life creates room for the Holy Spirit to come in and speak to you specifically.

# Disciplines of Life: Prayer

CHRISTIANITY IS BUILT on the foundation of our relationship with God. Everything in the Bible, all the doctrines, ultimately serves the purpose of showing us a loving God who desires to have an intimate relationship with us. Prayer is probably one of the most important things we can do to build that relationship. He is a living God, not a philosophy or religion of rules to be followed. And as an Individual pursuing relationship with us, talking with Him provides us a way to develop deeper intimacy with God.

While reading the Bible helps you know about God, and God can use the Word to speak to you, the Bible alone can never replace spending time with God and getting to know Him in a personal way. Prayer is communication with God. It's conversation, interaction, not just a liturgy or ritual. Paul tells us to "pray without ceasing<sup>xxxv</sup>." The implication is that prayer is more than just a one-time event in our day. There is prayer that happens in a time set aside in your day for concentrated, focused communication with God. But there is also prayer that comes informally throughout the course of the day. Think of it as your running commentary with God about the events and situations of your day.

As mentioned before, prayer at its core is simply a conversation between you and God. There isn't a special formula or certain type of "prayer speak" using thee's and thou's. It's really just a time to calm your spirit and chat with your Abba Father. Really, just talk to Him like you would to the person on this earth you're the closest to and can be the most vulnerable with: no formalities, no repetitions, just down-to-earth honesty. Remember: He's the God of the universe. He knows you more intimately than any human ever could. Yes, He knows your thoughts, but He wants to hear you say them.

Also just like a regular conversation with a friend, it's important to take time to listen. Sometimes we can pray through a long list of requests, say amen, and leave God hanging as we walk away. He wants to answer us, but we cut Him off with our "amen," having already moved on to the next thing on our agenda without hearing what He had to say.

A practice I'm seeing and experiencing more and more in some churches is what is called "soaking prayer." Simply put, you start by asking God through the Holy Spirit to come and speak to you. That's it. Then, you wait and listen, focusing on the Cross if you are having a hard time dialing down and actually listening to God. But the emphasis here is focusing on the listening aspect of prayer. I've done this on my own and with others, and it has always been a blessing.

I remember once a long time ago I was taking a motorcycle trip across the United States and stopped in at a Christian summer camp where a friend of mine was a counselor. He invited me to share at his cabin's devotional time, and I thought I would introduce these young men to the idea of listening to God. So I had them sit and focus on hearing the voice of God. After we listened for a while, I asked them for feedback. Most said they sensed God's presence and felt God's love. The biggest complaint I got from these twelve-year-olds was why I had stopped so soon! It had been close to a half hour! Seems time didn't matter much with them when they were just soaking in God's Presence.

As adults in this Western culture with very short attention spans, we have a hard time actually listening to one another, much less sitting still long enough to listen to an invisible God. But it's in learning to listen to God that our lives will be revolutionized. By listening, we allow God Himself to write His laws on our hearts<sup>[xxxvi](#)</sup>. Paul the Apostle listened closely to God's directions. For example, in Acts<sup>[xxxvii](#)</sup> he writes about the Holy Spirit preventing them from going to Bithynia<sup>[xxxviii](#)</sup>. Had they not taken the time to listen, I believe they would have missed doing something God specifically had in mind for them.

Yes, our personal experience listening to the voice of God is subjective. And yes, there have been people who horribly abused "hearing the voice of God" by using it as an excuse to do weird and even awful things. But before you get all worried about going off the deep end on some weird tangent, remember two things.

First, when combined with the discipline of reading the Bible, we have an automatic litmus test. God will never tell us to do something that

contradicts His written Word. The caution comes in that if we don't read His Word and our minds aren't saturated with it, our ability to rightly discern His leading is diminished. That's when it becomes easy to get weird.

Second, we know that if we seek Him and ask for His guidance, He'll give it to us. God promises to draw near to us as we draw near to Him<sup>xxxix</sup> and to answer us when we call on Him<sup>xl</sup>. Jesus goes to extensive lengths during His time on earth to help us see the goodness of God, drawing a comparison between our human relationships with our children to God's relationship with us. He says in this passage<sup>xli</sup> that no matter how great our desire to do good things for our kids might be, God's desire and *ability* to give good gifts is incomparably greater. So there's no need to fear God telling us to do something we'll hate or that will do us harm.

Bottom line, the key to prayer is just having a chat with God and letting Him know what's on your mind. There are many great books on prayer with great ideas and tips, but it isn't a competition to be the best prayer. All God wants is an open and honest heart. He so loves to hear us and wants to be near us, if we will let Him.

One final thought about prayer. Because of the perfect sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, we have access to God 24/7. And because of Christ, we can come boldly into God's throne room. Jesus makes it possible for us to have immediate, intimate access to the Father. This is a fact not dependent on our feelings, so regardless of whether you feel like God is near, know that He is there. God the Father delights in having you come to Him any time of the day or night – He always has time for you.

Keep this in mind when you fall short. Of all the ways Satan uses to sneak up and pounce on us, shame is a biggie. Satan will remind you in detail of exactly what you did, reciting words of "poor you, you fell short and sinned. How can you go to God and ask anything, you don't deserve it. You blew it again!" I've been there and done that. And you know what? Satan's right – sort of. We *don't* deserve the access we have to God, if the system were based on our performance. Our saving grace is that our access to God *isn't* dependent on us, but on Christ's perfect sacrifice.

Don't fall into the trap of hearing Satan or your own flesh tell you how unworthy you are and that you can't come to God because you are ashamed of your sins. Fact is, you aren't worthy – that's what grace is all about. Lord knows how many times I've fallen short of God's best, but it doesn't matter. We get to come to God any time, day or night, no matter how we feel or what we've done. The thing God desperately wants from you is to simply have a relationship with you, regardless of what you look like or what you've done. Jesus paid the price already for all your sins, so get over it and come have a chat with the God who loves you more than life. I'm sure you guys will be able to work it out and have a laugh over it someday.



# Seeking Rewards vs. the Reward Giver

LISTENING TO THE saints who have gone before us can be such a wonderfully rich experience. They have walked with God long enough to learn priceless life lessons, some of which may sound peculiar to us. We are all on a journey with God and all of us are, in our own way, one of those saints with a treasure chest filled with the richness of relationship with God. Some of these lessons, for me, anyway, are obvious and yet don't stick as much as I'd like. Others are more subtle and easier to remember.

One trait that almost always marks the life of an aged saint who has served Jesus their whole life is how simple their faith becomes. God is an incredibly complex Being. The longer I walk with Him, the more I realize I really don't know that much about Him. The more I learn, the more I'm aware of what I don't know. In most relationships, the longer you spend with a person the better you get to know them. But that's not always the case with God. His ways are so much higher than our ways<sup>12</sup> and His love, compassion, wisdom, and patience are so much more than I could ever comprehend. About the time I think I understand something, I realize I am just scratching the surface.

There is no limit to the depth of knowing God. The more intimately we know Him, the hungrier we become for more of Him. This desire for more of God leads us to transition from seeking God's blessings to simply seeking Him. We know this is the right way to approach God, at least in our heads. Anyone who has felt His touch and His presence will desire to be in that place again. But for that shift to happen on a deeper, heart level is something that has to be almost daily realigned. Life happens, daily needs and wants creep into our view, and our desire to see those things fulfilled takes our eyes off of the Giver and onto the gifts.

We want to see Him and nothing but Him, but when the funds are tight or the body is sick or the relationship is in crisis, it's so easy to lose focus until

the need is met. God has been so faithful to meet all of my needs over and over again – you’d think I would learn to just trust and not be worried. We are told to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and not worry about the rest. A good place to start learning that is to simply rest in Him and spend time in His presence. For where He is, there His kingdom is.

Thankfully, our God is amazingly patient, loving, and gentle. He is continually drawing us into His Presence. More than just being OK with us bringing our daily needs before Him, He likes it. God wants us to communicate our needs and anxious thoughts to Him, but He doesn’t want us to dwell on them. We are to *cast* all our cares on Him<sup>xlii</sup>. He wants to carry those burdens for us. The proper approach is to let God know our trouble, release it into His hands, and then focus on who He is. It isn’t that He doesn’t already know what we need, but rather that it gives us a chance to have dialogue about the things that are important to us, His kids. In the process, hopefully we are able to leave the conversation seeing things from His perspective, learning from Him. The better I learn to listen to Him when He tells me to do or say something, the more I see His hand working greater miracles than if I had done it my own way.

Recently, I was challenged by something my pastor said regarding our need to position ourselves to receive from God. If grace is unmerited favor, and if His gifts and blessings are therefore independent of my actions, why do I need to position myself? As I processed the idea, two things came to mind. First, if God were to suddenly bestow upon me all the gifts of heaven and earth that are mine by right as a son of God, I honestly don’t think I would know how to handle it. I’d probably wind up like those folks who win the lottery and find themselves in bankruptcy a year or two down the road. God’s method of blessing us is to do it in a way that we can *sustain* that blessing over time through increasing maturity and wisdom.

