

Christian Essential #3

FAITH

In Your Father's Love

**Grasping Promises about Your
Security, Significance & Satisfaction**

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Scripture quotations are from the *New Living Translation* (NLT, Tyndale, 2007) unless otherwise noted. Other translations include the **New International Version (NIV, Biblica, 2011)**; *New American Standard Bible* (NASB, Lockman Foundation, 1995); *English Standard Version* (ESV, Crossway, 2001); *New International Reader's Version* (NIrV, Biblica, 2014); *New Century Version* (NCV, Thomas Nelson, 2005); *New English Translation* (NET, Biblical Studies Press, 2006); *Today's English Version* (TEV, American Bible Society, 1992).

References used include: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature (BAGD)*, F. W. Danker editor, 3rd edition, (University Of Chicago Press, 2001). *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)*, Colin Brown editor (Zondervan, 1986). *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT)*, Bruce K. Waltke et. al. editor (Moody, 1980). *Lexham Greek-English Interlinear New Testament*, (Logos Research, 2008-2010). *Nestle-Aland 27th Edition Greek New Testament* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993). *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Thomas Nelson, 1996). *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, William Mounce (Zondervan, 2006).

Commentary sets used include: *New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT)*, Joel B. Green editor (Eerdmans); *New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC)*, Howard Marshall, Donald Hagner, editors (Eerdmans); *Word Biblical Commentary (WBC)*, (Thomas Nelson); *Tyndale New Testament Commentary (TNTC)*, Leon Morris, editor (Tyndale); *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, John MacArthur (Moody); *Pillar New Testament Commentary*, D. A. Carson, editor (Eerdmans); *Commentary on the Old Testament*, C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (Hendrickson, 2006).

The contents of this study are in accordance with the Statements of Faith of the National Association of Evangelicals (USA) and the Evangelical Fellowship of India.

All testimonies used in the *Christians Essentials* occurred in real life but names have often been changed.

Your FAITH

Part I: Your Identity & Security with God

Barnabas Group Project #1 to be completed sometime in first 7 weeks of the *FAITH* study.

✓

Week 1: The Importance of faith in God

3.1: Your War

You have a great enemy who wants to destroy your life. (1 Pet 5:8-9)

Project 3A: Testing My Spiritual Power

3.2: Your Dad's Parenting I

Do not let what the Devil did to you in the past, effect what you believe about God's love now. (Eph 2:12)

Project 3B: Facing My Disappointments with God

Barnabas Group: Day of the week: Time: Place:

✓

Week 2: Your Adoption by God

3.3 Your Dad's Parenting II

Your most important belief is that God is your real and perfect Dad. (2 Cor 6:18)

Project 3C: Facing My Childhood

3.4: Your Dad's Parenting III

Your real Dad is everything you ever wanted. (Ps 103:13)

Barnabas Group

✓

Week 3: Your Forgiveness from God I

3.5: Your Dad's Pardon I

Every one of your sins has been completely and forever forgiven by your Dad. (1 John 4:10)

3.6: Your Dad's Pardon II

You cannot break your relationship with your Dad. (1 John 1:7)

Barnabas Group

✓

Week 4: Your Forgiveness from God II

3.7: Your Dad's Pardon III

There is always peace between you and your Dad. (Rom 5:1-2)

3.8: Your Dad's Pardon IV

Obeying rules because of guilt makes both you and God miserable. (Gal 5:1)

Project 3D: Fighting My Guilt

Barnabas Group

	Week 5: Your Communication from God	
	3.9: Your Dad's Precepts I	God's will for your life is completely communicated in Scripture. (1 Cor 4:6)
	3.10: Your Dad's Precepts II	God gives you a lot of freedom in your decisions. (Gen 2:16-17)
	3.11: Your Dad's Precepts III	Do your best to make biblical and wise decisions and trust God to bless you. (1 Cor 7:36)
	Barnabas Group	
✓	Week 6: Your Security from God I	
	3.12: Your Dad's Presence	Your Dad's constant presence means you are never alone. (Heb 13:5)
	3.13: Your Dad's Protection	Nothing happens to you without your Dad's permission. (1 Cor 10:13)
	Barnabas Group	
✓	Week 7: Your Security from God II	
	3.14: Your Dad's Provision I	God is always working to change your heart or your circumstances. (1 Cor 10:13)
	3.15: Your Dad's Provision II	God is for you and will generously bless your life. (Rom 8:31-32)
	1 Hour with God: Project 3E: Fighting My Fears	
	Barnabas Group	

Part II: Your Significance & Satisfaction from God		
	Barnabas Group Project #2 to be completed sometime in next 5 weeks of the <i>FAITH</i> study	
✓	Week 8: Your Personality from God I	
	3.16: Your Dad's Personality I	Your Dad made your personality amazing and wonderful! (Ps 139:13-14)
	Project 3F: Discovering My Unique Personality	
	Project 3G: Recognizing My Sensitivity	
	Barnabas Group	

✓	Week 9: Your Personality from God II	
	3.17: Your Dad's Personality II	Your Dad gives you unique spiritual desires and powers to serve Him and His people. (Rom 12:6)
	Project 3H: Recognizing My Unique Design	
	3.18: Your Dad's Personality III	What really makes you attractive to your Dad and people is His Spirit in you. (1 Pet 3:4)
	3.19: Your Dad's Personality IV	Embracing the uniqueness, and fulfilling the roles of your God-ordained gender, blesses God, the world, and your life. (Gen 1:27).
	Barnabas Group	
	Week 10: Your Power from God	
	3.20: Your Dad's Power I: Prayer	Your Dad gives you a lot of power through prayer when you ask according to His will. (1 John 5:14-15)
	3.21: Your Dad's Power II: Praise	The power of praise can change your life no matter what. (Phil 4:6-7)
	Barnabas Group	
✓	Week 11: Your Pleasure & Purpose	
	3.22 Your Dad's Pleasure	The most pleasurable thing you will experience in this life is blessing other people. (Acts 20:35)
	3.23 Your Dad's Purpose	Your ultimate purpose in life is to reveal the greatness of God. (1 Cor 10:31)
	Project 3I: How Do I Glorify God?	
	Barnabas Group	
✓	Week 12: Your Paradise & Prize	
	3.24: Your Dad's Paradise	Your destiny is full joy and eternal pleasures with your Dad. (Ps 16:11)
	3.25: Your Dad's Prize	God Almighty is going to reward you generously and eternally for everything you do or suffer for Him. (Matt 16:27-28)
	Barnabas Group	

Appendices	
A	P.O.W.E.R. Plan for God Times
B	P.O.W.E.R. Plan for Barnabas Groups
C	Barnabas Group Project
D	Memory Verses for the <i>FAITH</i> Study
E	The Seven Emotional Needs of Humans- get chapters right
F	Spiritual Power Test
G	The Four Basic Personality Traits
H	Recognizing My Sensitivity
I	Outline of the <i>Christians Essentials</i> & the Transformation Triangle
J	Recommended Resources for Further Study

Chapter 3.1

Your War*A theme of Scripture & your life*

1 Peter 5:8-9

Week 1

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - Who is your great enemy?
 - What is one of the major themes of Scripture and your life?
 - How can ignoring this make you misunderstand your life and the world?
 - What does it mean for the Devil to “devour” you?
 - What is the Devil’s only weapon against you? What does God provide so you can defeat the Devil in your life?
 - What is faith?
 - What is God’s part and your part in your struggle with the Devil?

Ted Haggard started a church in his basement with 22 people. It grew to 14,000 with over 400 employees. He became the President of the National Association of Evangelicals in America and had regular phone calls with the President of the United States. *Time* magazine called him one of the most influential evangelical Christians in the country.

At the height of Ted’s “success,” a homosexual prostitute claimed Ted had repeatedly hired him for sex. Another young man claimed Ted had committed indecent sex acts with him. Eventually, Ted admitted all of it. ¹

How does the President of the National Association of Evangelicals, and founder and leader of a church of 14,000 people, become addicted to homosexual activity? This is not a simply question. But one reason was given by the Apostle Peter when he wrote:

Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.

Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith.

(1 Peter 5:8-9)

You have a powerful enemy who wants to destroy your life.

You have a great enemy

War. It is not just a current event in some foreign country. War is the reason for everything happening everywhere on Earth, including your life. Spiritual warfare is not just one subject of Scripture, but a primary theme of everything in Scripture. From Satan’s deception of Adam and Eve in

Genesis; to his eternal doom in Revelation, the Bible is the story of a Universe at war.

The cross of Jesus Christ, the center of biblical and human history, was, as much as anything else, a decisive victory in this war between good and evil. Because of Christ's sacrifice, you will win the war against the Devil. He is sure to be completely defeated. And Satan can no longer own you or take you from God. But there is still a great battle to fight in your life against the Devil's control of your life. And if you do not fight this fight successfully, you will fail in your Christian life in many ways.

You might remember in the OT that God promised His people that He would enable them to defeat all their enemies in the Promised Land. BUT THEY STILL HAD TO FIGHT FOR IT (cf. Josh 1:1-15). And there were real casualties and defeat in that war (cf. Josh 7:1-5). Likewise, you are promised to eventually win the war and inherit all that God will give you. But right now in this life He wants you to fight "*your great enemy, the devil*" (1 Pet 5:8) and overcome his influence in your life.

It is essential in the Christian life to fully understand God's intense, constant, and powerful LOVE for you. It is also essential to fully understand the Devil's intense, constant, and powerful HATRED for you. You do not live in a world with only a good God. But, "*The world around us is under the control of the evil one*" (1 John 5:19). Satan not only controls "*the world around us*" but God warns you: "*do not give the devil a foothold,*" (Eph 4:27), inside of you. The war not only occurs all AROUND you, but it is happening every minute INSIDE of you.

It is because you are in the middle of a war that Jesus told you to pray every day: "*Don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one*" (Matt 6:13).

Because you are in a war, the Apostle Paul wrote:

Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. (Eph 6:11-12)

Like it or not, your life is war. And not just against the Devil, but a multitude of "*mighty powers*" and "*evil spirits*" "*in this dark world.*" This World is not a spiritually safe place to live, but a dangerous jungle of demonic temptations waiting to seriously hurt your life.

Atheists live like there is no God and misunderstand the real cause of everything good in this life. They give good humans or good luck the credit instead of God. Likewise, many Christians live as if the Devil does not exist and misunderstand the real cause of everything bad, evil, and painful in this life. They blame bad humans, bad luck, or even God. But God says, "*we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood [human] enemies, but against*

evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world” who control much of what happens in your world.

All of this is why the Apostle Peter wrote the text for this chapter: “*Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour*” (1 Pet 5:8). You have a powerful enemy who wants to destroy your life.

The Devil is very real, but invisible. He is under God’s sovereignty, but very powerful. The Bible calls him, “*the god of this world*” (2 Cor 4:4). And he is “*your great enemy*.” Do you understand that Christian? There is a very powerful, invisible, angry, and cruel being who personally hates you and would torture and kill you and everyone you love right now if God gave him permission. As much as God LOVES you, the Devil HATES you. You have a powerful enemy who wants to destroy your life.

Maybe you have never experienced someone really hating you. Maybe you are a nice person who gets along with everyone. Perhaps you have never had an enemy, with a lot of power to do you harm. WELL YOU DO NOW, and you had better live like it. Imagine someone declaring war on you and your loved ones, and you either do not know it, or do not care. Your defenses would be down and you would be very vulnerable. That is how most Christians live. They think the Earth is a playground, but it is a battlefield. And they live in constant spiritual defeat, and often confused about why. The reason is that you have a powerful enemy who wants to destroy your life.

This is why God warns you have a, “*great enemy, the devil*” who “*prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour*.” Some think that because Peter said the Devil is only “*roaring*” that he really cannot harm you. Others think that talking about the Devil too much gives him more power. Neither of these views are biblical. Based on the repeated warnings in Scripture about the Devil, it would seem most Christians do not talk and think about him enough. Peter warned us, “*Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil*” (1 Pet 5:8). You have a powerful enemy who wants to destroy your life.

Why did Peter use the analogy of a “*lion*” to describe the Devil? Because even in ancient times the lion was considered the most dangerous and vicious beast on Earth. They attack their prey with surprise and always go after the weak. So does the Devil.

What does it mean for the Devil to “*devour*” you? Ask Ted Haggard. Ask any Christian who is controlled by destructive sin. Think about the anger, anxiety, or depression that controls you at times. That is being devoured and controlled by the Devil. Many Christians scoff when people say, “the Devil made me do it.” But there is more truth in that than you might think. You have a powerful enemy who wants to destroy your life.

The Devil's weapon and God's armor

How does the Devil devour you? By convincing you of lies. His name means lying. Devil (Greek: *diablos*) means a slanderer. Satan (Greek: *Satanas*) means adversary. The Devil fights against God and His people by slandering and lying about God to His people. In fact, the Devil's only weapon against you is a lie.

That may not sound very dangerous. But remember, everything you desire and do is based on what you BELIEVE. So if the Devil can get you to believe the wrong thing, he can get you to desire and do the wrong thing. That is how he defeated the first humans Adam and Eve. He told them the lie that God was withholding something good from them ("the knowledge of good and evil"). They believed the lie, which caused them to sin against God and brought great pain into their lives and the world (cf. Gen ch. 3).