My understanding of what it meant to be positioned for blessing came in reading the parable of the talents. The story goes that a rich land owner gave three servants each a different amount of money, not explaining why each got what they did. The landowner leaves, and upon his return, finds that two of the servants had doubled the money they had been given. The landowner rewards them with more because they had been faithful with the

little they had been given. I walked away pondering the principle that our faithfulness with what God has given us now directly relates with receiving more later. As we learn to handle the little we have now, God will give us more, and once we've mastered that, He'll bless us at the next level and so on. Faithfulness and stewardship are how we position ourselves to receive the blessings God has in store for us, be it financial, relational, health, wisdom, or any other good thing.

I close this section by reminding us all that when our goal is more of Him, there will be more coming our way. The more we desire God, the more our desires align with His, to the point that things our natural man might be appalled at, our spiritual man actually hungers for. An example of this is to desire sharing in Jesus' sufferings. While I'm not really a fan of pain, there is this part of me that is starting to desire being found worthy to share in Jesus' sufferings. If His great love for me caused Him to suffer unimaginable agony, if He was willing to become sin and be denied by the Father so that I could know righteousness, how could I *not* be willing to suffer for Him? It seems too opposite to be a blessing, but becoming like Jesus is the ultimate blessing we can experience, even if it involves suffering to get there.

I have no doubt this message of mine about God's grace will not sit well with some. That some of my past sins will likely be thrown in my face to prove I'm not worthy. Let's face it: that would be the truth. I am *not* worthy in and of myself or based on my past, but because of God and what Jesus did on the Cross. And that's what matters in the end.

# Taught By the Spirit, Written On Our Hearts

AS I'VE SHARED the message of God's grace with others, I frequently hear the question asked, "Doesn't this give us a license to sin?" which leads into the discussion of how we know right from wrong. If following the letter of the law isn't how we please God, then why should we follow it at all? At first glance, it can appear that following absolute grace negates our responsibility to worry about right and wrong. But there is an answer, and it has to do with separating in our minds the law and right and wrong.

The Bible says that God will write his laws on our hearts<sup>xliii</sup>. In the same section of Hebrews, He states we will know Him<sup>xliv</sup>. There are two Old Testament stories that reinforce this notion of our knowledge of right and wrong existing apart from the law.

In Genesis<sup>xlv</sup>, we read the story of Joseph. He was a man given an incredible gift to interpret prophetic dreams. As his father's favorite, his many brothers grew jealous and tried to get rid of him. Their chance came one day while out tending the fields, and they sold him to slave traders who took Joseph down to Egypt. While there, he was sold to a man named Potipher who was one of Pharaoh's high officials. Even without any knowledge of God, Potipher could tell God was with Joseph and had His hand on him<sup>xlvi</sup>. Potipher's wife took a liking to Joseph and attempted seducing him to sleep with her. Joseph kept putting her off, but her attempts became bolder to the point that one day she cornered him. Joseph fled the room, but left his cloak which was used as evidence against him to put him in jail.

In the midst of this uncomfortable mess when Potipher's wife was trying to get Joseph the last time, Joseph states that "I will not sin against Potipher or God<sup>xlvii</sup>." He knew that sleeping with another man's wife was wrong. How did he know? This was at least 400 years *before* God gave Moses the law

and before Israel became a nation. I submit that it was because God had written that law upon his heart.

Again in Genesis, we read the sad tale of Sodom and Gomorrah<sup>xlvi</sup>. God had looked on these cities and determined they were evil, and ripe for punishment. He sent two angels to destroy the cities, and upon entering they are met by a man name Lot who invites them to stay in his house. The angels tried to refuse but Lot insists, so they went with him where Lot fed them and took care of their needs until evening.

At this point, the townspeople<sup>13</sup> came by Lot's house and demanded for Lot to send the visitors out so they could have sex with them, essentially planning to gang rape the angels. Lot is so taken aback he offers his daughters in their stead because as his guests, these men were under his protection. He urges the townspeople not to "act wickedly<sup>xlix</sup>." Lot recognizes the wickedness of their intentions at a time well before the law of Moses had been given.

Most people today haven't studied the Bible extensively, and yet still have a knowledge of right and wrong. A shooter goes into his school and guns down some of his classmates at a school in Ohio. Without exception, everyone looks at this action as wrong. Being a Christian only heightens our sensitivity to this internal law. Most Christians will feel a certain urging as they pass by the homeless or down and out. While they may not always be sure how to handle the feeling, the compassion and desire to do something is written on our hearts by God and prompted by the Holy Spirit. This was certainly true for me personally.

I didn't grow up in a Christian home. My dad was a merchant seaman, an alcoholic, and a womanizer. He only married my step-mom so he could leave me at home while he travelled. I'm pretty sure my step-mom believed in God, but she never directly shared about her relationship with God that I can recall. I remember one day when I was all of four or five, we walked over the hill to the local 5 and dime store. My step-mom generally felt I was a good boy and trusted me to be left alone in the toys or sporting goods section of a store.

On this particular day, I don't know why, it dawned on me that I could play golf at home if I had a bag of golf tees. So my four-year-old brain thought up a plan to put the bag in my pocket and when my step-mom was ready, out the door we went, stolen golf tees tucked away in my pocket. Four years old and already shoplifting – talk about guilt! Before we got home, I showed my step-mom my loot and confessed. I was hoping she would say it was OK, thank me for confessing, and let me go home with them. Nope: back to the store we went and I had to confess to the store manager. I don't think I ever shoplifted again.

The point isn't how to prevent a kid from shoplifting, but more to illustrate the guilt that I felt even at the young age of 4. Somehow, I knew stealing was wrong without ever being told so. You probably have a story similar to mine: a moment in your childhood when you did something wrong, and somehow you *knew* it was wrong, even without anyone explicitly telling you so. Written on our hearts? Yeah, I think so.

# Keeping You From Your Gifting

WHILE I DON'T claim to be an expert on Satan, I do know that he exists and is very real. I've heard many teachings on knowing your enemy, and while it is important to acknowledge he exists and be familiar with his tricks, it is *most* important to focus on our Commander in Chief, Jesus Christ. Some people get overly caught up in casting out demons and rebuking the devil instead of spending their time and energy pursuing Christ and extending His Kingdom. It all needs to be seen and understood from the proper perspective.

All that being said, you can be completely confident that the moment Satan catches wind that you are starting to move forward into a place of blessing God has for you, your enemy will attack that area and try to trip you up. The unfortunate truth is how often we let him overtake us and find ourselves unable to reach our intended mark for the Kingdom of God. That's why it so often seems the area we are the most gifted in is often the same area of our greatest attacks and moments of weakness.

One of the areas in my life and ministry that was both a blessing and a struggle is my ministry to young people. Earlier in my adult life, I found myself really reaching out to young men who poor or non-existent relationships with their fathers. I had real compassion for kids in that situation. But at times my own kids were hurt by the time and attention I gave to these other kids, and not them. The enemy used my ministry to fatherless kids to build barriers between me and my own kids.

Another tactic the enemy used to limit my influence with young people was through their parents. For example, I encouraged one young man who was undecided about what to do with his future to explore the option of going on a short term mission trip before making a decision about a career path. His parents were set on their son following a particular career, and angrily cut off all my communications with their son. Ironically enough, I found out years later he did do short term missions with YWAM and later became a full time minister.

While that was one of the more extreme examples I experienced of parents limiting how I could speak into their kids lives, it got to the point that I avoided working with young people just so I didn't have to deal with their parents. The enemy leveraged my strained relationship with kids' parents to discourage me from continuing any work with young people at all.

Recently, I reconnected with an old high school friend who had spent years in the ministry. Because of his familiarity with how ministry and Satan operated, he was a good person for me to talk to about how the enemy had limited my ministry to young people. He reaffirmed to me that many times the place God wants us will also be the place we struggle against the most resistance. Because of his encouragement, I began reaching out to young people again and have found my life so blessed. What was once my passion and had become my biggest wound, is now becoming one of my greatest joys. I now get to see many of these young men find their stride in God and start families of their own. I have the honor of being the god-father to one family's kids, and just "dad" to another young couple. It's amazing seeing how God has redeemed that area of my life.



# All Things Will Become New: Your Best Days Are Ahead of You

WHAT COMES TO mind when you read these words: “All things will become new! Your best days are ahead of you”?

When I see them, my first thoughts are flashes of the things I’ve lost in the past: a great salary, my wife, relationships, prestige. Then I think of those things being restored: a better job, better salary, renewed or better relationships. It’s all centered around the things I thought were important, how I saw myself.

In the days since my prophetic assembly, amazing things have taken place. My understanding of what my best days will look like is changing. I know that I am loved and accepted by God just the way I am, not based on my actions. All of my tendencies, even if they never change, will never give God enough reason to stop loving me. That revelation alone means my best days are ahead of me! The best part is it doesn’t stop there. As a new creation in Christ, I have been given authority through Jesus to influence lives, sharing God’s love through words and actions. Being used by God is in my best days.

As I walk forward in faith, I know that because He loves me, He will take care of my needs. When the situation arises, there always seems to be the provision necessary. Even in the job situation, doors have miraculously opened for me to return to South Sudan, where I had previously ministered. If you recall, I started this book project out of obedience to God as I prayed about a job. Within two weeks of completing the manuscript, I was called by a Christian humanitarian aid group to interview for a position in South Sudan. I had previously applied for one position and was turned down, but this new position opened up and even though it was a much lower position than the one I originally applied for, they wanted to know if I was still interested. I figured why not, went to the interview, and within days found myself on a jet to the east coast for training. A dear friend of mine pointed

out the uncanny timing of this new job in connection with finishing the book: it seems God's hand was on this one!

Before I even got to South Sudan while still waiting for my visa, I got promoted into the position I had originally applied for since the guy they hired a few months earlier had quit. This position allows me to use my previous work experience and included staff care as a component. In other words, God has made it part of my job description to be able to speak into people's lives on His behalf. At this time, I can't even begin to count how many times I've been privileged to pray and talk to people about how much God loves them and see His Spirit touch them.

Also on the horizon is more school – pursuing a doctorate in Christian counseling in a program teaching counseling based on God's leading rather than our own human know-how. To me, this sounds like the right emphasis and I am excited about the program.

To sum it all up... God is faithful. Job with a Christian agency taking care of hundreds of thousands of the earth's needy. Position where I am supposed to be a conduit of God's love to our staff. Ability to travel (I'm writing this section from a penthouse apartment in the Canary Islands). Financial provision that's enabled me to eliminate debt outside of school loans. A bright future as I consider a Doctorate, pursue publishing this book, and take on a new role at work. Yup, God is faithful to His promises.

I would be amiss if I made it sound like everything has been great. There have been some off days too. Being alone has been the hardest part at times. It's tough not having someone to share these incredible things with. It's when I am feeling most lonely that the SSA stuff raises up and calls out to me, trying to get in my head. It's easily handled and life goes on. While in South Sudan, one of my best friends died and it was hard not being there. The door to reconciliation with my ex seems to have closed permanently. I missed the weddings of several dear friends. There have been sacrifices made while living this amazing life God has sent me.

But God has given me grace even in the rough spots, and one thing is clear: this life I am living is better than anything I've encountered so far and I am excited to continue knowing Him more and being used by Him more and

more. Life is a journey and it is nice to know that I'm headed in the right direction. My best days are ahead of me because Jesus is with me, loves me, and guides me. Nothing else compares to that.

# Conclusion

THE FINAL SUM of it all? Nothing but the finished work of Jesus on the cross! We've been asking ourselves what it actually looks like to live an abundant spiritual life. And while I've done my best to help paint that picture as I see it, there never will be an absolute answer or formula that will get you there. It's a process of walking with God, listening to Him, and having Him show you the way. From my heart, here are some final thoughts to keep in mind as you pursue more of Christ.

## ***God's love is bigger than you think.***

John 3:16 describes God's love incredibly when it says that He loved the world so much, He gave His only begotten Son. As a father of four, I cannot even begin to comprehend how someone – anyone! – could give up their own child to be killed for another. *Especially* for someone like you and me who doesn't deserve to be saved. It boggles my mind to try and comprehend that one.

But whenever you feel you've gone beyond God's love, stop and think about what He has already done for you. Don't dwell on the mistakes, dwell on His love, and let that thought continue to draw you to Him.

## ***There is good news, the Gospel of faith.***

The good news is that all our sins – past, present, and future – have already been atoned for on the Cross by Jesus. The only part we have to play in that whole transaction is to repent, be baptized, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. The rest of the story is that once we've done that, it's a done deal. It doesn't need to be revisited. Although we may fall short and sin from time to time, that doesn't mean we have to retreat all the way back to the beginning. Instead, we pick ourselves up and keep moving forward with Christ. The penalty has been paid, which should produce in us a desire to love Jesus for what He did out of love.

## ***The mystery of living a fruitful, abundant life is found in Christ.***

While we tend to see success in life equated to what we can earn through hard work, that isn't how it's done in God's Kingdom. We are in Jesus. And since we are in Him, all we need is found in Him. The Bible tells us that "as He is, so we are<sup>1</sup>." In other words, when we need a job or deliverance from an addiction, we need to find our identity in Christ, not in those other things. We don't need to work at it. Because He has already overcome, we have also already overcome. God has already given Jesus everything, and so by abiding in Him we, too, have everything.

This is vastly different from what we think we ought to be doing, but the truth is that the less we do and the more we have faith in what Jesus did on the Cross, the more we will be blessed. That isn't to say we'll all be millionaires and drive fancy cars and never get sick. Although some people may be blessed in those ways, not everyone will be.

Our blessing comes in the form of God's promise that we will always have enough. Not necessarily everything we want, but certainly everything we need. He will give us more than enough spiritually, financially, and relationally to take care of our needs, and give us the capacity to give to others in need. Everything necessary for life.

I will end here with these words from Peter<sup>li</sup>. Let them sink into your heart and bless your soul.

*<sup>3</sup> I can pray this because his divine power has bestowed on us **everything necessary for life** and godliness through the rich knowledge of the one who called us by his own glory and excellence. <sup>4</sup>Through these things he has bestowed on us his precious and most magnificent promises, so that by means of what was promised **you may become partakers of the divine nature**, after escaping the worldly corruption that is produced by evil desire. <sup>5</sup>For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith excellence, to excellence, knowledge; <sup>6</sup>to knowledge, self-control; to self-control, perseverance; to perseverance, godliness; <sup>7</sup>to godliness, brotherly affection; to brotherly affection, unselfish love. <sup>8</sup>For if these things are really yours and are continually increasing, they will keep you from becoming ineffective and unproductive in your pursuit of knowing our Lord*

*Jesus Christ more intimately. <sup>9</sup>But concerning the one who lacks such things - he is blind. That is to say, he is nearsighted, since he has **forgotten about the cleansing of his past sins.** <sup>10</sup>Therefore, brothers and sisters, make every effort to be sure of your calling and election. For by doing this you will never stumble into sin. <sup>11</sup>For thus an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be richly provided for you.*

Blessings to you. May you know how great is the love of God for you, and may you never forget His acceptance and forgiveness. May you grow closer each day so you can hear His voice and know Jesus and rest secure in the work He did on the Cross for you.

# Appendix A – Prophetic Assembly Transcription

Prophetic Assembly – Pearl Campus City Bible Church, April  
22, 2011

*STEVE:*

Scripture says: “The end of a thing is better than its’ beginning, the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry for anger rests in the bosom of fools and do not say where were the former days and why were they seeming to be better? For you do not inquire wisely concerning this” (Ecclesiastes 7:7-10). Your best days are ahead of you.

Your best days are ahead of you. You cultivate your heart and your love for Me as you are laying down your life for Me in this relationship that we have. I am working all things together for good. “All things” means all things: the good, the bad, the confusing, the pieces we don’t understand, the things we wonder about. Working all things together for your good. *Your* good. For I am well pleased with you, says the Lord. Well pleased that you have designed and desired to seek after Me with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your strength. That desire that you have walked in your life for Me is going to go to a whole new place and a whole other level in your life and in your heart.

You will find yourself passionate for things that you have not been passionate about before, think it not strange because remember, your best days are ahead of you. Things that would have been fine and normal for you in the past will not be fine and normal for you in the future because your best days are ahead of you. How you have served Me in the past would have been fine and normal for the past, but your best days are ahead of you.

**Take Me out of the box, let Me move in every area of your life, begin to stir your faith, I am asking you to begin to build your faith. It is my plan and My desire that you be characterized by those that look at you and say “this is a man of faith.” Not only in speech, but in action, in action, in action, in action.**

**Seek with all your heart and you will find Me. And in finding Me your faith will grow. You will begin to lay hands on the sick and they will recover. You will speak the word of the Lord and people will listen and there will be a change and a healing that comes to their life and in their heart. Think it not strange when you hear a still, small voice, which means you are going to have to listen. Maybe speak less. Hear the still small voice: “Walk this way, walk ye in it” It’s the new path, it’s the new plan, and it’s the greater days that are ahead of you, says the Lord.**

**Tune in to My voice like you have never tuned in to My voice before. Hear and know My voice, move to the place that is My desire that you would have an unwavering confidence in My voice. There would be those when the winds and storms of life would come and the parts would be tossed and they will come to you because they say, “That man knows the voice of the living God. Not one of the gods, not maybe god, not a guru, but The God, Jehovah, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” And you will speak a word that causes peace to come to their life. A peace that even you have cried out for, a peace that you even desire in your life, a peace I give you this day. And that peace you will take to others and you will stand firm and you will stand strong and you will stand resolute in the word of the Lord. Not only are you strong in stature naturally, but you’ll stand strong in stature spiritually.**

**Know the strength of the Lord. Hear the word of the Lord. Move to a new level, another level, and a new dimension of My strength, moving out of your own strength and your own thoughts and your own ways into My thoughts and My ways, because they are beyond your ways that takes you into the future. A future where your best days are ahead of you. The end of a thing is better than the beginning of a thing. Your life...the best days are ahead. Begin to move to a whole other level of serving in the house of the Lord. You enjoy serving. But there is a**



**fulfillment that is coming from you that you have not experienced. As you begin to serve and give yourself to tasks and some of those will be simple tasks but they will be tasks that bring great impact in the lives of people I will bring into this house. Never loose sight that when you are serving you are serving Me. Never move into a place of endeavoring to find the favor of man but stay in the place of My favor. My favor for your life, because it's in that place that greater days lie ahead. Come and I have come to favor you. Walk in a new place and in a new dimension. It will be different than the past. It will be different than the past. Do not allow the past to dictate your future. Do not allow the past to influence your future. It's not just a little pin-up scripture for you, it's your life message: "Behold, all things have become new." Walk in the newness that I have for you.**