The power of lies has continued to be the only weapon Satan has needed to control almost all of humanity throughout all of history. And to whatever extent the Devil controls your beliefs, then he controls your life too.

How did the Devil's lies work in Ted's life? In the previous study, *Your FOUNDATIONS*, you learned that all humans have God-given needs to be H.A.P.P.I.E.R. These needs include **H**ope, **A**cceptance, **P**rotection, **P**ower, **I**mportance, **E**njoyment, and **R**elationship. And like all humans, Ted was seeking to have these needs fulfilled. But through experiences and influences in a Devil-dominated World, parts of Ted's mind were convinced that the best way to fulfill those needs was sin instead of God. And eventually those Devil-deceived parts of Ted won the war inside of him and the Devil devoured him. And the same will be true for you if you do not "*Stand firm against him [the Devil], and be strong in your faith*" (1 Pet 5:9).

What is "*faith*"? Faith is simply believing the truth. And the truth is the only thing that will defeat lies. This is why "*faith*" is the only weapon you need to "*stand firm against*" or resist the Devil. Believing the truth defeats the work of the Devil in your life because his only weapon is lies.

This is how Jesus defeated the Devil in the desert. He simply told the Devil: "*It is written . . .*" and Satan left Him (cf. Matt 4:1-11).

It is because the Devil's only weapon is a lie, that the "armor" of God in Ephesians 6 is simply believing the TRUTH. Paul wrote:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. . .

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Eph 6:10-11, 13-17 NIV)

You will experience the Lord's "mighty power" "against the devil's schemes" when you "put on the full armor of God" (vs. 10-11). As explained below, the "armor of God" is essentially believing, trusting, and having faith in the TRUTH. You need to "put on the full armor of God" because the Devil will take advantage of any lie you believe and that leaves a part of your mind and heart unprotected. It is the "armor of God" because it comes from God. He provides the truth you need to defeat the Devil's lies.

Three times in this passage the Apostle says to "stand" against the Devil instead of running from him. The Devil is a very powerful, wise, and fierce enemy. But we are not to run from him in fear. If we are afraid, he already controls us and has won the battle. The Bible says, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). We are to "resist" him, not run from him. God wants the Devil to "flee from you," not have you run scared from him.

What this practically means is that God wants you to face your fears, anger, depression, and anything else that does not feel like the powers of the Holy Spirit (cf. Gal 5:22-23). Anything that is not "love, joy, peace . . . self-control" in your life is the work of the Devil. God wants you to confront it, not run from it. And He wants you to fight back with the TRUTH.

What is the armor from God? First it is "the belt of truth buckled around your waist" (v. 14). The belt of an ancient soldier held his armor together, including holding his sword. Likewise, truth is the essence of all the Christian's spiritual armor because this is what defeats the Devil's lies.

Secondly, the armor available from God is having "the breastplate of righteousness in place" (v. 14). This is your righteous standing with God. The Devil wants you to believe your sins separate you from God, and such a belief will spiritually defeat you. But Scripture says, "nothing can ever separate us from God's love" (Rom 8:38; cf. Eph 1:4, 7). The Devil also wants you to believe that your sin makes you a sinner and defines who you really are. But the Apostle Paul said, "I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it" (Rom 7:17). God wants you to understand that sin is a spiritual disease you have, but is not who you really are. And believing these promises is putting "the breastplate of righteousness in place," and a powerful weapon against the Devil's lies.

The "breastplate of righteousness" is probably also your righteous behavior for God. Earlier in Ephesians Paul warned, "Don't sin by letting anger control you . . . for anger gives a foothold to the devil" (4:26-27). Sin certainly gives the Devil power in your life, and a holy life protects you.

It is probably intentional that the Apostle spoke of a "breastplate" protecting your chest instead of your back. As stated above, if you turn and run from your fears and other sins, you have no protection from the lies of

the Devil and you will be defeated. You are protected only when you stand against him with God's truth.

Thirdly, armor from God includes having "*your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace*" (v. 15). Again, there is probably both a "positional" and "practical" aspect to this. Knowing that your faith in the Gospel gives you "*peace with God*" (Rom 5:1) is a great defense against the Devil's constant accusations that God does not like you, is angry with you, or has rejected you. On the other hand, being actively ready to share the Gospel with others is also a powerful weapon "*against the devil's schemes*." Pursuing your privilege of being an ambassador for Christ protects you from temptations to be like the unbelievers around you.

Fourth, God's armor is to, "*take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one*" (v. 16). Those "*flaming arrows*" are the lies the Devil hurls at you to make you feel angry, afraid, or depressed. And because these demonic, controlling feelings come from lies, it is "*the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one*." Again, "*faith*" is simply believing the truth.

Fifth, God's armor is "*the helmet of salvation*" (v. 17). It is a "*helmet*" because this battle is in your mind. There is no evidence in Scripture that the Devil can directly plant thoughts in your mind. He gets his lies into you through the experiences, influences, and people of the World he controls. But the war over the control of a Christian is in their mind. This is because it is simply a war between believing the Devil's lies or God's truth. It is "*the helmet of salvation*" because again, your firm faith in God's complete forgiveness of you is a powerful defense against the Devil's accusations.

Sixth, the armor of God is "*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*" (v. 17). Again, the truth of Scripture is a weapon against "*the devil's schemes*" (v. 11) because his only weapons are lies.

Learning personal spiritual warfare in the *Christian Essentials*

Notice what is God's part, and what is your part, in experiencing victory over "*the devil's schemes*" (Eph 6:11). God provides the truth through Scripture that will defeat every lie the Devil has. But you must believe that truth, replacing the Devil's lies with God's truth, to experience the victory.

There are commands here for you to obey because God expects you to learn how to "*Put on the full armor of God,*" and "*take up the shield of faith . . . and the sword of the Spirit.*" God gives you the "*shield*" and "*sword*" in Scripture, but He is not going to "lift up" that shield or "swing" that sword for you. He expects you to learn how to do that and to be faithful to do so. Contrary to what some think, God is not going to fight the Devil for you. God will give you the weapons to defeat the Devil. But the command is for you to "*Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith*" (1 Peter 5:8-9). We will say something here we will repeat throughout the *Christian Essentials*: God will not do for you what He wants to enable you to do.

Enabling you to defeat the Devil in your life is a major purpose of the next two *Christian Essentials* studies. In this study #3, *Your FAITH*, you will learn the promises of God and what the “armor of God” is made of. The text for this chapter says, “Stand firm against him [the Devil], and be strong in your faith” (1 Pet 5:9). What is that “faith”? What are the truths of God that will defeat the lies of the Devil? That is the subject of study #3, *Your FAITH*.

Study #4, *Your FREEDOM*, will give you very practical instruction on how to “take up the shield of faith” and swing “the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God.” How do you recognize lies you believe? How do you attack demonic strongholds in your life that control you? This is the subject of *Christian Essentials* study #4: *Your FREEDOM*.

You are encouraged to continue the P.O.W.E.R. agendas for God Times and Barnabas Groups that were introduced in study #2: *Your FOUNDATIONS*. This will enable you to better grasp the truths in these studies and prepare you for the personal spiritual warfare you will fight in study #4, *Your FREEDOM*. These P.O.W.E.R. agendas are found in Appendices A and B.

Two Barnabas Group Projects will be assigned during the course of this study, *Your FAITH*. A description of these is in Appendix C.

You are encouraged to memorize the main verse for each chapter throughout *Your FAITH*. These are listed in Appendix D.

The Table of Contents provides a checklist to help you keep track of what chapters you have read, Barnabas Groups you have attended, and projects you have completed. Appendix H provides an outline for all of the *Christian Essentials* studies.

God says, “Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith” (1 Peter 5:8-9). You have a powerful enemy who wants to destroy your life. So learn and practice what it takes to defeat him.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Memorize 1 Peter 5:8-9 in the translation above or another.
- ▶ Complete Project 3A by 1) Reviewing Appendix E: “The Seven Emotional Needs of Humans.” 2) Complete “The Spiritual Power Test” in Appendix F. This will give you an idea of how well you are doing in your fight against the Devil’s control of your life. Share your results with your Barnabas Group this week. Has there been any improvement since you took this same test at the beginning of the *Christians Essentials* study #2: *Your FOUNDATIONS*?

¹ “Ted Haggard” online at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ted_Haggard.

Chapter 3.2

Your Dad's Parenting I*You were without God in this World*

Ephesians 2:12

Week 1

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - What was your relationship with God like before you belonged to Him?
 - What is the real reason bad things happened to you before you were a child of God?
 - How does the Devil want to use your past to affect your relationship with God now?
 - Why is it important to understand that the old you died when you were “born again”?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?

When Sally was a teenager, her school bus driver sexually molested her. As a result she acquired a fear of men and purposely became obese so they would not be attracted to her. Even after becoming a Christian she doubted God's love for her because He had not protected her.

One day Sally was told that before she was a Christian, she did not have a relationship with God and His promises did not apply to her. When she was molested she belonged to the Devil and was under his authority. But now as a child of God, she could claim all of God's promises. Sally was asked if she could see how God began protecting and providing for her after she became a Christian. When she thought about it she realized this was true.

Sally began taking care of herself and lost weight. Soon she was married. Sally learned an important truth about her past including:

You lived in this world without God and without hope. (Eph 2:12)

Do not let what the Devil did to you in the past, effect what you believe about God's love for you now.

You lived in this world without God

You were not born a child of God. The Bible says: *“In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope”* (Eph 2:12).

Living “*in this world without God*” summarizes your life before you were a Christian. “*You were living apart from Christ.*” You were “*excluded from*” God’s people and His “*promises.*” You were “*dead*” to God and not even “*alive*” to Him (Eph 2:1, 5). You were born into “*the kingdom of darkness*” (Col 1:13) and under “*the power of Satan*” (Acts 26:18). Jesus would have said to you what He said to other unbelievers: “*You are the children of your father the Devil . . . You don’t belong to God*” (John 8:44, 47). The Devil was your dad.

Therefore, you could not expect God to love you, protect you, or provide for you as one of His children. All sin makes God sad (cf. Gen 6:5-6), including the sin that hurt you. Knowing that you would one day become one of His children, God probably did protect you from many things. But you could not have expected it, or blamed Him if He had not because you did not belong to Him.

Also, God never heard your prayers. The Prophet Isaiah said of you: “*Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore*” (Isa 59:2; cf. 1 Pet 3:12; John 9:32).

When you were without God, the Devil worked to slander God

Why is it important for you to understand that “*You lived in this world without God and without hope*” before you were a Christian? Because like Sally, you might blame God for the bad things that happened to you before you belonged to Him. Maybe you believed there was a God, and that if He was a good God He would have protected and blessed you. And because God did not do these things, you concluded that God is not good or worthy of trust. And maybe you still struggle with this.

This is what the Devil wants. The Devil’s plan is to use the painful events of your past to slander God. This is why he is called the Devil (Greek: *diabolos* “slander”). When you belonged to the Devil, he wanted to cause great pain and suffering in your life. The Devil wanted you to believe the lie that you deserved good from God. Then the Devil wanted you to experience great disappointment with God, blame Him for your pain, and hold a grudge against God that would last throughout your life. But the truth was, “*In those days you were living apart from Christ. . . You lived in this world without God and without hope*” (Eph 2:12).

Remember, “*the world around us is under the control of the evil one*” (1 John 5:19). The Devil is the ultimate agent of every sinful and painful thing on Earth, including the sinful and painful things that happened to you. The man who molested Sally was controlled by the Devil. People and events that have hurt you were controlled by the Devil. The Bible says all unbelievers, “*live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the Devil . . . He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God*” (Eph 2:2). Such people can do very hurtful things to you.

Dads molesting their daughters and rejecting their sons. Moms constantly criticizing their daughters and belittling their sons. Siblings hating siblings. Boyfriends and girlfriends emotionally scarring one another. Kids bullying and excluding others from feeling accepted. And the world making you feel scared, lonely, ugly, and worthless. This is all the work of your former spiritual father the Devil. The Devil and the people and world he controls are very cruel. And no one has lived on this Earth without being hurt by the evil one. Not even Jesus who was crucified by people controlled by the Devil.

Do not let what the Devil did to you in the past, effect what you believe about God's love for you now

The critical problem for you is that you might continue to believe Satan's slander after you become a child of God. Your painful experiences when "*You lived in this world without God*," distort your image of Him even now when you have God. You transfer your past experience when you belonged to Satan, to the present when you belong to God. As a result you struggle to completely believe God is now going to treat you differently.

Imagine when you were born your parents abandoned you and you grew up in a poor, dirty, orphanage with a cruel and uncaring master. Your abandonment and experiences as a child would teach you that the world you live in is a lonely and scary place. You would believe you were the worthless person your cruel master said you were. You would have a hard time believing anyone could love or protect you and take care of you. You would grow up believing you needed to take care of yourself.

But then a very kind and powerful man adopts you into his family. He and his wife do love you and you are very valuable to them. They demonstrate their love in many ways and repeatedly prove that you can trust them. But you still might struggle a great deal to accept and trust their love. Your past experiences imprinted you with the belief that you were not loveable or valuable. And now you need to change your mind about that. You need to understand you live in a different world now where someone really does care about you. You need to let go of how you were treated when you belonged to the cruel master and know that your past has nothing to do with who you are now, and what you can expect.