***RANJY:***

**Jay, the Lord told me that you're a Colossians man, I don't know if you ever studied that book particularly, but you know that Colossians is an interesting book, it is a letter from Paul. A lot of people may not know this unless you study the book, what it's about...you know Paul comes in a very simple way literally in four chapters he kinda lays down doctrine. He really helps explain some very straightforward things of what it means to build the church. And so what the Lord told me was in Colossians 1, it's about Paul's labor for the church, and it says "now I rejoice in what was suffered for you and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regards to Christ's affliction for the sake of His body which is the church. I've become its servant by commission that God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness, the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations. But is now disclosed to the saints to them God has chosen to make known among the gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery which is Christ in you, the hope for glory."**

**Jay, I believe that that is the word you are called to preach in this house. That there is a mystery, yet a very simple, a very clear, a very straightforward idea that Christ in you is the mystery. And that you are called like Paul to labor for the house of God. That's not a, its' a**

compliment, that is the almost the highest compliment that you can give someone, that you have the call of God on your life. You... let's just say you found the right church. This is a church, if there is a church in our city, our region, that really understands or believes that what God says about the significance of the local church this is the one. And yet God has drawn you here in this place because this is where I believe you are going to thrive. When we talk about Paul's labor for the church, let's look at the significance of the church in Paul's life, in what he did. And so I really want you to study Colossians. I want you to dive deep into it because it talks about, you know, rules for Holy living, and rules for the Christian household. It's very ...on its surface level it's fairly um doctrinal, it's fairly the basic tenants of what it means about our faith. But the reason why he wrote that letter was because some people in that house started getting squirrely, they started adding things that God didn't intend to add and I feel like you're the "subtractor", you're going to come in and help people subtract those thoughts that aren't really from God at all. It comes from Christian culture or Portlandia or whatever it is that people walk in with, right? That they believe is Godly that is not from God. You are going to have a clear word on that and you're going to be able to speak in a moment into people's lives, that clarity. And I just think this book has something for you, that there is just something about what Paul did and the representation of how Paul labored for the church is how you're going to labor for the church. It's how you already have in some ways. So this is a bit of a fulfillment of what is already true about you. But I think it goes deeper cuz I think what happens next is you are the first to stand up and say how can I serve, um, you're not the first to stand up and say can I speak into someone's life. Now is the season, now is the time to be that guy. Right? And people will receive from you because they know you are a man of credibility, that you're a man that seeks no fame or you're not looking to be put in the highlight, not trying to be cool or pursued in the sense of I want attention, and because of that there will be people who will hear from you the way they wouldn't hear from other people. Because they will know that this Jay, if he is speaking into my life is because he has something to say. So I just encourage you to really study that book and to read that letter from Paul cuz I believe it was written to you.

***DONNA:***

**God gave me the verse: “God has not given you the spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind.” And Jay I just feel that God is saying to you that He is going to put a new boldness in your spirit and a new courage. And courage is not something that you screw up on your own and try to work yourself up to be brave but, it’s a braveness, a Holy Spirit braveness if you will, that God is going to give you just to speak out a word at the right time, at the right place and I see you just walking up to this person and that person and just in a not even a loud way, but in a quiet way, coming up along side of somebody and just speaking what God has told you about that person and speaking a truth into that person’s life and with a spirit of boldness coming out of you that is not, in the past maybe you would have been fearful about but God is giving you a sound mind and God is going to give you a sure word for that person, just at the right time and at the right moment and you’ll be surprised when you are obedient to God and hear that voice and go over to that person and God gives you a word for that person and you’re going to be amazed at that. It’s just a word in due season, it’s a word they needed to hear at just that moment and God is going to encourage you through that but I just challenge you that you just get before God and that you allow Him even as Ranjy said and get into His word, get into the book of Colossians let God just begin to stir up in you so that you’ll be ready and that you’ll be prepared when God gives you that opportunity that you’ll be able to speak out the word of God and in boldness and it’ll be a word in due season and it will be a word that will bless the hearer.**

***ROBERT:***

**Sat down and the words “plans, plans, plans” came to my mind. Proverbs...somewhere in proverbs says...I was just there, Proverbs 3:5 says: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, and He will show which path to take”. James 4, verse 15 says: “What ought you say is the Lord wants us to we will do this or that, otherwise you are boasting about your own plans and is evil.” Also thought of the scripture that says: “Man thinks the thought but**

God gives the answer.” I think God wants you to take the time, even what I’ve heard said already is that God wants you to do some more soul searching, He wants you to find all the planning scriptures in the Bible and there are a lot of them, but like the book of Proverbs through the book of James and places like that, and God wants you to study how plans are put together. God is working in you, even as Steve said, the future is bright for you and I’m sitting here looking and it’s like you are a new man and not like the man I met just a number of years ago, God is working in you but cycle of time in your life still, He still has to a cycle of things he is working out. Be patient with that cycle, be patient with the plans. Trust the Lord with all your heart, don’t lean on your own understanding and He will direct your paths.

Lets Pray for Jay. Lord I pray for Jay right now, I pray right now for Your grace upon him, I pray for, God, Your destiny Your purpose, Your plans, Your desires for him. God, You have a heart for him, You know his future, God, You know his past God, You love him, You’re concerned about him, we just pray right now that Word of the Lord would come guide him, that he would ponder these things, I see him already beginning to digest then, he’s a thinker God, I pray that You would help him in these coming days, months and years God, and to use this prophecy, this laying on of hands, God, to fight the good fight, Lord God, God help him he’s got a destiny, a purpose, God, working in him, a season of building a season of just studying things where You want him, God. You have a time, You have a purpose, You have a destiny, You know the day that things should happen. Lord God, I pray for grace upon him, we’re so thankful for having him in this church, Lord, I pray that he take this word, God, that he step out to the next level that like Rangy said that he becomes beyond the servant God, the one that actually changes peoples’ future, their destiny, Lord..pray for today, Lord, thank you for what You are doing in him, bless Jay, Lord, bless us in Your name, amen amen.

*STEVE:*

Take every opportunity to pray for the sick.

***RANJY:***

**I got the word “Job job job”**

# **Appendix B – Salvation Prayer**

**IF YOU ARE** tired of all the striving and failing and would like to simply receive all that Jesus has done for you, all you have to do is ask. You can start by praying this prayer, believing it in your heart, and making Him your Lord and Savior. After you've prayed, let someone know and find a community to continue your spiritual journey.

**Lord Jesus, thank You for loving me and dying for me on the Cross. Your precious blood washes me clean of every sin. You are my Lord and my Savior, now and forever. I believe that You rose from the dead and that You are alive today. Because of Your finished work, I am now a beloved child of God and heaven is my home. Thank You for giving me eternal life, and filling my heart with Your peace and joy. Amen.**

## **I Would Like To Hear From You**

**If you have prayed the salvation prayer, or if you have a testimony to share after reading this book, please send me an email at , [GraceWalkTheBook@gmail.com](mailto:GraceWalkTheBook@gmail.com).**

# Appendix C – Healing Model

**ONE PART OF** the word that was prophesied over me at the prophetic assembly had to do with laying hands on the sick and seeing them recover. For years I've prayed for the sick, sometimes seeing amazing results and sometimes seeing nothing visible. My perspective is that either way, it's God's job to heal people, not mine. I am simply called to pray and believe for the healing. Tangible results aren't a focus or a worry for me.

The response of many believers to healing prayer seems almost silly to me. Out of intimidation, many Christians don't feel "qualified" to pray for healing. If our response to a request for healing prayer is, "sorry, that's not my gifting, go ask someone else," then we're not fully walking out our faith. We may not say that out loud, but it's often the attitude of our heart. We pray with no faith that God even *could* let alone *will* show up and do something miraculous.

The hang-up is often found in our worry about not having enough faith to accomplish anything. Let the words of Jesus put that concern to rest in your mind: He said that if you have faith like a mustard seed, you can move mountains<sup>lii</sup>. If you have enough faith to believe God for your salvation, then faith for healing isn't that much of a stretch. In fact, if God is able to heal broken hearts and souls, wouldn't it almost seem *easier* for Him to heal a broken body? The focus of our faith should be Jesus and His faithfulness, not our own faith to produce a healing. The focus of your faith is what makes all the difference in the world.

Below is the outline I used at the Lutheran Bible Institute when I taught a course about healing on campus. It was an amazing class – God showed up every session and showed us some amazing things.

I've been praying for people using this model for nearly 30 years now and I can confidently say that in nearly every circumstance I've used this outline to guide my prayer, God has shown up with blessings. Not

**always what I – or the person I was praying for – expected, but always what was needed. I hope this helps you understand a little better another facet of the Holy Spirit and how He operates.**

## **The Healing Model**

**(or: how to pray for the sick or just about any other time you pray for someone else)**

**First, let's be clear about what this healing model is, and what it is not. It is a guide for prayer I have used in the past and have seen God honor and continue to honor. It's a general guide and a way to help you along the path to learning how to pray effective prayers. It is *not* by any means a "magic" method or formula that works every time, nor is it the only way God answers prayer. It is simply one way to pray I have found useful. God is sovereign and will do as He pleases, and answers the prayers of any type of prayer He so chooses.**

**Let's start with some helpful foundations about healing. First, God wants to heal people. The Greek word for "Salvation" and the word for "Healing" both share the same root word, *Sozo*, which means to make whole. God's heart for His creation is that we are made whole, spirit, mind, soul, and body. So why aren't we all healed yet? Let's balance this with a touch of reality.**

**Scripture tells us that God wants all of us to be saved, yet not every soul accepts salvation. Likewise, even though He desires for all to be healed, not everyone is. There are many reasons why this is true, but that's a theological debate for another day. The main takeaway is that just because not everyone who hears the Gospel is saved doesn't mean we should stop sharing the Good News. In the same way, just because not everyone is healed doesn't mean we should stop praying for healing. Let's face it, if we stop sharing the Gospel and praying for the sick, then no one gets to go to heaven and no one is healed.**

**Some people are intimidated by the spiritual realm and all the things that happen in it that they cannot explain. To them, it's spooky and**



something to be feared. Scripture asks us if God will give us a rock when we ask for bread<sup>liii</sup>. The obvious answer is: of course not! God is a good Father who gives good things to His children. Therefore, if we ask God to intervene supernaturally in our world, we should have no fear. His desire is to do us good, not harm. Remember that we are first spiritual beings and there is no need for us to fear the spiritual; it is our natural environment.

So how, then, do we pray? I see five steps, starting with an interview. This is no more than a brief Q&A to find out what is wrong so you can pray for it. It wouldn't make sense to ask for God to heal a back ache if it's really the arm that's broken. One thing to remember here is that you only need enough information to pray accurately, and that is enough. You don't need the person's whole medical history, only what's pertinent to praying. The temptation here is to be overwhelmed by or start relying on our own understanding of the problem rather than faith in God to heal. God does the healing, so we need to be dependent on Him, nor on our own wisdom or understanding.

The next step is to evaluate why it might hurt. This shouldn't be a drawn-out process, just a quick check of common sense or what the Holy Spirit is prompting. The obvious answers would be that they caught a virus or were injured in an accident. But on occasion it could be something else, and we should always take the time to find out.

Sometimes, sickness is the result of sin either done by them or to them. Other times, emotional factors such as stress and grief can heavily affect a person's physical body. Overall spiritual health could be another reason for sickness. Spiritual strongholds like unforgiveness and bitterness have roots in a person's life that can start affecting their physical body. Another cause could be the enemy. In the West we tend to overlook the fact that Satan sometimes attacks believers. As you're evaluating what the underlying cause for sickness might be, if you don't strongly sense something then just pray for the obvious. The point is to remember to check with the Holy Spirit to see if He does want to reveal something deeper to you.

**Now that you've heard what they think the sickness is all about and you've taken the time to turn a sensitive ear to God, you need to know what kind of prayer you need to use. Most of the time, your approach will start as a petition. In other words, you'll simply be asking God to heal. But often, you will find that while you start there, the Spirit will move you on to different types of prayer. Be open to listening to Him and responding to His impressions.**

**Sometimes, you'll feel prompted to pray in the form of a command: "Be healed in Jesus' Name" or your faith will be stretched and you'll be able to make a pronouncement by faith. In Scripture, people were healed in all different ways: going down to the water to wash and even having mud made with spit put on the affected area. Be open to how God might tell you to pray. Sometimes, you may have to do battle in the spiritual realm and bind Satan in Jesus' Name.**

**It's now time to put it all together. You interviewed the person to know what their complaint is about. You listened to the Holy Spirit to find out what other factors may be at work here. You've established a rough game plan of how to approach the prayer. Now it's time to actually pray. By the way, all the steps up to this point are a matter of a few minutes, if that. For example: My arm hurts. Why? I hit it while at work. To self: looks as if it is just an accident, I'll ask God to intervene. Pray. Easy. Don't make this more complicated than it really is. Remember, you aren't healing anyone, that's God's job and He is not dependent on you getting it right. He is dependant on you giving Him an opportunity to work.**

**There isn't a special language or healing prayer talk you need to use. Just relax and talk with God. Start by inviting the Holy Spirit to come, as He is the one that moves on the earth and does the Father's will. I usually begin with something along the lines of: "God, please come and minister to this person. Holy Spirit, You are welcome here." Then quietly and to myself I ask God what's going on. Although we may be praying about a sore back or a sickness, I always make it a point to touch base with God and find out if He has something else in mind. I cannot tell you how many times a person has asked me for prayer for a**

**specific healing and God instead took the opportunity to bless them by healing a deep-seeded hurt in their heart or pronouncing a reminder of His love for them in a specific circumstance unrelated to the original request.**

**Now that you're in motion praying, don't forget to listen, to wait, and to watch for what God is up to. It may take a while, so don't be in a rush. Many times you won't visibly see any confirmation that something's going on, but inside God is ministering to them. If you aren't sure what's going on with the person, simply ask them. They may not answer, or they might respond saying "I just feel at peace right now" or "I feel heat on this area" or something to that extent. If this is the case, just bless what God is doing and continue praying. I can't remember once when I asked that and the seemingly "non-spiritual" interruption caused God to not show up and bless His kids.**

**Eventually, your prayer must end. So how do you know when it's time to stop? For one, when the person says so it's obviously time to be done. They will say "thanks" or "wow, that was great" and you naturally transition. Sometimes, God may tell you to stop. They may be healed and so there is no use praying for healing if the healing has already happened. In some cases, God may show you that enough ministry has happened for now, and that there may be another time of prayer for complete healing in the future. I find this to be true primarily when there are deeper issues going on in the person's life beyond the sickness.**

**The final reason to stop praying is that sometimes, you just run out of words to pray. You're done, everyone praying with you is done, so it is time to be done. Saying words just to continue the prayer out of your own flesh won't do any good. Working in the supernatural realm of the Holy Spirit doesn't give you license to throw out common sense.**

**Wrapping up the ministry time is an easy but sometimes forgotten step. If God is prompting you, be sure to share any words He has given you for the person. It may be "go and sin no more" or a simple reminder of His great love for them. It may be time to get them up and walking, and to stay out of their wheel chair.**

And that's the outline I use to pray for people. Pretty easy, huh? Outside of the how-to of praying for the sick, here are a few other things to look for so that you can "go with the flow" in prayer. When the power of the Holy Spirit shows up, it manifests itself in different ways for different people. Some will respond with phenomenological responses, in other words, physical stuff you can see like shaking, stiffening, changes in breathing, falling over, laughing or weeping, glistening, fluttering eyelids, "drunken" behavior, and hot flashes or hot spots, which may indicate where you should lay hands on them to pray.

All of these responses may be outside your comfort zone, but most of the time they are an uncontrolled response from the person you're praying for. All are clues that God is up to something! On the other hand, though, don't be discouraged if you *don't* see physical signs from the person. God can still be working even if you don't observe anything!

While this is not the place to give a full course on the gifts of the Spirit, I would be doing you a disservice to not mention them. The gifts of the Spirit shouldn't be overlooked or dismissed. They are a vital part of prayer, and you should be open to them and respond to the Spirit's prompting. For me, the most common gift I operate in is giving words of knowledge.

In my experience, this takes the form of seeing things in my mind. Often, I will get a picture of something and I share with the person what I'm seeing and go from there. It also isn't uncommon for me to get a single word or a name dropped in my head. Others describe their experience with a word of knowledge as a strong impression. Some hear an audible voice, or they may feel the pain of what the person they are praying for is going through. Sometimes people open their mouth and start to speak, and the Spirit starts filling in the words for them.

Similar to words of knowledge are words of wisdom. The main difference is that words of wisdom often have more to do with action *about* the situation rather than the situation itself. For example, a word of knowledge is God telling you the person is struggling with such-and-

such, while the word of wisdom would be God telling the person through you to talk to so-and-so about such-and-such.

Sometimes, when you are feeling resistance or you aren't sure what to pray, then that is a good time to start praying in tongues, if speaking in tongues is part of your experience with the Holy Spirit. Letting the Holy Spirit Himself intercede on your behalf can really break through barriers and bring more understanding and freedom. Speaking in tongues or not, the bottom line is to remain open to the Holy Spirit's leading and watch what He will do. You will see miracles, and you may find yourself in a spiritual battle to see a person set free.

As we wrap up this section, I want to encourage you to just get out there and do it. Don't disqualify yourself before you even try. Telling yourself it won't work for you because you're too young, a new Christian, you aren't spiritual enough, you don't pray enough, go to church enough, read the Bible enough, you're too old, you need more faith, you need more anointing are all lies. It's true that God will use others, but not in the same way He could have used you. Be wary of the enemy's tactics to discourage you before you even try.

The truth is, you may be trying to take on too much responsibility. Your only job is to pray. That's it. The healing is God's job. Because the Holy Spirit lives inside of you, that means you and every believer have the potential to be used by God in healing. Don't be afraid of making mistakes. It's OK, we learn from them. And God will probably still use the situation for His glory, despite any blunders you might make. Theory only goes so far, we must practice what we learn. I believe there's an old saying that says if we want to walk on water, we have to get out of the boat. Step out in faith, be open to letting God use you, and just see what He will do.