God decided before He created the world that you would belong to Him (cf. Eph 1:4-5). But you were born first into an evil orphanage with the Devil as your dad. And this was how you lived until you were adopted by God the Father. Some people "*lived in this world without God*" for only a short time. Others lived as children of the Devil longer and were therefore hurt even more by him. But you belong to God now and He is your Dad.

Do you still believe the Devil's slander about God? Do you struggle to believe God is good and really cares about you because of the things that happened to you before you belonged to Him?

“You lived without God in this world” (Eph 2:12). “But now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13).

“You lived without God in this world.” But now “He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you” (Deut 31:8).

You were under the cruel *“power of Satan” (Acts 26:18)*. But now, God *“has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom” (Col 1:13)*.

“Once you had no identity” but “now you are God’s people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God’s mercy” (1 Pet 2:10).

“You lived without . . . hope in this world” because you were *“excluded from . . . the covenant promises God had made” (Eph 2:12)*. You could not expect His help with anything. But now, *“He has given us great and precious promises” (2 Pet 1:4)*.

You need to ask yourself the question Sally was asked. Have you experienced the love of God in greater ways since becoming His child? Have you experienced more blessing, protection, and happiness since belonging to God? That is because you have a new Dad. Stop living and believing like you are still under the curse of your cruel old dad the Devil. You belong to God now, not the Devil. Do not let what the Devil did to you in the past, effect what you believe about God’s love for you now.

The person that belonged to the Devil no longer exists

We want to share one more very important fact about your past. THE PERSON YOU WERE IS DEAD. God says, *“YOU DIED”!* (Col 3:3). Paul said elsewhere, *“My old self has been crucified with Christ” (Gal 2:20). “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17 ESV)*. You need to recognize and resolve how your past experiences are still affecting you. But that person who was a child of the Devil no longer exists. They died when you were *“born again” (John 3:3)*. And being *“born again”* means your old self is dead and you are a new person. Whatever God allowed to happen to that person of your past has nothing to do with how He feels about the new you.

“You lived in this world without God and without hope” (Eph 2:12). But you have God now and He has you. Do not let what the Devil did to you in the past, effect what you believe about God’s love for you now.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite 1 Peter 5:8-9 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Ephesians 2:12 in the translation above or another.
- ▶ Complete the following Project 3B: “Facing My Disappointments with God.”

Project 3B

Facing My Disappointments with God

You learned in the previous *Christian Essentials* study, *FOUNDATIONS*, that your faith in God’s love depends greatly on your experiences with God. To build your faith it is valuable to think about those times you know God personally demonstrated His love for you. You did this in Project 2.E: “Counting My Blessings” in that study.

But you also need to be honest about the times it did not feel like God was loving you, especially during painful events in your childhood. Be honest with God and record these too. And be honest with yourself that these events are an attack on your trust in God’s love for you. Be assured that God wants to help you resolve these events with Him and have peace about them.

The studies *Your FAITH* and *Your FREEDOM* in the *Christian Essentials* are designed to help you resolve these things. This current study, *Your FAITH*, will help you have a solid understanding of God’s love and perhaps *correctly* see some of your past from God’s perspective. The study *Your FREEDOM*, will equip you with a lot of biblical understanding and several tools to resolve painful events in your past.

For now, record your disappointments with God in the table below. Then compare these disappointments with the blessings you recorded in Project 2.E attached to chapter 2.6 in *Your FOUNDATIONS*. How do these two inventories of your experience with God compare?

Regarding your disappointments with God, begin praying that He will lead you to freedom from the pain, fear, shame, and hurt of any past disappointments with God. Pray the “heart prayer” for God’s help:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way. (Ps 139:23-24 NASB)

Disappointments with God

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Chapter 3.3

Your Dad's Parenting II*God is Your Real Dad*

2 Corinthians 6:18

Week 2

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - Why do you think God being your Dad is emphasized in the NT?
 - Why is it important to recognize the differences between your real Dad and your parents?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?
 - What would you be willing to share from Project 2.F “Facing My Childhood”?

Rhonda grew up with parents who went to church and gave the impression to others they were a moral family. But her parents were constantly critical and even cruel. When Rhonda expressed feelings of loneliness, fear, or inadequacy to her parents, they simply told her to work it out herself. Rhonda grew up fearing her parents and hating herself.

Nancy grew up with an alcoholic, adulterous dad, and an angry, depressed mom. Her parents were constantly fighting. And they sure didn't love Nancy either. They made her feel insecure, desperate and worthless. And this affected her life in many very sad and destructive ways. She thought, “Gee, if my own parents do not love me, I must be trash.” And she lived that way, giving herself to any boy who showed the least bit of interest.

Rebecca had a painful childhood. Almost too horrific to speak of. Her dad left her mom when she was a little girl. But she had to visit her dad every week. When she visited, he sexually molested her, beginning at age five and continuing for several years. She remembers her dad holding a flame of fire in front of her face and telling her, “If you ever tell anyone about this I will burn you alive.” So she did not tell anyone.

Thankfully, all three of these women became Christians, and through the principles and practices shared in the *Christian Essentials* studies, have experienced a great deal of freedom from how their childhoods affected them. They have learned the joy of what God has said to us:

**“I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters,”
says the Lord Almighty. (2 Cor 6:18)**

Your most important belief is that God is your real and perfect Dad.

If Jesus Christ is your Savior and Lord, then the Almighty Creator and Ruler of the Universe is your Dad! If you believed all that means, with all your heart, nothing would stop your joy!

Is it biblical to claim God is your Dad? In our text above, God Himself proclaims this: *“I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters,” says the Lord Almighty* (2 Cor 6:18). The Bible says, *“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”* (1 John 3:1 NIV).

Paul said, *“You received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, ‘Abba, Father’”* (Rom 8:15). The Aramaic word “Abba” was the informal word used by children to address their father. It is best translated in English as “daddy.” Do you see the incredible privilege you have to call God your Dad?

Making you a son or daughter of God was one of the reasons Jesus came. *“God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children”* (Gal 4:5).

Jesus always called God His Dad when He prayed. Likewise, He said you should begin your prayers with: *“Our Father in Heaven”* (Matt 6:9). This is remarkable because in all of ancient Jewish literature, including the OT, there is no evidence that anyone addressed God as father, and certainly not the more intimate terms *Abba* or Dad.

While God is referred to as a father in the OT 15 times, He is called father 245 times in the NT! God no longer wants to be just the Creator and Ruler that causes fear in His people. God’s favorite way for you to relate to Him is as your Dad. He says, *“I will be your Father and you will be my sons and daughters,” says the Lord Almighty* (2 Cor 6:18). Your most important belief is that God is your real and perfect Dad.

This truth is your most important belief because it summarizes everything about God’s love for you. And it is a powerful truth because you were created to respond to a father’s love more than anyone else. We know what a dad should be and we desperately need one. You have a Dad! A perfect, patient, kind, and powerful Dad. You just cannot see Him yet. But He always sees you. After becoming a Christian, knowing God loves you as a perfect Dad is your most important belief.

This was true in Jesus’ life. On the day He was baptized, what did His Dad speak from Heaven for all to hear: *“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased”* (Matt 3:17 NIV). Why did His Dad say that? Because it was the most important thing for Jesus to hear and believe. Notice that His Dad said He was *“well pleased”* with His Son before He had performed any ministry. The Father did not love His Son because of what He did, but because of who He was. And He loves you the same.

Jesus needed to know His Father loved Him. Immediately after hearing His Dad tell Him that He loved Him we read, *“Then Jesus was led by the*

Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the Devil" (Matt 4:1). And what was the one thing the Devil used to attack Jesus the most? The Devil began two of his three temptations with the statement, "*If you are the Son of God . . .*" (vs. 3, 6). Do you see what the Devil was trying to do? To tempt Christ to doubt He was the Son of God. To doubt that God was His Dad. If you do not think the most important belief in your life is that God is your perfect Dad, then notice that the Devil thinks that is the most important belief to attack in your life. Jesus' firm belief that God was His Dad empowered Him to reject all the temptations of the evil one. The same will be true of you.

There was no "identity crisis" in the life of Jesus Christ. He knew who He was. He knew He had a Dad in Heaven who loved Him no matter what. His identity was being a Son of God. And so is yours. And when you believe with all your heart all the things it means for God to be your Dad, then you will experience all the power, joy, fruit, and fullness that God wants for you.

God is your real Dad

God is your real Dad. In fact, Jesus commanded: "*Do not call anyone on Earth 'father,' for you have one Father and he is in Heaven*" (Matt 23:9 NIV). Do you see here how much God wants to claim you as His son or daughter? God wants you to "*honor your [human] father and mother*" (Eph 6:2) and treat them with respect and kindness. But He wants you to understand that He is your real Dad. Why is God the Father your real Dad?

First, your earthly dad did not create you, but your real Dad did. The Psalmist says of God the Father, "*You made me; you created me*" (Ps 119:73). Because He created you, God is your real Dad.

Secondly, your earthly dad did not choose you, but your real Dad did. When you were born into your natural family you were not chosen. But when you were adopted into your new spiritual family you were specially selected by your real Dad. The Bible says:

Even before he made the world, God [the Father] loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God [the Father] decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he [God the Father] wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. (Eph 1:4-6)

The most powerful, wonderful, and important Person in the Universe chose you to be His son or daughter for one reason: "*God loved us . . . and it gave Him great pleasure*" to adopt you. We learned in the previous chapter that you have not always been a child of God. But God chose you to eventually become one. And even if your earthly parents rejected you in some way, your real Dad chose you even before you were born!

The third reason that God is your real Dad is because He is the One that will evaluate your whole life, not your earthly dad. And it will matter much more how you pleased your real Dad, than your other dad!

Finally, your real Dad will be your Dad forever. Because your adoption is a choice God made with His unconditional love, it is secure and will last for eternity. God says, *"I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty* (2 Cor 6:18). Your most important belief is that God is your real and perfect Dad.

Facing the effect of your earthly parents

Does it seem weird to think of God as your Dad? For some the idea of a dad may not be a good one. Earthly fathers play different roles in people's lives. Maybe your dad is your best friend and you learned a lot about love from Him. But maybe your dad was mean or lazy or you do not even know who your human dad is. Goodness, maybe he even abused you like Rebecca.

In that case, you might struggle with the idea that God is your Dad. Regardless, God will not allow sinful humans to define what being a dad should be. He does not abandon the concept of being your Dad just because there are really bad dads on Earth and one of them may have been yours. God defines what a dad is supposed to be, and wants to show you that being His child is a wonderful thing.

God is your perfect Dad who loves you perfectly. But no human parents are perfect. Therefore, you need to recognize the differences between your earthly parents and your heavenly Dad. God created children so that the biggest influence on them would be their parents. Your most powerful imprinting of who God is and what love is came from your parents. This is why you must face any errors in that imprinting. The influence of parents can either be good or bad depending on what your parents were like. If your parents were patient, kind, and holy, you will have a great head start in being the same way. If your parents were angry, anxious, or sinful, you probably learned to be the same way.

If you do not recognize and resolve the bad things you learned from your parents, then you will pass them on to your own children. The Bible says of *"Ahaziah son of Ahab"* that *"He did what was evil in the LORD's sight, following the example of his father and mother"* (1 Kings 22:51-52). God wants to be your real Dad. He wants you to follow His example and teaching and reject anything you learned from your parents that your real Father would not like.

You need to recognize and admit the flaws in your parents that affected you. You need to reveal the lies you were taught about yourself and replace them with what your real Dad thinks of you. And you need to forgive and accept your parents for who they are. They probably did their best with who

they were, and how they were raised themselves. Even if their best was not very good.

For most people it is God's plan for them to physically leave their parents and be joined with their spouse (cf. Gen 2:24). But you also need to spiritually leave the parts of your parents that are not like your real Dad. You can thank God for the ways your parents reflected the love, acceptance, and care of your real Dad. But if you want to be a loving, joyful, and fruitful Christian, one of the most important tasks in your life is to shed any bad things your parents taught you.

Unfortunately, some parents are selfish, harsh, cruel, critical, wicked, perverted, depressed, fearful, pushy, hypocritical, liars, unforgiving, uncaring, unfaithful, greedy, and godless. Some parents, like those experienced by Rhonda, Nancy, and Rebecca have hit their children, verbally abused them, sexually molested them, and abandoned them.

Even if your parents were not abusive, the values they raised you with may have been wrong. Jesus spoke of this when we read:

The Pharisees, who dearly loved their money, heard all this and scoffed at him. Then he said to them, "You like to appear righteous in public, but God knows your hearts. What this world honors is detestable in the sight of God." (Luke 16:14-15).

Many parents in the world love money more than God. Many are religious or moral hypocrites who look good to others in public, but in private and in their homes, are very different. Most parents "*honor*" and value things like physical appearance, academic intelligence, athletic skill, and financial success. And they evaluated you on these very things and taught you that your own value was based on them.

But such values are "*detestable in the sight of God*" who is your real Dad and who values very different things. And He gave you the highest value possible even before the creation of the world when He chose you to be His son or daughter forever.