## **An Outline of the Healing Model**

### **1. What this is and what it is not**

- 1. IS – A guide that God has honored in the past and still honors.**

**2. IS NOT – A method or the only way that God answers prayer.  
It is just one way that I find useful. God is sovereign and will do as He pleases and does utilize many ways to bring healing.**

**2. Some helpful foundations**

**1. God wants to heal**

**1. Same root word in Greek as Salvation (Sozo): to make whole**

**2. God wants all to be saved, yet not everyone is saved.  
Likewise He wants all to be healed but not all are healed.  
(see below for possible reasons)**

**2. If you ask the Father for bread, will He give you a rock?<sup>liv</sup>**

**1. No need to fear the spiritual, it is our natural environment.**

**3. Five phases of healing (how to pray)**

**1. Interview – Find out what the problem is.**

**1. Where does it hurt, not what is wrong.**

**1. Too much info may work against the prayer.**

**2. Remember, just enough to pray**

**3. Dependency on God, not on our own knowledge**

**2. Diagnostic Decision – Why does it hurt?**

**1. Physical – obvious, playing ball etc.**

**2. Sin – self**

**3. Sin – against others**

**4. Emotional**

**5. Demonization/curse**

**6. Spiritual health**

**1. Afflicting**

**2. Family**

**3. Unforgiveness**

**3. Prayer Selection – How do I pray?**

**1. Petition**

**2. In the Spirit - Impressions**

**3. Command**

**4. Pronouncement of faith**

**5. Bind demons**

**6. Prayer of engagement – bless what God is doing, go with the flow**

**4. Ministry Time**

**1. Start**

**1. Invite Holy Spirit**

**1. “God, please come and minister to this person, Holy Spirit, you are welcome here”**

**2. Inquire of God – To yourself, what is going on here?**

**2. Pray**

**3. Observe, ask, wait**

**1. May take awhile**

**4. Stop**

**1. Person says so**

**2. God says so**

**3. Out of words**

**5. Post Ministry – What should they do to keep their healing?**

**1. Obvious – go and sin no more**

**2. Words from God**

**4. Phenomenological Response**

**1. Shaking**

**2. Stiffening**

**3. Respiration**

**4. Falling**

**5. Laughing/weeping**

**6. Glistening**

**7. Eyelids Fluttering**

**8. Hot Spots**

**1. Places to Pray**

**9. Drunkenness**

**10. Body Temp rises**

**5. Spiritual Gifts**

**1. Word of Knowledge**

**1. Seeing**

**2. Words**

**3. Impressions**

**4. Pain of the other**

**5. Auto-mouth**

- 6. Hear
  - 2. Word of Wisdom
  - 3. Tongues
  - 4. Gift Clusters
  - 5. Gifts of Faith
  - 6. Healing and Miracles
  - 7. Distinguishing of Spirits
- 6. Flow of Ministry
  - 1. Initiation
  - 2. Faith Response – without faith it is impossible to heal
    - 1. Prayee
    - 2. Prayor
    - 3. Others
  - 3. Working with the Father
  - 4. Working with Others
    - 1. Lead & Support
    - 2. Pray for lead, not prayee
    - 3. Team effort, lead changes
- 7. Training Model
  - 1. Begin doing it yourself
    - 1. Study God’s word
    - 2. Watch others
    - 3. Do it, get feedback
  - 2. Let others join you
  - 3. Let them do it as you instruct
  - 4. Release them and repeat
- 8. Erroneous Concepts
  - 1. This will not work for me because
    - 1. I’m too young
    - 2. I’m a new Christian
    - 3. I’m not spiritual enough
      - 1. I don’t pray enough
      - 2. I don’t go to church enough
      - 3. I don’t read the Bible enough
    - 4. I’m too old
    - 5. I’m a female
    - 6. I need more faith



- 7. I need more anointing**
- 8. God will use others but not me**
- 2. Truth – may be taking on too much responsibility**
  - 1. Your job is to pray**
  - 2. God’s job is to heal**
  - 3. The Holy Spirit lives inside of you (all of Him), therefore every believer has the potential to be used in healing.**
  - 4. It’s OK to make mistakes; we learn from them**
  - 5. Theory just goes so far; then we must put into practice what we learned**
    - 1. If you want to walk on water, you have to get out of the boat**
- 9. Feedback Wrap up**
  - 1. Go and pray**
    - 1. What were the results?**

# Appendix D – That Gay Thing

**BECAUSE I MENTIONED** early on in the book that I found myself struggling with what is called Same Sex Attraction (SSA), I thought it would be prudent to share with you my studies and thoughts on the subject. It's a complicated issue, and one that has been written and debated about to a great extent by incredibly educated people. I don't consider myself an expert, but having struggled with it myself, I do have a personal interest in understanding SSA and how it relates to being a Christian. First, we need to understand that SSA and Homosexuality never was God's intent for people. Unfortunately, we live in a fallen world and we can no longer ignore the fact that homosexuality is all around us. Our major question is not is it wrong or right as much as it needs to be, what is our response to the people around us who are dealing with SSA.

One of the first elements of this discussion I had to come to terms with is how harsh most of Christianity's response to the gay community is. Whether it's someone dealing with mild SSA or a full-blown political activist, most Christians will either blindly condemn a gay person or naively try and sweep the issue under the rug. Few are willing to grapple with it and work to come to a Christ-centered conclusion. No matter where your personal opinions fall in the end, the bottom line is to remember that Jesus died for all mankind. *All*. If the Father determined that He loved a gay person so much that He willingly chose to offer His only son as a sacrifice, we have no business treating them like second-class citizens.

If you struggle with SSA, whether you're a Christian or not, I understand that the last place you would want to go is the Church or anywhere Christians mingle because of the judgmental attitude many Christians hold on this subject. To you I offer a sincere apology on behalf of my fellow Christians and ask that you forgive us for our attitude of being better than you. And in this apology, I also encourage you to push past the rhetoric and seek after God and ask Him to place

someone in your life that knows Him and understands His heart towards you, and can be available to walk with you.

It's impossible to show the love of Christ while protesting and picketing holding derogatory signs condemning the gay community to hell. Again, each and every one of us were destined for hell but by the grace of God who gave us a way through Jesus Christ. Our calling is to preach that Gospel to all. Self-righteousness will always repel the world away from any message we have for them. Only by loving and serving will be heard and seen as reflections of who Jesus is.

I can hear the arguments now: "but it's a sin, and as Christians we need to stand up for God's standards!" I have two thoughts for you. First, if your goal is to stand up for God's standards, then you can't just pick and choose which ones you'll stand up for. Where are the protests and demonstrations against pre-marital sex, gambling, drunkenness, lying, stealing, etc.? It would keep a person fruitlessly busy to try and "stand up" for all the sins God frowns on.

Secondly, the bottom line is that *any* sin breaks God's heart *equally*. We're the ones who decided sins could be ranked in order of "badness," God never did that. The happy end to our hopeless plight of falling horribly short of God's standards is that through Jesus we have forgiveness of all our sins and are no longer under condemnation. And that's a message that's worth our time and energy proclaiming.

Throughout history, the Church has periodically held an incorrect doctrine as truth and backed it by out-of-context Scriptures. A classic example of this would be the issue of slavery in this country in the 1800's. Good Christian people were solidly convinced there was nothing wrong with owning slaves and mistreating them. Today, we look back on that with horror and shame, wondering how anyone could ever justify that in their mind. And yet we do the same thing with the issue of homosexuality. We have our arguments against homosexuality all laid out and backed by Scripture, but what if this justified "sanctified" gay-bashing is really the same as justifying slavery?

**This all begs the question to be asked: Is homosexuality really a sin in God's eyes? Here's my answer: Yup. In the same way divorce breaks God's heart. And I don't know that I will ever be able to have a 100% concrete opinion. What I can say is that most of what I hear other Christians say from the Bible to justify their actions is gravely out of context and based on English translations of the Bible that fail to accurately represent the original meaning of the Greek and Hebrew texts.**

**While I don't agree with all the conclusions of Justin R. Cannon in his book "The Bible, Christianity, & Homosexuality," I do recommend it for further reading on this subject. He does an excellent job of getting down to the original meaning of the Greek and Hebrew words used in those verses. From my own studies, I find that most scholars agree with him that most of the verses we commonly use to condemn homosexuality are actually more specifically condemning male prostitution, *not* homosexuality. These verses were especially applied in reference to the temple prostitutes and anyone who used their services or dealt in their trade.**

**For example, if we look at 1 Corinthians 6:9 it states:**

**"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! The sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, passive homosexual partners, practicing homosexuals..."**

**In this verse, the phrase "passive homosexual partners and practicing homosexuals" use the words *arsenokoitai* and *malakos* respectively for our English word "homosexual". These words don't have a clear translation from Greek to English. Interpreters have translated *arsenokoitai* as everything from "sissies" to "boy prostitutes" and *malakos* as "given to unnatural vice<sup>lv</sup>." This lack of a clear definition gives a huge amount of room for interpretation and error.**

**An accurate translation of these words in the Bible would seem to indicate very specific actions or relationships whereas homosexuality in today's western society is defined in much broader terms.**

That really only leaves one verse that says a man should not lay with a man as he lays with a woman<sup>lvi</sup>. While on the surface this seems pretty straightforward, arguments have been made suggesting it may not be. The phrase “as he lays with a woman” may indicate an underlying message in this verse. In the culture in which that verse was written, women were viewed as property and marital rights (including sex) were demanded of a wife. Perhaps the implication is that gay relationships should not be viewed in the way heterosexual relationships were. If the verse was supposed to be a clear statement against gay sex, why doesn't it read: “men, don't lie with a man”?

God has always desired for us to have deep, meaningful relationships with each other, including friendships with the same sex. In the Bible, the relationship between David and Jonathan and even Jesus and John reflects intimacy, both emotionally and physically.

In Western culture, it's rare that we see true friendships as deep and true as that. They maintained a relationship that freely expressed love, caring, and even physical closeness that was not sexual in nature. We see John laying his head on Jesus' breast<sup>lvii</sup>, we see David and Jonathan embracing<sup>lviii</sup>, and we are told to greet each other with a holy kiss<sup>lix</sup>. In western society, these forms of closeness have taken on different meanings, often associated with sex, than the actions had in Biblical times. I believe we have lost a level of relationship with one another through fear of true appropriate intimacy being misunderstood as homosexual or perverted in nature.

I have a friend who I have been privileged to be a bit of a spiritual father to. Being Hispanic and coming from a family very comfortable with physical touch, I also tend to be a more “touch-feely” guy. I'm cautious in how I interact with others outside of my immediate family because of our Western cultural norms. But in the case of this friend of mine, we shared a closer physical relationship than other friends of mine. When I see him after a time apart, we hug and briefly exchange a kiss on the lips. Nothing extended or romantic, but the type of kiss on the lips I share with my kids on special occasions.

**My friend and I will talk and catch up, but eventually, he will sit next to me, turn his back to me and lean back taking my arm across his chest and then we get down to really talking about whatever is on his heart. In effect, we cuddle and chat. To me, this is the kind of intimate relationship I think God intended. It is physically and emotionally close but not sexual in any way. In short, it is a healthy closeness that Westerners seem to miss out on.**

**As another example, when I was on the mission field in the Sudan, I would often see men walking hand in hand in the streets. My first thought was how surprised I was that homosexuality was so openly expressed in a Muslim country. I got that one wrong! In the Sudan, when men walk hand in hand it's simply a sign of friendship. In that culture, your relationship with one another is very important and is reflected in how you greet one another, where you sit in a room, and in the nature of your physical contact. Being an Arab culture, they are closer to a Biblical model than we are in the West.**

**The clear directives we see are that sex outside of marriage – heterosexual or homosexual – is always wrong. It destroys relationships and has many ripple effects on both the individuals involved and the people around them. Gays in the bar scene with multiple partners are taking chances both emotionally and with their physical health. The same applies to “straight” singles doing the same thing. But not all homosexuals live that way. I know many who are with a single partner they have been faithful to for years. I also know a lesbian couple raising twins as loving and caring parents.**

**As for the argument that people are homosexual due to environmental or genetic reasons, I don't claim to be an expert. What I do know is that no matter what our tendencies are, be it lying, stealing, or being attracted to people we can't be with, I do know that we all have choices about how to act on the feelings we have. While a heterosexual man may find many women beautiful, he will choose not to take any action on that because he is married or dating someone else. So too with gays: they have choices about their feelings. They can choose to participate in the nightclub scene, wait for that special someone, or choose to live a**

straight life denying their feelings. Each choice has consequences, and only that person can make that decision for themselves. You and I are not their judge, God is.

So what is the conclusion of all this? First, I firmly believe that as Christians, we have no right to judge any man. That is God's place, not ours. Our place is to love all people unconditionally as Christ has loved us unconditionally. Second, it's important to recognize that God intended for us to have healthy, intimate relationships that are closer and more intimate than our Western culture would tell us. Finally, and most importantly, if a homosexual comes to Christ, God's word tells us that He will write His law on their hearts and direct their paths<sup>lx</sup>. I think we are better off letting God lead them to the right conclusions and convictions about their homosexuality than us trying to do it for them and doing more harm than good.

I don't have all the answers, but this is where I am today. I am choosing to love rather than judge, and am choosing to let God direct them rather than risk me misdirecting them. My God is able because He loves them more than I ever could, and that is a very good thing.

As you seek to understand God's position on SSA, I would recommend the following books that have been useful to me on my journey. This is not an exhaustive list of everything available on the subject, but just some of the authors that have caused me to stop and consider my personal position more fully.

- "The Bible, Christianity, & Homosexuality." Justin R. Cannon, 2009. Cannon does a nice job of walking through the Biblical text on the subject. While he uses some of the ambiguity to argue that the Bible does not condemn a faithful gay relationship, I personally cannot make that jump.
- "Love Is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community." Andrew Martin, 2009. A good book about moving the conversation between Christians and the gay community away from a debate about choices or genetics to a discussion of Jesus and the Gospel.

- **“Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality.” Wesley Hill, 2010. The story of a gay Christian who has chosen abstinence over following his own feelings. He also shares about the lives of several other gay men in the Church and the challenges they faced in years gone by.**
- **“The Gay Faith: Christ, Scripture and Sexuality.” M. W. Sphero, 2011. The author goes beyond Cannon’s book to look at other scriptures that may indicate verses have been poorly translated, giving a clearer view of what the Bible really meant when referring to homosexuality. I have not had the chance to verify his word studies, but he does clearly push homosexuality as a normal lifestyle that should be accepted in the Church. Many interesting and thought-provoking facts, but I don’t know that I am ready to accept his conclusions.**
- **“The End of Sexual Identity: Why Sex is Too Important to Define Who We Are.” Jenell Williams Paris, 2011. A cultural anthropologist and Christian looks at sexual identity. I probably appreciated her book most as her final conclusion is that our identity must be in Christ and Christ alone.**
- **“I’m OK – You’re Not: The message we are sending non-believers and why we should stop” and “UNFAIR: Why the Christian view of Gays doesn’t work.” Both by John Shore. Great books to help us stop and take a look at how our actions and opinions are perceived by the non-believer.**
- **“The Unlikely Disciple: A Sinner’s Semester at America’s Holiest University.” Kevin Roose, 2010. While not directly part of the discussion about SSA, this is a good read about a kid who goes to a Christian University as part of his cross-cultural experiences and how he was faced with the school’s ideals and the reality of his own family which included a lesbian aunt.**
- **“Fall to Grace: A Revolution of God, Self and Society.” Jay Baker, 2011. Jay is the son of evangelists Jim and Tammy Faye Baker. This is his story and how his ministry and understanding of grace express themselves. He writes about some conclusions I can understand, but personally am not as far along as he is.**



# Appendix E

## You Can Hear God's Voice!

By Mark and Patti Virkler, co-authors of "4 Keys to Hearing God's Voice"

Christianity is unique among religions, for it alone offers a personal relationship with the Creator beginning here and now, and lasting throughout eternity. Jesus declared, "This is eternal life – that they may know God" (Jn. 17:2). Unfortunately, many in the Church miss the great blessing of fellowship with our Lord because we have lost the ability to recognize His voice within us. Though we have the promise that "My sheep hear My voice," too many believers are starved for that intimate relationship that alone can satisfy the desire of their hearts.

I was one of those sheep who was deaf to his Shepherd until the Lord revealed four very simple keys (found in Habakkuk 2:1, 2) that unlocked the treasure of His voice.

*Key #1 – God's voice in your heart often sounds like a flow of spontaneous thoughts.*

Habakkuk knew the sound of God speaking to him (Hab. 2:2). Elijah described it as a still, small voice (I Kings 19:12). I had always listened for an inner audible voice, and God does speak that way at times. However, I have found that usually, God's voice comes as spontaneous thoughts, visions, feelings, or impressions.

For example, haven't you been driving down the road and had a thought come to you to pray for a certain person? Didn't you believe it was God telling you to pray? What did God's voice sound like? Was it an audible voice, or was it a spontaneous thought that lit upon your mind?

**Experience indicates that we perceive spirit-level communication as spontaneous thoughts, impressions and visions, and Scripture confirms this in many ways. For example, one definition of paga, a Hebrew word for intercession, is "a chance encounter or an accidental intersecting." When God lays people on our hearts, He does it through paga, a chance-encounter thought "accidentally" intersecting our minds.**

**Therefore, when you want to hear from God, tune to chance-encounter or spontaneous thoughts.**

***Key #2 – Become still so you can sense God’s flow of thoughts and emotions within.***

**Habakkuk said, "I will stand on my guard post..." (Hab. 2:1). Habakkuk knew that to hear God's quiet, inner, spontaneous thoughts, he had to first go to a quiet place and still his own thoughts and emotions. Psalm 46:10 encourages us to be still, and know that He is God. There is a deep inner knowing (spontaneous flow) in our spirits that each of us can experience when we quiet our flesh and our minds. If we are not still, we will sense only our own thoughts.**

**Loving God through a quiet worship song is one very effective way to become still. (Note II Kings 3:15.) After I worship and become silent within, I open myself for that spontaneous flow. If thoughts come of things I have forgotten to do, I write them down and dismiss them. If thoughts of guilt or unworthiness come, I repent thoroughly, receive the washing of the blood of the Lamb, putting on His robe of righteousness, seeing myself spotless before God (Is. 61:10; Col. 1:22).**