God says, "*I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters,*" says the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor 6:18). Your most important belief is that God is your real and perfect Dad.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite Eph 2:12 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize 2 Cor 6:18 in the expanded translation above or another.
- ▶ Complete Project 3C: "Facing My Childhood" on the next page.

Project 3C

Facing My Childhood

We discussed in the previous chapter that your parents, and especially your earthly father, can have a lot of influence on you. This can be good or bad. It is important to recognize these things so you can correct them.

You might struggle with being honest about the sins and weaknesses of your parents. It may be difficult to admit the pain your parents have caused in your life. Some may feel this would violate the commandment to “*honor your father and mother*” (Eph 6:2). But God always wants you to do everything in the truth, even honoring your parents. It is not honest or helpful to ignore or distort the reality of how your parents hurt you and how that has affected you.

Besides your real Dad already knows all of these things. And all we are asking is that you would be open with Him about them. If you do not want to share the results of this project with your Barnabas Group that is O.K. Your real Dad just wants you to recognize any bad influences or pain caused by your earthly parents so He can begin to help you overcome them and not pass them on to your own children.

So, it is your real Dad, in private, with compassion, and already knowing the answers better than you do, who is asking these questions: What were your parents really like? How did they hurt you? What were ways they failed to love you? How were they different than Me, your real Dad?

Take some extended time to complete this project. It will be helpful to start as early in your childhood as you can remember and work forward. Pray the “heartly prayer” from Ps 139 for God’s help:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way. (Ps 139:23-24 NASB)

Biblical or Good Things My Parents Said to Me, Did for Me, or Taught Me	Unbiblical, Bad or Hurtful Things My Parents Said to Me, Did to Me, or Taught Me

Continue on another page if needed

Chapter 3.4

Your Dad's Parenting III

God is Your Perfect Dad

Psalm 103:13

Week 2

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
- ▶ What are your favorite aspects of your real Dad's love for you?
- ▶ What was especially meaningful for you in this chapter? Why?

Matthew grew up with a tough father. He remembers when he was just a small boy his dad told him, “You will never amount to anything.” Being that young, Matthew believed it. And throughout his childhood Matthew's father constantly criticized him.

Many years later Matthew was in full-time ministry. He noticed that he never felt like God was pleased with him. Through some counseling he realized there was a part of him that believed God was like his dad.

But God His Father already believed Matthew was significant. God was not expecting him to earn His approval like his earthly father had. Applying this truth to the memory of his dad telling him “You will never amount to anything,” changed Matthew's life. He knew his real Dad would never say that. As a result, Matthew gained a deeper understanding of what his real Dad was like:

The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate. (Ps 103:13)

Your real Dad is everything you ever wanted.

God shows us what a real Dad is like. “*Tender and compassionate*” translate the same Hebrew word (*racham*) which means a deep love. OT authors used this word for a mother's feeling toward her nursing baby (cf. Isa 49:15), or a father's concern and compassion on his children (cf. Ps 103:13). And that is how the God of the Universe loves you.

When God described Himself to Moses, He said: “*The Lord! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness*” (Exod 34:6). The Prophet Micah said of God: “*You delight in showing unfailing love*” (7:18). And this is describing God in the OT before He sent His Son to die for us and gave us His unconditional love in the New Covenant! “*The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate*” (Ps 103:13). Your real Dad is everything you ever wanted.

Your real Dad compared to your earthly dad

Were your parents ever angry with you? Your real Dad is never angry with you because all of your failings have already been forgiven completely. Scripture says, *“Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand”* (Rom 5:1-2). Your Dad has declared you are forgiven of all your sins. Right now and always there will be “*peace*” between you and Him because you live in His “*grace*.” This is the forever and always reconciled relationship with your Dad that Jesus purchased for you.

Did your parents ever make you feel like you had to earn their love? God says, *“I have loved you with an everlasting love”* (Jer 31:3). Your real Dad’s love is unconditional and based on His perfect grace. He chose you even knowing the worst things you would do.

Did your parents break promises? Your real Dad has never done that to you. The Bible says, *“God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not change his mind. Has he ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through?”* (Num 23:19). Never.

Did one or both of your parents leave you? *“God has said, ‘I will never fail you. I will never abandon you’”* (Heb 13:5). David believed: *“Even if my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will hold me close”* (Ps 27:10). God is a “*Father to the fatherless*” (Ps 68:5).

Did you ever feel your parents did not teach you what you needed to know? Your Dad promises: *“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you”* (Ps 32:8).

Did you ever feel unwanted, or judged by your parents? The Bible says, *“So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus”* (Rom 8:1). Your real Dad chose you to be His child, to belong to Him, and He will never criticize or judge you because all your faults are forgiven.

Did you ever feel misunderstood or ignored by your parents? *“The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate”* (Ps 103:13). Your real Dad always understands you and cares how you feel. David said of Him *“You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book”* (Ps 56:8).

God is not only your real Dad, but your perfect Dad. Anything good in your parents is only a small reflection of the goodness and love of your real Dad. And God has none of the sins, weaknesses, or failings of your parents. As you learn and experience more about your real Dad, you will be able to imitate Him to your children. Take a moment to imagine what you would desire in a perfect Dad. Your real Dad is everything you ever wanted.

Your real Dad's love is reflected in how dads and moms are supposed to feel

If you are a father or mother, how do you feel toward your children? If you do not have children, how would you feel toward them if you did? Most parents care a great deal about their children and want the very best for them. They are very concerned when their children are hurting and struggling and will do everything they can to help them. Do you think you love your children more than your real and perfect Dad loves you?

God was teaching this to the Israelites when He said:

"Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for the child she has borne? But even if that were possible, I would not forget you!" (Isa 49:15-16)

Jesus was also teaching that your real Dad's love is greater than even a good parent's love when He said:

You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him. (Matt 7:9-11)

Your real and perfect Dad loves you more than you can love your own children. *"The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate"* (Ps 103:13). Your real Dad is everything you ever wanted.

Your real Dad's love is reflected in the fruits of the Spirit

Imagine a mom and dad who are always controlled by the Holy Spirit. Your real Dad is always controlled by His Spirit and therefore He always treats you with: *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control"* (Gal 5:22-23). ¹ Your real Dad is always with you, always praising you, and always eager to listen. *"The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate"* (Ps 103:13). Your real Dad is everything you ever wanted.

Your real Dad's love reflected in His love for His OT people

The Apostles taught that the words and events in the OT were written as examples for us (cf. Rom 4:23-24; 1 Cor 10:11). The feelings, love, and promises He revealed to His chosen people in the OT can be claimed by us.

God made unconditional covenants with some of the characters in the OT. He did not favor all people like this, but men and women like Adam, Eve, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and David experienced the unconditional love of God. Those relationships were a foreshadowing of the grace, love, favor, and friendship that God grants to all of those chosen to

be a part of His New Covenant. How God treated the special characters of the OT is how He feels about you.

He covered the nakedness and removed the shame of sin from Adam and Eve. He had great mercy on Noah and his family and saved them. He called Abraham His friend. He redeemed all the evil done to Joseph in order to glorify Himself and help Joseph's family. He called Moses to accomplish a great task for Him. God was always so kind and faithful to David. This is what God is like, and this is how He feels about you.

Likewise, He made promises to His Old Covenant people that He still intends to fulfill in the future. But these promises reveal how God feels now about His chosen people like you. Some of these are quoted below. A general theme is that God your Father wants to bless and use your life. God, your real and perfect Dad says:

"I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, 'You are my servant'; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God." (Isa 41:8-10 NIV)

"This is what the Lord says—he who created you . . . he who formed you . . . 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.'" (Isa 43:1)

"You are my witnesses," declares the Lord, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.'" (Isa 43:10)

"I—yes, I alone—will blot out your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again." (Isa 43:25)

"I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'" (Jer 29:11-12 NIV)

Thank God this is your God! Thank God He is your real and perfect Dad. *"The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate"* (Ps 103:13). Your real Dad is everything you ever wanted.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite 2 Corinthians 6:18 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Psalm 103:13 in the expanded translation above or another.

¹ We have explained "The Nine Powers of God, the Spirit, & the Authentic Christian" in Appendix G of the previous *Christian Essentials* study #2: *Your FOUNDATIONS*.

Chapter 3.5
Your Dad's Pardon I
Forgiven Forever
1 John 4:10

Week 3

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - What did God the Father do to secure your forgiveness forever?
 - What did God the Son do to secure your forgiveness forever?
 - What did God the Spirit do to secure your forgiveness forever?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?

Sandra had been a Christian for many years. But she struggled with feeling guilty all the time. No matter how hard she tried, she never felt “right with God.” She feared that there was sin in her life that made God distant and even angry with her. Then Sandra did a Bible study on God’s grace and began to understand the perfect and forever forgiveness of God through Christ. She learned this about her Father in Heaven:

He loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:10 NIV)

Every one of your sins has been completely and forever forgiven by God.

The words “*atoning sacrifice*” (*hilasmon*) in 1 John 4:10 means the sacrifice of a life to pay the penalty for sin. But it also means to take away God’s wrath about your sin. All of the anger that your real Dad could ever have about your sin, was poured out and completely exhausted and inflicted on Christ. The “*atoning sacrifice*” for you occurred when Christ hung on the cross in your place, was drained of His blood, and was separated from and despised by God. All of this was because God the Father wanted there to be nothing between you and Him. Every one of your sins has been completely and forever forgiven by God.

God the Father sent

God the Father did His part to ensure your forgiveness. He sent His Son to die for your sins. This was the sacrifice He made. Imagine if you turned your son over to sinful people to be mocked, tortured, and killed in order to help those very people. Can you begin to understand what God the Father gave when He sent His Son to die for your sins?

But He did something even before He created the world to also ensure your forgiveness forever: *“He chose us . . . before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption”* (Eph 1:4-5 NIV). That was a decision God the Father made about you before you were even born. He “chose” and “predestined” you *“to be holy and blameless in his sight.”*

And your complete forgiveness is forever. God the Father *“predestined us for adoption.”* What your Dad decided even *“before the creation of the world”* will last forever because God *“will not lie, nor will he change his mind, for he is not human that he should change his mind!”* (1 Sam 15:29). When God predestined you to be a part of His family, nothing you or anyone else could ever do could change that. Once you are in the Father’s family you will never be rejected. Jesus said: *“a son is part of the family forever”* (John 8:35).

Why did your Dad predestine and choose to forgive you and adopt you? The Bible says He did all this because of His unconditional “love” (Eph 1:4, *agapē*¹ is used here). In Ephesians 2 it says:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and [even] this [faith] is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. (Eph 2:8-9 NIV).

Why did God choose you? Because He decided to love you and it was not because of anything you did. This is what it means to be rescued from the penalty of your sins by God’s grace instead of your works. The reason that even your saving faith in Jesus Christ is not a human work is because *“it is the gift of God,”* given to you when the Holy Spirit indwelt you. The ultimate reason you are forgiven is because God chose you, not because you chose Him.

This unconditional (*agapē*) love means your Dad in Heaven has decided to love you and forgive you no matter what. That is God’s kind of love. This is why the Bible says: *“Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever”* (Ps 107:1).

Your Dad’s unconditional love is difficult to understand or accept because no humans love you like He does. Even the people who love you the most will get angry with you, or may even reject you if you do something really bad. But the Bible says, *“Now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus”* (Rom 8:1).

A painful part about life is that people will judge, condemn, reject, and separate from you when you sin against them. But do not ever let mere humans define who God is or what real love is. When you suffer in some way because of your sin, take comfort that your Dad never judges, condemns, rejects, or separates from you. Nor does He want you treated in the way that some may treat you even if you do something wrong. Your Dad always instantly and completely forgives you even if people do not.

It is because of the unconditional love your Father has for you that He can promise you eternal life that never ceases. *“God [the Father] loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). Eternal life is eternal and can never stop. Your Dad did not promise a temporary life that can be taken away. If you truly believe in Christ, then from that moment forward and forever you have *“eternal life.”*

Your Dad is even working now to give you eternal security. Jesus said: *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand.* (John 10:28-29)

Your Dad's unconditional love for all of His adopted children ensures you will be protected from ever being destroyed or lost until He brings you to the New Earth to live with Him. The Bible says of God your Father: *“He will keep you strong to the end so that you will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns”* (1 Cor 1:8).

There is only one reason your Dad will ever abandon you. You commit a sin that He will not forgive. But this is impossible! *“He forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross”* (Col 2:13-14). “All” means all. You cannot commit a sin that He will not forgive. There is not even a *“record of the charges against us”* anymore. It has been erased! This is why Paul wrote:

I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow- not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. Indeed, nothing in all creation [including your sin] will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:38-39)

The common saying among Christians is true: “Once saved, always saved.” And it is true because when God promises to save someone, He has the power, character, and desire to keep His promise. Are you convinced of that Christian? Every one of your sins has been completely and forever forgiven by God.

How then does your Father feel when you sin? If He predestined you to be blameless in His sight (cf. Eph 1:4), already erased the record of your sins (cf. Col 2:14), and exhausted His anger over your sin on Christ (cf. 1 John 4:10), then what feeling remains when you sin? COMPASSION. The Bible says: *“The LORD is like a [perfect] father to his children, tender and compassionate . . . For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust”* (Ps 103:8-10, 13-14).

Jesus illustrated the compassion of your Dad when you sin in the parable of “The Prodigal Son.”² The son “*wasted all his [father’s] money in wild living*” (Luke 15:13). The word “prodigal” means to be wasteful. But the son was more than wasteful. It would be more accurate to describe him as “The Sexually Immoral Son” because he spent his father’s money to have sex with “*prostitutes*” (v. 30).

Like most people would, the son’s brother was angry with him, condemned and rejected him (cf. vs. 29-30). Even the son himself believed he was “*no longer worthy of being called [the father’s] son*” (v. 19).

But what did the father feel and do about his sinful and even sexually immoral son? “*While he [the son] was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him*” (v. 20).

Why did the father see his son even when “*he was still a long way off*” from home? Because the father was constantly and eagerly watching and waiting for his son to return to him. The father’s love did not start when the son repented and returned. No, the father was loving his son even while he was wasting the father’s hard earned money to have sex with prostitutes.

What did the father feel toward his wasteful, ungrateful, and sexually immoral son? He was, “*filled with love and compassion.*” Jesus made sure to make it clear that the father had no anger toward his son.

And when the son did repent and was sorry for his sin and came to the father, what did the father do? “*He ran.*” Not away from his son, like many would do. The father ran to his son with a smile on his face. He did not correct, lecture, rebuke, or shake his head in disgust at his son. He “*embraced him, and kissed him.*”

Instead of leaving his son in shame, the father instantly treated his son like royalty, putting the “*the finest robe in the house . . . on him*” and “*a ring [on] his finger and sandals for his feet*” (v. 22). Instead of requiring his son to pay back the money he wasted on prostitutes, the father spent a bunch more money to have a huge celebration for him! (v. 23). And Jesus told that story with the purpose of explaining how God your Father feels about you, His son or daughter, when you sin. “*He loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins*” (1 John 4:10 NIV). Every one of your sins has been completely and forever forgiven by God.

God the Son sacrificed

Our text says God the Son was, “*an atoning sacrifice for our sins*” (1 John 4:10 NIV). Your forever forgiveness is perfect and complete because the “*atoning sacrifice*” of God’s “*Son*” was perfect and complete. There was not a single sin missed by the blood of Christ. The Bible says: “*The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin*” (1 John 1:7). “*The blood of Jesus*” was

precious and powerful enough to pay for, and purify you “*from all sin.*” There is that word “*all*” again. And all means all or God is a liar.

The sacrifice of Christ provides another reason why the saying, “Once saved, always saved” is true. What could cause you to lose your salvation? You commit a sin that Christ did not pay for. But that is also impossible because God says that the blood of Jesus Christ paid for all of your sins.

When Christ died on the cross for your sins, all of them were future. Therefore, all of your sins have already been paid for, past, present, and future. God’s forgiveness is complete and forever, and going to Heaven is a guarantee! The Bible says, “*For by that one offering he [God the Son] forever made [us] perfect*” (Heb 10:14). Every one of your sins has been completely and forever forgiven by God.

God the Holy Spirit seals

When you belong to God the Father and God the Son, you also belong to God the Spirit. The greatest gift the Father gives you is His Son. The second greatest gift is His Spirit. And all true Christians are promised “*You will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 2:38).

This “*gift of the Holy Spirit*” results in several different blessings. First, the Bible says, “*We have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit*” (1 Cor 12:13). All Christians have been baptized by the Holy Spirit and have Him living in them.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit is in you to stay. You cannot make God leave when He has promised to stay. Humans are not more powerful than God or His promises. Therefore, one result of the baptism and indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the “sealing” of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says: “*When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance*” (Eph 1:13-14 NIV).

Thirdly, when the Holy Spirit indwells you, He recreates you into a different kind of human being. You will now always be a person who wants to love Christ and hate sin. The change is so radical and permanent that Jesus called it being “*born again*”! (John 3:7). Paul wrote: “*If anyone is in Christ, [or Christ is in them!] he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come*” (2 Cor 5:17 ESV). A person “*born again*” by the indwelling Spirit cannot ever sincerely reject Christ and they will never want to. Those who do, were never “*born again.*”

Like the baptism, indwelling, and sealing of the Holy Spirit, being “*born again*” and recreated cannot be reversed. Like physical birth, no one can be “unborn again.” It is a permanent change for those who belong to Christ. The Bible says to Christians: “*You have been born again by means of the living word of God. His word lasts forever. You were not born again from a seed that will die. You were born from a seed that can't die*” (1 Pet 1:23 NIV).

Finally, it is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that proves your forever forgiveness from God. The Bible says: “*I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life*” (1 John 5:13). God wants you to know for certain if you have eternal life and His forgiveness forever. How can we know that? “*God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us*” (1 John 4:13).

What will be the obvious effects of the Spirit of God indwelling you? You will have a new love for God and people and a new hatred for sin. You will never do these perfectly, but your attitude toward God, people, and sin will be radically, instantly, and permanently changed. And if God changes your life in this way, you can be certain He has forgiven you forever. This is because such lasting and radical moral change only happens when the Holy Spirit indwells a person.³

He [God the Father] loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10 NIV). Every one of your sins has been completely and forever forgiven by God.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite 1 John 4:12 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize 1 John 4:10 in the translation above or another.

¹ For the unconditional nature of *agapē* love in the NT see the section on “Love” in “The Nine Powers of God, the Spirit, & the Authentic Christian” in Appendix G of *Christians Essentials* study #2: *FOUNDATIONS*.

² The parable of “the Prodigal Son” more specifically describes the transition from being a chosen but unconverted child of God, to becoming a Christian. This is the case with all the parables in Luke 15 (cf. vs. 2-3, 7, 10, 32). If the parable describes the compassion of God the Father before we were Christians, surely He feels the same now that we belong to Him.

³ For more on your eternal security and how to be certain of your salvation see chapters 1.5-1.6 in the *Christian Essentials* study #1: *FORGIVENESS*.

Chapter 3.6

Your Dad's Pardon II*The unbreakable relationship you have with your Dad*1 John 1:7

Week 3

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - What are some things you might believe if you were a Christian living under the Old Covenant? What is different about the New Covenant?
 - What are experiences and Scriptures used to claim a real Christian can lose their salvation? What is the correct interpretation of these?
 - Can I commit the sin that cannot be forgiven? Why not?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?

Michael was taught that you could never feel completely secure with God. You could never confess enough sin, or recognize enough sin, to be completely accepted by God. You always needed to be afraid of God's discipline for your sin. You even needed to be afraid that God would eventually reject you. Michael's church ignored this promise from God:

The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

(1 John 1:7 NIV)

You cannot break your relationship with your real Dad.

Is your Father's forgiveness really forever? Is this too good to be true? Once you become a Christian can you stop being one? Can your sin make God angry with you, and even separate you from having a close relationship with Him? Will God punish you with bad things if you sin? Do you have to confess your sins to be forgiven? Will I be embarrassed about all of my sin when I stand before Christ to be evaluated? The Bible's clear answers to these questions are given in this chapter and the next.

We could simply start with the text for this chapter. If God is not a liar and “*The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin*” (1 John 1:7), then none of the questions above should concern you.

Are you living under OT law instead of NT grace?

Many harmful errors occur because some Christians live like they are still under the Old Covenant. In the OT God did not have unconditional love for His people. God told them He would bless them if they obeyed, or curse

them if they disobeyed (cf. Deut ch. 28). God's feelings toward His people changed depending on their performance. God was often angry with His people (cf. Num 11:1). And the threat of His anger made God's people live in fear of Him.

A good way to tell if you are living under OT law or NT grace is if you struggle with being afraid of God. Everyone begins a real relationship with God in fear. "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*" (Prov 19:10). If you have never feared God, then you do not have a real relationship with Him. Through the conversion experience we catch a glimpse of His holiness, our sinfulness, and the wrath we deserve (cf. 2 Cor 4:4-6).

But God does not want you to continue a relationship with him in fear. Awe, yes. Fear, no. This is because the grace and forgiveness revealed in the Gospel and the New Covenant moves you from fear to reverence and love.

God's OT people were motivated by the fear of punishment. They were not generally indwelt with God's Spirit and only had the sinful nature which "*is hostile toward God*" (Rom 8:7). They needed fear to help them obey God.

But the New Covenant is different. Christians who think "the fear of the Lord" is a healthy, biblical thing, need to think carefully about what the Apostle John said in the NT:

God is love . . . Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. (1 John 4:16, 18)

When you fully understand the love your real Dad has for you, you will not be afraid of Him. Some Christians live in fear of their Father because they believe He will treat them according to what their sins deserve. But "*this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.*" Those who have, do not live in fear of God, but in grace and love.

Likewise, the Apostle Paul wrote:

The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. By him we cry, "Abba, Father." (Rom 8:15)

The Apostles were clear: God does not want fear to be a part of His relationship with you. In rare cases when a Christian is addicted to a particularly harmful sin their real Dad may discipline them. We discuss this more in the next chapter. And of course we are to always have a great sense of AWE about God. But if you are still afraid of your Dad then you do not understand His love. Your Dad "*is love.*" And "*Love is patient. Love is kind . . . it is not provoked*" to anger (1 Cor 13:4-5 NASB). And neither is your Dad. Unlike people in the OT, "*we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand*" (Rom 5:1-2 NET).

Some NT references to fearing God refer to the attitude unbelievers should have, or that we should have for the fate of unbelievers (cf. Matt 10:28; Rom 3:18; 2 Cor 5:11). There are other references in the NT to fearing God that apply to Christians (cf. Acts 9:31; Phil 2:12; 2 Cor 7:1; Eph 5:21; 1 Pet 1:17). The Greek word used in all of these verses is *phobō* from which we get the English word “phobia” meaning fear. But a common meaning of *phobō* in the Greek language the NT was originally written in was: “reverence, respect, awe-inspiring.”¹ This meaning fits the teaching of the NT the best, including 1 John 4:18 and Rom 8:15 quoted above.

Some Pastors preach “the fear of the Lord” to motivate people to obey Him. But the OT proves that fear never empowers long term, sincere obedience. In fact, this is essentially the whole story of the OT. The Israelites were plenty afraid of God. When they saw God over Mount Sinai, *“They stood at a distance, trembling with fear. And they said to Moses, ‘You speak to us, and we will listen. But don’t let God speak directly to us, or we will die!’”* (Ex 20:18-19). The OT people feared God but did not love Him. Again, *“perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.”* (1 John 4:18). Because they feared God but did not love Him, only 40 days later after seeing His presence above Mount Sinai, they were worshipping a golden calf (cf. Exod 24:18; 32:1-9).

The fear of God simply does not work. And this is a major theme throughout the OT. Fear never empowers long term, sincere obedience because fear, even fear of God, is ultimately selfish and caused by thinking only of your own well-being. A relationship of fear is the opposite of a relationship of love. And because God wanted to change His relationship with His chosen people from fear to love He sent God the Son to implement a New Covenant.

A covenant in the Bible is simply a promise of God to His chosen people. The Old Covenant promised God’s blessing for obeying His laws and curses for disobedience. But the NT says:

Jesus . . . is the one who mediates for us a far better covenant with God, based on better promises. . . When God speaks of a “new” covenant, it means he has made the first one obsolete (Heb 8:6, 13).

Since the Old Covenant is “obsolete” it is a shame that many Christians still live in it. God has moved on to “a new covenant,” but they remain stuck in the old one. Unfortunately, even the World we live in reinforces an OT mindset. People reject you and get angry with you when you sin against them. And many Christians believe that God is the same.

But the NT says, *“You no longer live under the requirements of the [OT] law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God’s grace”* (Rom 6:14). This is why we caution the Christian against prioritizing the OT over the NT in their God Times and Bible study. Not only are many of the OT

commandments “*obsolete*,” but it often does not accurately describe God’s relationship with His people anymore. As stated earlier, in the OT God is rather constantly angry with His people and His relationship with them was based on their performance. Reading the constant OT illustrations of this can give you the impression that your relationship with God is the same. But the covenant described in the OT is “*obsolete*.”

This does not mean the Christian should discard the OT. It does mean that the OT must be interpreted and evaluated by the NT. Whatever can be found in the OT that reflects and supports the teaching of the NT is valuable to the Christian.

The NT says, “*Jesus . . . is the one who mediates for us a far better covenant with God*” because it is “*based on better promises*.” Those “*better promises*” can be simplified to two. First, your standing and relationship with God is no longer dependent on your obedience, but on God’s unconditional, never-ending, never-changing love for you. GRACE: undeserved favor and kindness, is the best one-word description of the New Covenant. The Bible explains:

As people sinned more and more [in the Old Covenant], God's wonderful grace became more abundant [in the New Covenant]. So just as sin [and fear] ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful grace rules instead. (Rom 5:20)

Do you understand this is the kind of forgiveness Christ purchased for you? When your sin increases, God’s grace and compassion increases even more! You cannot break your relationship with your real Dad.

Likewise the “*better promises*” of the New Covenant include: “*God’s will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time*” (Heb 10:10). Do you still think you need to do something to pay for your sins? The Bible says that Christ’s “*once for all time*” sacrifice has already made you “*holy*.”