**To receive the pure word of God, it is very important that my heart be properly focused as I become still because my focus is the source of the intuitive flow. If I fix my eyes upon Jesus, the intuitive flow comes from Jesus. But if I fix my gaze upon some desire of my heart, the intuitive flow comes out of that desire. To have a pure flow I must become still and carefully fix my eyes upon Jesus. Again, quietly worshiping the King, and receiving out of the stillness that follows quite easily accomplishes this.**

**Fix your gaze upon Jesus (Heb. 12:2), becoming quiet in His presence and sharing with Him what is on your heart. Spontaneous thoughts will begin to flow from the throne of God to you, and you will actually be conversing with the King of Kings!**

***Key #3 – As you pray, fix the eyes of your heart upon Jesus, seeing in the Spirit the dreams and visions of Almighty God.***

**Habakkuk said, "I will keep watch to see," and God said, "Record the vision" (Hab. 2:1,2). Habakkuk was actually looking for vision as he prayed. He opened the eyes of his heart, and looked into the spirit world to see what God wanted to show him. This is an intriguing idea.**

**God has always spoken through dreams and visions, and He specifically said that they would come to those upon whom the Holy Spirit is poured out (Acts 2:1-4, 17).**

**I had never thought of opening the eyes of my heart and looking for vision. However, I have come to believe that this is exactly what God wants me to do. He gave me eyes in my heart to see in the spirit the vision and movement of Almighty God. There is an active spirit world all around us, full of angels, demons, the Holy Spirit, the omnipresent Father, and His omnipresent Son, Jesus. The only reasons for me not to see this reality are unbelief or lack of knowledge.**

**In order to see, we must look. Daniel saw a vision in his mind and said, "I was looking...I kept looking...I kept looking" (Dan. 7:2,9,13). As I pray, I look for Jesus, and I watch as He speaks to me, doing and saying the things that are on His heart. Many Christians will find that if they will only look, they will see, in the same way they receive spontaneous thoughts. Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us (Matt. 1:23). It is as simple as that. You can see Christ present with you because Christ is present with you. In fact, the vision may come so easily that you will be tempted to reject it, thinking that it is just you. But if you persist in recording these visions, your doubt will soon be overcome by faith as you recognize that the content of them could only be birthed in Almighty God.**

**Jesus demonstrated the ability of living out of constant contact with God, declaring that He did nothing on His own initiative, but only what He saw the Father doing, and heard the Father saying (Jn. 5:19,20,30). What an incredible way to live!**

**Is it possible for you to live out of divine initiative as Jesus did? Yes! Fix your eyes upon Jesus. The veil has been torn, giving access into the immediate presence of God, and He calls you to draw near (Lk. 23:45; Heb. 10: 19-22). “I pray that the eyes of your heart will be enlightened....”**

***Key #4 – Journaling, the writing out of your prayers and God’s answers, brings great freedom in hearing God’s voice.***

**God told Habakkuk to record the vision (Hab. 2:2). This was not an isolated command. The Scriptures record many examples of individual’s prayers and God’s replies (e.g. the Psalms, many of the prophets, Revelation).**

**I call the process "two-way journaling," and I have found it to be a fabulous catalyst for clearly discerning God's inner, spontaneous flow, because as I journal I am able to write in faith for long periods of time, simply believing it is God. I know that what I believe I have received from God must be tested. However, testing involves doubt and doubt blocks divine communication, so I do not want to test while I am trying to receive. With journaling, I can receive in faith, knowing that when the flow has ended I can test and examine it carefully, making sure that it lines up with Scripture.**

**You will be amazed when you journal. Doubt may hinder you at first, but throw it off, reminding yourself that it is a biblical concept, and that God is present, speaking to His children. Relax. When we cease our labors and enter His rest, God is free to flow (Heb. 4:10). Sit back comfortably, take out your pen and paper, smile, and turn your attention toward the Lord in praise and worship, seeking His face. After you write your question to Him, become still, fixing your gaze on Jesus. You will suddenly have a very good thought. Don't doubt it;**

**simply write it down. Later, as you read your journaling, you, too, will be blessed to discover that you are indeed dialoguing with God.**

**Some final notes: Knowing God through the Bible is a vital foundation to hearing His voice in your heart, so you must have a solid commitment to knowing and obeying the Scriptures. It is also very important for your growth and safety that you be related to solid, spiritual counselors. All major directional moves that come through journaling should be confirmed by your counselors before you act upon them.**

**For a complete teaching on this topic, order the book 4 Keys to Hearing God's Voice at [www.CWGministries.org](http://www.CWGministries.org) or call 716-681-4896. Online catalog of 60 books by Mark & Patti Virkler as well as 100 college courses through external degree: [www.cluonline.com](http://www.cluonline.com)**

# Endnotes

## Something Missing: Joy of My Salvation

<sup>1</sup> E-mail dated Oct 10, 2011 - Some time ago \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_ were visiting the offices of the Jesus Film in Laguna Niguel, CA. The president said there were many reports of a team with some foreigners and a truck moving around the Dinka area of Sudan showing the Jesus Film. He said that the Dinka tribe, now with a large and growing Christian presence (more than tens of thousands) give credit to that team for bringing them the gospel. He asked, “You lived in Sudan right about that time. Do you know who this team was?” Oh yeah. We know! We had the privilege of serving together with those precious folks in Sudan to share the love of God in Christ. How wonderful, isn’t it Jay, to hear, sometimes a long time later, that our measly efforts were used to make a difference in this old world!

<sup>i</sup> John 10:10.

# Keeping a Right Relationship With God: Oops, Missed Something

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for a transcript of the prophecy.

<sup>3</sup> Gideon when he wanted to make sure he had heard correctly asked God to let de only fall on a wool fleece and no where else. He asked again for the opposite, fleece dry and ground wet. Both times God answered and he had assurance he was hearing God correctly.

ii 1 John 1:9

iii Hebrews 10:11-12

iv Romans 8:1

v II Corinthians 5:21

vi James 5:16

vii I John 1:7



# So, What's That Look Like?

viii Gn 25:22

ix Matthew 6:33

<sup>4</sup> By the way, that is NOT in the Bible.

x Mt 8:5-13

xi NIV

<sup>5</sup> Gn 39:2

xii II Corinthians 10:5

# Victory Over Addictions

xiii Romans 8:1

xiv Romans 7:15ff

xv Romans 7:5

xvi Romans 7:7

xvii II Corinthians 5:17-19

xviii II Corinthians 10:5

xix Philippians 4:13

# Rightly Dividing The Word

<sup>xx</sup> Coverdale's Dedication and Preface, Coverdale's Bible. Retrieved February 10, 2012 from [www.bible-researcher.com/coverdale1.html](http://www.bible-researcher.com/coverdale1.html)

<sup>xxi</sup> <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20john%201&version=NIV>

<sup>xxii</sup> <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+John+1&version=NIV>

<sup>xxiii</sup> <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=3%20John+1&version=NIV>

<sup>xxiv</sup> Mk 11:25

# Law vs. Grace: Mixed Messages

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 2:8

xxv Revelations 3:16

<sup>7</sup> Colossians 3:3

xxvi Gn 39:9

# Faith Walk

xxvii Rom 8:39

xxviii II Cor 5:21

xxix Eph 1:30

xxx Jn 19:30

xxxi Col 2:13-14

xxxii Rom 8:1

<sup>8</sup> Elbert Hubbard

# A Colossians Man – Chapter 1

<sup>9</sup> Forgiven and Loved, *Written by Jimmy Needham, Ryan Wayson and Blake Samper, © 2008  
Needham Music*

# Faith to be Healed

xxxiii Isaiah 53:5

10 Matthew 17:19-20

xxxiv Matthew 6:33

# **Disciplines of Life: Tithing**

<sup>11</sup> Malachi 3:10



# Disciplines of Life: Prayer

xxxv Ephesians 6:18

xxxvi Hebrews 8:11

xxxvii Romans 2:15

xxxviii Acts 16:6-7

xxxix James 4:8

xl Luke 11:5-12

xli Matthew 7:9

# Seeking Rewards vs. the Reward Giver

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 55:8-9

xlii 1 Pet 5:7

# Taught By the Spirit, Written On Our Hearts

<sup>xliii</sup> Heb 8:10 “I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts”

<sup>xliv</sup> Heb 8:11 “all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest”

<sup>xlv</sup> Gen Chapters 37-50

<sup>xlvi</sup> Gen 39:2

<sup>xlvii</sup> Gen 39:9

<sup>xlviii</sup> Gen 19

<sup>13</sup> The word translated men can also include women, as in mankind or in Spanish the third person plural ellos or French ils, the NKJ translates it “ “But before they lay down, the *men* of the city, *even the men* of Sodom...” . (italics mine). In other words, the whole town, men, women, young and old were there. <sup>xlix</sup> Gen 19:7

# Conclusion

<sup>l</sup> 1John 4:17

<sup>li</sup> 2 Peter 1:3-11

# Appendix C – Healing Model

lii Mt 17:20

liii Luke 11:11

Luke 11:11

## Appendix D – That Gay Thing

lv <http://www.jeramy.org/gay/gaytrans.html>, retrieved March 10, 2012

lvi Lev 18:22

lvii Jn 13:25

lviii 1 Sam 20:40-42

lix Rom 16:16

lx Jer 31:33