Are you a Christian who is still living under the law of blessings and curses based on your obedience as in the Old Covenant? The NT says, “*Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the [OT] law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing*” (Gal 3:13).

Do you think your relationship with your Dad changes based on your actions? No! God the Father’s love for you is never based on what you do, but on what Christ did. He paid for all your sins. Your Dad’s love for you is unconditional and perfect and can never diminish in any way.

Another promise in the New Covenant is the re-creation of the Spirit. What God promised to eventually give saved Jews in the future, has already been given to those in the New Covenant. God promised:

I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender,

responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations. (Ezek 36:26-27)

This has already happened to you Christian. And this is why fear is no longer needed to motivate you to obey God. Unlike the OT people who only had a sinful nature, the born-again Christian has been indwelt and recreated by the Holy Spirit to desire to love God.

In the OT even the few who were indwelt with God's Spirit could lose Him. This is why David prayed to God: *"Don't take your Holy Spirit from me"* (Ps 51:11). But in the New Covenant God's Spirit seals and re-creates us in a way that cannot be reversed, nor was true for OT saints.² And that *"born again"* experience of all true Christians results in new hearts that love God in a way that OT believers generally could not.

In the New Covenant *"The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7). You cannot break your relationship with your real Dad.

Can you lose your salvation?

Again, there is only one thing that could cause you to lose your salvation: An unforgiven sin. If God forgives all of your sins, then there is no way you can lose your relationship with God. Some Christians believe there are still unforgiveable sins like cursing God or being real angry with Him. A born-again Christian might do these things, but *"The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7 NIV).

But many Christians suffer because they believe they can lose their forgiveness from God. They believe this because of bad experiences or bad teaching. Bad experiences include knowing someone who seemed to be a Christian for a long time but then denied Christ and did not want to be a Christian any more. Some conclude from this that the person was a real Christian and then lost their relationship with God. But the biblical answer is that they were a false Christian. This is discussed further in *Christian Essentials* study #1: Your FORGIVENESS.³

Misinterpreting the Bible causes others to believe they can lose their salvation. Common examples are from the book of Hebrews, including:

It is impossible to bring back to repentance those who were once enlightened- those who have experienced the good things of heaven and shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come-and who then turn away from God. (Heb 6:4-6)

Some claim this means a true Christian can reject their faith. But you can experience all of the things described here and still not be a Christian. You can be *"enlightened"* about the truth, experience some of the blessing of *"heaven"* by just being around Christians, share in the Holy Spirit's

conviction of sin, and get a taste for the goodness of God's word and power . . . and still not have a saving faith in Christ and be born again and indwelt with the Holy Spirit.

This is why a few verses later we read: *"Even though we are talking this way, we really don't believe it applies to you. We are confident that you are meant for better things, things that come with salvation"* (v. 9). And those *"better things"* that actually *"come with salvation"* are not mere spiritual or emotional experiences, but include in verse 10: *"how hard you have worked for him and how you have shown your love to him by caring for other believers."* This is what proves the Spirit lives in you and you are saved.

Later in Hebrews we read: *"You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised"* (10:36 NIV). Is this a warning you can lose your salvation if you do not continue to perform? Indeed, Christians need to persevere in their faith and works to prove they are a Christian. But because the Holy Spirit permanently indwells them, they will persevere! The common misinterpretations of the book of Hebrews are corrected by one biblical promise: *"He will keep you strong to the end so that you will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. God will do this, for he is faithful to do what he says"* (1 Cor 1:8-9).

In Revelation 3 Jesus warned the Laodicean church: *"I will spit you out of my mouth!"* (v. 16). Was He warning real Christians of rejection? No. He describes these people as spiritually, *"wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked"* and needing *"white garments"* of salvation (vs. 17-18). This is why He invites them to *"repent"* and *"open the door"* (vs. 19-20) to a real relationship with Him. Like many churches this one was full of false Christians.

In John 15 Jesus warned that God, *"cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit"* and *"If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned"* (vs. 2, 6). Was He saying a real Christian could be cut off and thrown away? No. Why would a branch attached to a vine not bear fruit? Because it is dead. The dead branch looks like it is attached to the vine just as false Christians appear on the outside to be attached to Christ. But their lack of fruit reveals they are spiritually dead and not really attached to the vine (or Christ) at all. The reference to not remaining in Him has the same meaning. Jesus said false Christians can do all kinds of spiritual looking things (cf. Matt 7:21-23), but in time they *"fall away"* because they really are not attached to Christ (cf. Matt 13:18-23).

Finally, how do we explain Paul's words to *"continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling"* (Phil 2:12)? First, notice that the text says, *"work out"* rather than *"work for"* your salvation. A real Christian no

longer needs to work for their salvation. To “*work out your salvation*” simply means to live like a Christian. Why would we do this “*with fear [phobōs, better “reverence, awe”] and trembling*”? Because Paul says in the next verse: “*God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him*” (Phi 2:13). Realizing this will cause the reverence and awe the Apostle speaks of.

Can I commit the sin that cannot be forgiven?

This concern comes from Christ’s warning: “*Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin*” (Mark 3:29). What does this mean?

First of all, we must interpret this obscure statement with clear Scripture. No Christian who has been given “*eternal life*” (John 3:16) can commit the “*eternal sin*,” either in the past or future. For the Christian, “*The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin*” (1 John 1:7 NIV). Therefore, no Christian ever has, or ever will, commit the “*eternal sin*.”

What then is the sin that cannot be forgiven? It is being exposed to so much clear revelation of who Jesus Christ is, but still saying He is of the Devil. This is the context of the original statement. Jesus cast a demon out of a person and the Pharisees said He did it with the power of Satan! (cf. Mark 3:22). In fact, it is possible that the “*eternal sin*” can no longer be committed because Jesus Christ is not physically present on the Earth.

Regardless, the “*eternal sin*” reveals a conscience that is hardened beyond repentance. Unbelievers can reach a point of “no return” in which they can never be saved (cf. Rom 1:28; Heb 6:4-6). But no Christian has ever, or will ever commit the “*eternal sin*.”

Can you be cleansed of sexual sin?

Some people live a very sexually immoral life before becoming a Christian and they struggle with feeling “dirty.” Indeed, sexual sin is especially harmful. The Apostle Paul wrote:

Don’t you realize that if a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her? For the Scriptures say, “The two are united into one.” . . . Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. (1 Cor 6:16, 18)

We need to be honest that sexual sin is somehow especially defiling to our bodies and damaging to our psyche. But “*The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin*” (1 John 1:7), even sexual sin. In the context above Paul refers to “*Those who indulge in sexual sin . . . or commit adultery, or are male prostitutes, or practice homosexuality*” (1 Cor 6:9) but says to Christians: “*Some of you were once like that. But you were cleansed; you*

were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (v. 11).

Some people were sexually immoral, adulterers, prostitutes, or homosexuals before becoming a Christian. But no real Christian is any of those things anymore (cf. 1 Cor 6:9-10). And such Christians have been “cleansed” of such sins.

Christian, no matter what you have done with your body, or has been done to your body, “*The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin*” (1 John 1:7). And you now have the freedom and privilege to devote your body to serving, loving, and glorifying God and blessing people. Paul wrote to these formerly sexually immoral Christians:

Don’t you realize that your body is [now] the temple of the Holy Spirit? . . . God bought you with a high price. So [now] you must honor God with your body” (1 Cor 6:19-20).

This is what it means to be redeemed. The same precious blood of Jesus that spiritually cleansed your body, also purchased your body for God. Your Dad bought your sinful, dirty, and abused body back from the Devil, cleaned it up, and re-purposed it to be a temple for Him to live in and to serve Him.

Scripture says: “*The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin*” (1 John 1:7). If this is true then: You cannot break your relationship with your real Dad. No matter what arguments are made to claim a real born-again Christian can be lost, God’s word promises otherwise.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite 1 John 4:10 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize 1 John 1:7 in the translation above or another.

¹ BAGD.

² It is probable that some OT leaders and prophets were indwelt with the Holy Spirit including Noah, Moses, David, etc. This explains their unique obedience to God and service for him. But the permanent rebirth and indwelling of the Holy Spirit for all of God’s people did not begin until the day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2.

³ *Christian Essentials* study #1: *Your FORGIVENESS* chapters 1.5-1.6 discuss “false faith” and how to be sure you are a Christian. See online at www.newlifecr.com.

Chapter 3.7

Your Dad's Pardon III*There is always peace between you and your Dad*

Romans 5:1-2

Week 4

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - Does your sin separate you from God? Why not?
 - Do you need to confess your sins to be forgiven of them? Why not?
 - Do I need to properly recognize my sin before communion?
 - How does God discipline me for my sin?
 - Will I be embarrassed about my sin when I stand before Christ?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?

Gary was taught that he must confess his sins and be sorry for them or God would not forgive them. This made him worry about sins he may not have noticed in his life. Maybe there were sins God was still holding against him? Unfortunately Gary did not understand the great grace Christians have from God because of Jesus Christ. In fact, now with the New Covenant, God says:

Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. (Rom 5:1-2 NET)

There is always peace between you and your Dad

God, your ultimate Judge, has “*declared*” that you are “*righteous*” and forgiven of all sin. That is what the Bible means when it says you are “justified.” God treats me “just-as-if-I’d” never sinned. This is for two reasons. One, as the last two chapters have demonstrated, God the Son paid the penalty for all of your sins. Secondly, as pointed out in the previous study *FOUNDATIONS*, God the Spirit made you a new creation that is no longer a sinner. Romans 7:15-25 teaches us that sinning is no longer your true nature, but a disease you have in the programming of your mind. God does not view you as a sinner because the real you is not a sinner. ¹

Because of this relationship we have with God, there is and always will be “*peace*” between you and Him. When you sin against people, they usually get angry or impatient with you and maybe think less of you. Sin

separates people, destroys relationships, and causes strife between people. But it is never like this with your Dad. You *“have peace with God”* now and always. You “stand” and live before God in *“grace,”* His undeserved favor and kindness.

“Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand” (Rom 5:1-2 NET). There is always peace between you and your Dad. This truth corrects many popular errors in Christianity which are addressed below.

Can my sin separate me from God?

Before someone is a Christian their sin separates them from God. The Prophet Isaiah said to sinners in the Old Covenant: *“Your sins have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore”* (Isa 59:2). Some Christians believe this verse applies to them and that when they sin, it breaks God’s fellowship with them. They think God responds to your sins like people who pull away and reject you.

But again, we no longer live under the Old Covenant. In the New Covenant your Dad promises: *“Nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Rom 8:39). And *“Nothing in all creation”* includes whatever you do! It may feel like you are separated from God’s love when you sin. But this is because you believe lies about His love. You are never separated from God in any way because you sin. In fact, *there is always peace between you and your Dad.*

Do I need to confess my sins to be forgiven?

Some Christians like Gary above believe you need to recognize and confess your sins in order to be forgiven for them. This is often based on 1 John 1:9 which says: *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”* (NIV). Does this mean that if you do not confess a sin, it is not forgiven?

First, we know it is impossible for us to even know all of our sins, let alone confess them. Secondly, any sin that is not forgiven by God will be punished in Hell. There is no such thing as a sin that is not forgiven for the Christian, whether it is confessed or not. So we must not interpret 1 John 1:9 to say we can lose our salvation because this is unbiblical.

So what kind of confession was the Apostle John speaking of? In the early Church it was customary for a person to confess their life of sin at the time of their conversion and baptism. This is why the context of 1 John 1:9 is an appeal to unbelievers to get saved and contrasts believers with unbelievers (cf. 1 John 1:1-10; Matt 3:6; 1 Tim 6:12). John did not intend to

teach you must always confess your sins after you become a Christian. In fact, there is always peace between you and your Dad.

Am I supposed to feel guilty about my sin?

Some Christians believe it somehow honors God to feel guilty about their sin. But again, if there is always peace between you and your Dad, why would He want you to feel guilty? In fact, your guilt dishonors the great sacrifice Christ made to pay the full penalty for all of your sins. When you sin, God is much more pleased if you thank Him for His forgiveness, rather than being oppressed by the Devil's guilt.

Recognizing your sin and being sorry for it is a good thing. But there is a difference between the Spirit's conviction and Satan's condemnation. Scripture says, "*Now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus*" (Rom 8:1). If that is true then your Dad does not want you to feel guilty about your sin.

In Hebrews we read: "*The blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God*" (Heb 9:14). Notice that it is not something you do to make up for your sin so you have a clear conscience. Instead, it is believing that the blood of Christ takes away all of your sin. Faith removes guilt better than works. And it is important to have a clear conscience because guilty people do not serve God very well. They will either not do much for God, or serve Him for the wrong reasons. God does not want His people serving Him out of guilt.

The Bible says, "*Let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most*" (Heb 4:16). When you sin, your Dad wants you to "*find grace*" at His "*throne*" instead of feel guilt. This is because there is always peace between you and your Dad.

Do I need to properly recognize my sin before communion?

Some believe that a Christian must meet certain requirements before being allowed the privilege of partaking in the Lord's Supper. Supposed requirements include recognizing their sin, or a relationship that needs to be reconciled. Such things are obviously good, but they are not necessary for the Christian to participate in the Lord's Supper. This false belief is a misinterpretation of Paul's words:

So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. (1 Cor 11:27-29 NIV)

Paul is not addressing real Christians here. The warning is for people who take communion “*without discerning [diakrinōn] the body of Christ*” (v. 29). The Greek word here means to correctly evaluate something and recognize its difference from other things. It is not likely that a real Christian would fail to recognize the special meaning of the sacrifice of the body of their Savior Jesus Christ. But unbelievers would.

Paul in fact states that there are unbelievers participating in the Corinthian meetings who are getting drunk and not caring if people are hungry (cf. 1 Cor 11:19-21). And he says such people are in danger of being, “*finally condemned with the world*” (v. 32). This could not be true of any real Christian. Paul is warning unbelievers not to partake in the Lord’s Supper because they cannot properly value the sacrifice of Christ. Therefore, before people take communion in a church they need to examine themselves to ensure they are a Christian (cf. 2 Cor 13:5).

But all of God’s children, regardless of their performance, are warmly invited to the ceremony that reminds them of their forgiveness. Unfortunately, believing otherwise keeps God’s children from something God wanted to give them to help them. Jesus said the purpose of His Supper was to “*remember me*” (1 Cor 11:25) not our sin, and to celebrate there is always peace between you and your Dad.

How does God discipline me for my sin?

Many Christians fear that the hardships they are experiencing are God’s punishments for their sin. This fear comes from the warnings in the NT of God’s discipline. In Hebrews we read: “*Endure hardship as discipline [paideian: “training”]. God is treating you as His children*” (Heb 12:7 NIV).

Unfortunately for many, the word “*discipline*” automatically means “punishment,” like a spanking. But that is not the meaning of the Greek word used here. *Paideian* throughout the NT means to teach by instruction, not punish with pain. For example, in 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul writes: “*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training [paideian] in righteousness*” (NIV; cf. Eph 6:4; Heb 12:5, 7-8, 11). So “training” rather than “discipline” would be a better translation of *paideian* throughout Hebrews 12.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the threat and experience of curses and punishment for sin was a major part of the Old Covenant. But the NT teaches us that God now wants to motivate us with grace, instead of fear (cf. 1 John 4:16-18; Rom 8:15).

Rather than punishing you for your sin, your Dad is usually protecting you from the potential effects of your sin. Many times in your life, your sin should have hurt you and others much more than it did. This is because God was protecting you. It is also because your Dad knows that treating

your sin with grace is usually more productive than punishment. God's love and patience motivates you to love Him more than fearing Him.

Therefore, it is a mistake to quickly interpret a hardship as divine punishment. Think about Job's experience. His friends wrongly interpreted Job's hardships as God's punishment, and they were wrong (cf. Job 5:17). Actually, God was very proud of Job. Likewise, you will usually be wrong to interpret your difficulties as God's punishment for your sin.

When God does discipline us, He uses various ways. First, the painful conviction you experience after sinning is a powerful motivator to not sin. Secondly, your Dad may simply choose not to protect you from the usually painful consequences of your sin. Therefore, the burden of your conscience about your sin, and the naturally painful consequences of your sin, are usually very effective as God's normal methods of discipline.

Like a good human father, more strict discipline is used by your Dad as a last option. This can occur when a Christian becomes addicted to a very destructive sin like illegal drug abuse or sexual immorality (cf. Rev 2:20-22). Very painful consequences may be the only thing that will help such a person stop their behavior. In such cases, a Christian will be thankful for God's discipline because of how much they hate their sin and the destruction it is causing in their life, and for people they love. But even in the very rare times when your Dad painfully punishes His children, He does it with compassion, and never anger.

How can you know when a painful event in your life is God's punishment for your sin? Or the attack of Satan? Or just an ordinary difficulty of life? Honestly, you usually cannot distinguish between these things. Thankfully you do not have to, because your response to difficulties, no matter the source, is the same: TRUST AND OBEY GOD.

But imagine if you thought all of your difficulties in life were God's punishment for your sin. Your hardships would be harder because you would feel like God has something against you. Unfortunately, many Christians live this way. But remember, there is always peace between you and your Dad.

Will I give an account for my sin when I stand before Christ?

The Bible says, "*We will all stand before the judgment seat of God. . . . Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God*" (Rom 14:10, 12). Many Christians greatly fear this day. They believe Christ will expose all of their shameful sins for all to see, and that they will be greatly embarrassed on this day. This is not true.

God promises in the New Covenant: "*You will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. God will do this, for He is faithful to do what He says*" (1 Cor 1:8-9). "*He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy*

and blameless and beyond reproach" (Col 1:22 NASB). *"He forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross"* (Col 2:13-14). There will be no accusation of sin when the Christian stands before Christ because, *"now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus"* (Rom 8:1). Not now and not ever.

Therefore, when we read *"before God's throne . . . the dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books"* (Rev 20:12-13), we know that only your good deeds are *"recorded in the books"* and none of your sins. Your sins will not even be mentioned when you meet Christ. And any teaching to the contrary diminishes the sacrifice Christ made to remove your sins from the record of your life.

Then what will happen when you meet Christ before His throne? Your Christian life will be evaluated in order to determine your eternal reward. The idea of "giving an account" is a monetary term referring to what you have to show for what God gave you, as illustrated in the "Parable of the Talents" (cf. Matt 25:14-30). Here we are told that the only message Jesus will have for Christians is: *"Well done good and faithful servant."* The *"useless servant"* that is thrown *"into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth [Hell]"* is not a Christian (Matt 25:30).

The Bible says, *"We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad [phaulos: "worthless"]* (2 Cor 5:9-10). The contrast here is not between moral good and evil (cf. Matt 7:17), but between what is valuable and worthless.² The Christian's purpose for appearing before Christ is to be evaluated for their reward. Sins are considered merely eternally worthless, but not condemning. The believer *"will suffer loss"* of potential reward, but their worthless deeds are *"burned up"* (1 Cor 3:15), and therefore there is no record, blame, revelation, or condemnation for your sin when you meet Christ.

Therefore, notice how Paul describes this event: When *"the Lord comes, [He] will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one [Christian] will receive his commendation* [not condemnation!] *from God"* (1 Cor 4:5 ESV). Some translations suggest Paul is warning of evil motives being exposed when we meet Christ. But Paul's topic is your *"hidden" good deeds* that *"will receive his commendation,"* praise, and reward. Jesus referred to the same thing when He spoke of good deeds that are *"done in secret"* such as *"giving"* and *"praying,"* that *"your Father will reward you for"* (Matt 6:4, 6).

All of this helps us to explain Christ's warning:

"I tell you that everyone will have to give an account on the day of evaluation for every worthless word they have spoken. For by your

words you will be acquitted of wrong, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matt 12:36-37)

In the context Jesus was explaining how to distinguish an “evil person” who will be “condemned” by God, and a “good person” who will be “acquitted of wrong.” Their true “heart” is revealed by the kind of words they say. No “acquitted” person, like a Christian, will be “condemned” for their words. However, “worthless words” will be accounted for and not rewarded (cf. Matt 12:33-35).

For unbelievers there is “*only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God*” (Heb 10:27). But God has promised Christians: “*You will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. God will do this, for He is faithful to do what He says*” (1 Cor 1:8-9). “*He forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross*” (Col 2:13-14). This is why there is always peace between you and your Dad.

So how does God feel about my sin?

As we have read in these chapters on your Dad’s Pardon, the NT teaches that your Dad has erased all of your sins (cf. Col 2:14) and is never angry about any of your sins (cf. 1 John 4:10). In fact, He knows that sin is essentially a disease you have been infected with by the programming of the World, and being a sinner is not your true nature or desire.

But of course God is aware of your sin. The Holy Spirit in you is constantly fighting your sin! (cf. Gal 5:16-17). The Bible says, “*Do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live*” (Eph 4:30). Likewise, Jesus told some Christians He had some “*complaints against*” them because they were allowing false doctrines and sinning in their churches (cf. Rev 2:4, 14, 20). And we have noted that God may discipline a Christian if the consequences of their sin, and conviction of their conscience, is not enough to help them stop a particularly addictive and harmful sin.

These truths are intended to be more motivations to not sin. None of them mean that God the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit are ever angry with you, reject you, or distance themselves from you when you sin.

Your Dad’s grace and forgiveness gives you powerful reasons to love Him by not sinning. But the NT is honest about the fact that your sin hurts God. And you do not want to hurt someone you love. This is why the Bible says, “*We make it our goal to please him*” (2 Cor 5:8-9), and to love Him by rejecting sin in our life.

But you will regularly “*fall short of God’s glorious standard*” (Rom 3:23). And when you do, you need to know: “*Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have also obtained access by faith into*

this grace in which we stand” (Rom 5:1-2). There is always peace between you and your Dad.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite 1 John 1:7 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Romans 5:1-2 in the translation above or another.

¹ For further discussion about Romans 7:15-25 and Paul’s repeated statement that “I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it” (Romans 7:17, 20) see chapter 2.10 in *Christian Essentials* study #2: *FOUNDATIONS*.

² The respected Bible teacher John MacArthur writes regarding 2 Corinthians 5:8-9: “The use of the word bad does not indicate that believers’ judgment is a judgment on sin, since all their sin has already been judged in Christ. The contrast between good and bad is not one between moral good and moral evil. Bad does not translate kakos or ponēros, the words for moral evil, but phaulos, which means “worthless,” or “useless.” (*Commentary*).

Chapter 3.8

Your Dad's Pardon IV*Never Serve God out of Guilt*

Galatians 5:1

Week 4

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - What is the brief definition of legalism offered in this chapter?
 - What are the different types of legalism and examples of them?
 - What is the motivation of legalism?
 - Why is legalism another form of idolatry?
 - How can you be free from legalism?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?

Dave was miserable. He was trying so hard to be a good Christian. He faithfully attended all the church meetings he was supposed to. This included the door to door evangelism on Tuesday nights. In fact, he had been appointed as a deacon in the church.

But everything felt like a duty rather than a delight. Especially because almost every Sunday sermon made him feel guilty. No matter how much he did, it never seemed like enough to please his Pastor or God. So there was no way he could tell anyone that his marriage was struggling. Or that his teenage son hated church. Following Christ seemed like such a hard and heavy burden! But the Bible says:

Christ has truly set us free. (Gal 5:1).

Obeying rules because of guilt makes both you and Christ miserable.

Jesus and Paul were usually really nice guys. But legalism made them mad. Jesus welcomed and forgave “*sinner*s and *tax collectors*” and even prostitutes (Matt 9:10; cf. John 7:36-39). But He publicly called the law-loving Pharisees hypocrites, children of Hell, blind guides, whitewashed tombs, snakes, and murderers (cf. Matt 23:13-35). Likewise, when the Apostle Paul observed legalism in the Apostles James, Barnabas, and Peter, he “*opposed [Peter] to his face,*” and publicly rebuked the Apostle for “*hypocrisy*” and “*not following the truth of the Gospel*” (cf. Gal 2:11-21). Apostles of Jesus Christ rebuking Apostles of Jesus Christ for legalism! This illustrates how deceptive and destructive legalism can be!

Which is why Paul wrote a lot about legalism in Galatians. Throughout the letter he encourages Christians that God's love no longer depends on obeying God's laws because God loves them unconditionally. Therefore, the grace of God, not guilt over sin, is to be your motivation for living for God. All of this is why Paul wrote: "*Christ has truly set us free. Now make sure that you stay free, and don't get tied up again in slavery to the law*" (Gal 5:1) and the guilt it causes. This is because obeying rules because of guilt makes both you and Christ miserable. Jesus died so you could live by grace. It does not please Him when you live by the law.

Legalism is salvation by works

Legalism is the attempt to gain the acceptance of God or people by obeying their rules. Legalism comes in various and subtle forms. The first kind is the attempt to earn God's forgiveness through obeying His laws. Paul wrote: "*We know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law*" (Gal 2:16). Any teaching that claims to be Christian, but also claims that good works pay for your sin is "*a different Gospel, which is really no Gospel at all*" (Gal 1:6-7 NIV).¹

A NT example of this kind of legalism was the belief that Christians had to be circumcised in order to be accepted by God. Modern examples include the belief that a person must be baptized with water, or belong to a certain church, or have communion, make confession, do penance, or any other good work in order to be forgiven for all of their sins. Only faith in the blood of Christ to pay for your sins will cleanse you of sin. But legalists believe they are saved by their good works. Which is why so many people in legalistic churches and religions think they are Christians, but actually are not. It is also why many legalistic churches believe a Christian can lose their salvation. Now *that* is real legalism!

Legalism is idolizing human traditions

Another form of legalism is when human traditions and preferences are treated as the commands of God. And when they are disobeyed it is treated like disobeying God. Respecting and honoring God-given authorities is biblical (cf. Eph 5:33-6:1; Heb 13:17). But when these authorities make their unbiblical or even extra-biblical traditions equal to God's commands, they are abusing the authority God gave them.

Along these lines Paul wrote: "*You are trying to earn favor with God by observing certain days or months or seasons or years.*" He called these "*weak and useless spiritual principles of this world*" and warned us not to "*become slaves*" to these human rules again (Gal 4:8-10; cf. Mark 7:5-9).

In NT times religious traditions or rules included following the Sabbath, and other OT regulations not repeated in the NT. Remember, God

does not expect a Christian to obey a command in the OT unless it is repeated in the NT. Today, this kind of legalism may include restrictions on certain types of clothing, music, dancing, or good Bible translations.

Legalists measure spiritual maturity by how well people are following their rules. Your Dad measures it by how consistently you experience and exhibit the powers of the Holy Spirit. These are, “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*” (Gal 5:22-23). In fact, legalists usually demonstrate their lack of spiritual maturity by their lack of these spiritual virtues.

Be very careful that you do not allow any human traditions or rules to be treated as a command of your Dad. He only gives you grace to obey His commands and you will not have His power to obey merely human commands. This is why legalism will frustrate and exhaust you so much.

All of this is why you do not want to teach your children legalism. How many grow up thinking that God’s acceptance is based on their obedience, or that Christianity is a bunch of rules, or that conformity to those rules is more important than experiencing the Spirit of love, joy, and peace? The answer is too many. Make sure your children are not among them.

Legalism is obeying your Dad out of guilt

There is another kind of legalism that is more subtle than those described above, but just as damaging. It is subtle because the commands that are promoted are taken from Scripture. What makes it legalism is the MOTIVE and reason people are obeying those biblical commands.

Biblical Christians obey their Dad out of gratitude. Legalistic ones obey Him out of guilt. It is a good thing to be convicted about sin in your life. But if you struggle with guilt and condemnation, you are believing a lie about your Dad’s love. “*Now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus*” (Rom 8:1).

But legalist leaders will make you feel condemned. They think the best motivation for the Christian is guilt. And they are afraid of grace. They think if you really knew how forgiven and accepted you are by God, that you would sin more. What they fail to realize is that your Dad has given you a new heart that hates sin and wants to obey Him. This is what Paul is teaching in Romans 6-8 and was discussed in an earlier study. ²

Legalistic leaders want to burden you with guilt. But listen to what kind of leader Jesus is:

Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.” (Matt 11:28-30)

If your Christian leaders do not make you feel that way then perhaps you are living in legalism and following people instead of Christ. “*Christ has truly set us free*” (Gal 5:1). Obeying rules because of guilt makes both you and Christ miserable.

Because legalistic leaders live with guilt and without grace themselves, they do not treat others with grace. The fact is, we are really good at condemning ourselves and we don’t need help from legalists. Legalistic teachers focus on sin and guilt. The NT focuses on forgiveness and grace. Legalistic leaders are often controlling, intimidating, arrogant, angry, and prone to criticize other Christians to make themselves feel more superior.

Unfortunately, even good Christian things can become legalistic things. This is because you do them out of guilt to earn the favor of your Dad or other people. You are trying to gain your approval and significance by *doing* Christian things instead of knowing God has already made you approved and significant. Common examples include: how much evangelism you do; how often you read your Bible or pray; how much money you give; how many children you have; whether or not you send your kids to public school or home school them; whether you dress nicely enough for church; and how many of your sins you confess to your “accountability group.”

All of these can be good things, and some are even encouraged in Scripture. But when they feel more like a duty rather than a delight they can become legalistic. When you are doing them to please people rather than your Dad, they really do not please Him at all. True spirituality is living in the powers of the Spirit, not how many “quiet times,” converts, or church meetings you can claim. Paul’s discourse on love was written for legalists:

If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing. Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud. (1 Cor 13:3-4)

Doing good, sacrificial, Christian things “*gains nothing*,” if they are done out of legalism instead of love. The motivation of legalism is to build yourself up and make yourself feel better, because you are trying to earn your significance and acceptance by what you do, instead of who you are. This is why legalism makes people “*jealous*,” “*boastful*” and “*proud*.” They are constantly comparing themselves to others. Works done out of guilt, or to make yourself feel loved or significant, are also worthless because Jesus is not pleased with them, nor will you be rewarded for them.

Legalism encourages and promotes biblical things like holiness, sacrifice, and evangelism, and looks so spiritual. Even spiritually superior. This is what makes this kind of legalism so hard to detect. But the motivation for these things is ultimately self, instead of God, because the identity of legalists is in their works rather than the unconditional love of God. Jesus describes them well when He said:

What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs--beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity. Outwardly you look like righteous people, but inwardly your hearts are filled with hypocrisy and lawlessness. (Matt 23:27-28)

For all the holiness claimed by legalists, they are often especially sinful. This is because being under the law drives us to sin. Why is this? Because being under law makes you feel unloved and hopeless and these false beliefs will quench the Holy Spirit's power in your life. It is the truth, including the truth about God's grace for you, that empowers the Spirit in your life.

Are you motivated more by the guilt of sin than the love of God? Our text says: *"Christ has truly set us free"* from earning your acceptance and significance by your performance. Your Dad never wants you to do anything out of guilt or to earn His acceptance. Your obedience to Him is a measure of how much you know His love and love Him. But it is never a measure of how much He loves you. His love, compassion, and how much He values you never changes. The measure of your Dad's love for you is what Christ did on the cross for you, not what you do for Him.

Serving your Dad out of guilt makes both you and Him miserable. *"God loves a person who gives cheerfully"* (2 Cor 9:7). He is not pleased with giving or serving out of pressure or fear or duty. Your guilt never pleases Him. Even if it motivates you to obey His commands.

This is because legalism kills the joy that is supposed to come with serving your Dad and others. But Jesus said, *"I have told you these things [to obey My commands] so that you will be filled with my joy"* (John 15:11). If you do not feel joy in doing something for God, you may not really be doing it for God. A lack of joy is a common sign of living in legalism. Obeying rules because of guilt makes both you and Christ miserable.

Legalism is being enslaved to "spiritual disciplines"

Another subtle form of legalism is pushing spiritual disciplines like fasting, solitude, devotions, memorizing verses, studying Scripture, and even prayer. People pushing these often exalt the spiritual "fathers" and mystics of the past as examples of true spirituality.

Again, these things can be good and are even encouraged in Scripture. But when people do them just to say they are doing them it is legalism. When they do them just to feel spiritual, have God's favor, or to relieve their guilt, it is legalism. The Apostle Paul warned Christians about *"Rules [that] may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires"* (Col 2:22-23).

How do you know when a “spiritual discipline” is a legalistic chain, or a grace-giving practice? Does it “*provide . . . help in conquering a person's evil desires*”? Does the practice transform your life by renewing your mind? Does it produce the powers of the Spirit, love, joy, and peace? The Pharisees were more devoted to all kinds of biblical spiritual disciplines than most Christians, and it just made them more arrogant. If missing or skipping a “spiritual discipline” makes you feel guilty and out of God’s favor, then you might be suffering from legalism. “*Christ has truly set us free*” (Gal 5:1). Obeying rules because of guilt makes both you and Christ miserable.

Legalism is another form of idolatry

Legalism is worshipping the idol of performance. It is basing your spiritual security and significance on what you are doing, instead of who you already are, according to the grace and love of God. Legalism is another idolatrous way you are trying to please people instead of your Dad. And because you are trying to get your sense of being loved from your performance, this is another false and painful god in your life.

This was why the Pharisees worshipped the Law and missed the Lord. They were seeking their significance and security in their performance rather than the unconditional love of God. The Pharisees are among the most idolatrous people in the Bible, and so are modern legalists.

Likewise, the Apostle wrote the Galatians about the idolatry of legalism: *Before you Gentiles knew God, you were slaves to so-called gods that do not even exist. So now that you know God (or should I say, now that God knows you), why do you want to go back again and become slaves once more to the weak and useless spiritual principles of this world? You are trying to earn favor with God by observing certain days or months or seasons or years.* (Gal 4:8-10)

Do not make your spiritual performance the foundation of your significance. “*Christ has truly set us free*” (Gal 5:1). Obeying rules because of guilt makes both you and Christ miserable.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite Hebrews 10:17 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Galatians 5:1 in the translation above or another.
- ▶ Complete Project 3D: “Fighting My Guilt” on the next page.

¹ For more on the forever forgiveness of God by grace through faith see the *Christian Essentials* study #1: *Your FORGIVENESS*.

² For more on the changed “heart” and identity of a Christian in relation to sin see chapter 2.10 “Jesus is Your Real Identity” in *Christian Essentials* study #2: *Your FOUNDATIONS*.

Project 3D

Fighting My Guilt

The Apostle Paul said: *“I always try to maintain a clear conscience before God and all people”* (Acts 24:16). The Apostle talked about this a lot (cf. Acts 23:1; 2 Tim 1:3; Heb 13:18). Your conscience is the moral reasoning of your mind and tells you when you have done right and when you have done wrong (cf. Rom 2:15). The guilt of your conscience can be very painful and inhibit your relationship with God and others. Therefore, God wants you to monitor it closely and *“always try to maintain a clear conscience before God and all people”* like the Apostle.

To *“maintain a clear conscience before God”* means you do not feel guilty about any sin in your life. It is important to ask yourself if you feel any guilt or shame in the presence of God about anything in your life. Take some time to think and pray about this. If something comes to mind, claim the promises of God’s forgiveness discussed in these chapters on Your Dad’s Pardon and *“always try to maintain a clear conscience before God.”*

To *“maintain a clear conscience before . . . all people”* means you do not feel guilty about any of your actions toward people. Jesus commanded this when He said in Matthew 5:23-24:

If you are offering your gift at the altar and remember that someone has something against you, leave your gift at the altar. First go and be reconciled; then come and offer your gift.

If someone feels you have sinned against them, this should bother your conscience and you should do all you can to be reconciled. If this seems overwhelming to you right now that is O.K. You will learn the power to reconcile relationships and offenses in the next study #4: *FREEDOM*, and you will learn the biblical steps for doing this in study #5: *FRUIT*.

A clear conscience is also a vital protection for you in the face of criticism. The Apostle Peter wrote: *“Keep a good conscience so that when you are slandered, those who criticize your good Christian behavior will be ashamed”* (1 Pet 3:16). The correction of others is often valuable, but it is only through your conscience that you can ultimately know how much of it is truthful. Paul describes this process in 1 Corinthians 4:1-4. In spite of all the potentially paralyzing criticism he received in his ministry, it was God, through his conscience, who comforted him, and shielded him from the emotional anguish that unjust criticism can cause. A clear conscience may be your only defense against such unjust criticism.

Therefore, take some time to search your conscience now and on a regular basis so that like Paul you can, *“always try to maintain a clear conscience before God and all people”* (Acts 24:16).

Chapter 3.9

Your Dad's Precepts I ¹

God's word and will are completely communicated in Scripture

1 Corinthians 4:6

Week 5

- ▶ For a God Time use the "P.O.W.E.R. Plan" in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
- What does the Christian doctrine of "the sufficiency of Scripture" mean?
- How does this doctrine bless and protect our life?
- What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?

Debbie desperately wanted to be married. That's why when a "prophet" in her church told her God was going to bring someone into her life she was excited. And sure enough, a couple months later she met a man who claimed to be a Christian. There were some things about the man that concerned Deborah, but surely this was the man the "prophet" was referring to and God wanted her to marry him. And she did. But a short time later the man committed adultery, left her, and abandoned Christianity. Deborah was obviously confused and hurt, wondering if God had led her wrong, or did she miss His will. She would have been greatly helped if she had understood and followed the biblical instruction:

Learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." (1 Cor 4:6 NIV)

God's will for your life is completely communicated in Scripture.

God's will for your life is completely communicated in Scripture

You desperately need the truth. If you do not know the truth or where to find it, you cannot be secure in a world full of lies. Jesus said you, "*live by . . . every word that comes from the mouth of God*" (Matt 4:4). The vital question then is this: Where can you confidently find the words God has for you? The text above gives the answer: Only in holy Scripture.

The above text was written to the Corinthians who were tempted to follow men rather than God (cf. 1 Cor 1:10-13; 3:1-4), valued worldly wisdom (cf. 1:18-24), believed, "*I am allowed to do anything*" (6:12), and were vulnerable to false revelations (cf. 12:2-3; 14:29).

To Christians who looked for the word and will of God apart from Scripture, the Apostle told them, "*Learn from us the meaning of the saying, 'Do not go beyond what is written'*" (1 Cor 4:6). Paul was repeating

a common saying in the early Church that encouraged Christians to only hear God in Scripture. ²

Modern Christians desperately need to “*learn . . . the meaning of the*” well-known and valued “*saying*” in the early Church: “*Do not go beyond what is written*” in Scripture. This is because some depend on modern popes, prophets, and apostles as the source of new words from God. Many Christians try to read “signs” and circumstances in their life to know the will of God. And many Christians believe God will “speak” to them through mental intuitions and impressions.

A Christian author describes the most popular approach today regarding how God guides us in decision making:

Inward guidance through mystical impressions is an extremely popular approach to knowing God’s will. It’s popularly assumed that intuition is in some sense the direct voice of the Holy Spirit. A strong inspiration to do something is as clear a leading of the Holy Spirit as the audible voice of God itself. When someone says “God spoke to me,” most often he or she does not mean hearing God’s audible voice but simply feeling a sense of inspiration to move in a certain direction. Many refer to this as “the still small voice,” or “inward guidance.” ³

This approach to divine guidance and decision making can be referred to as mysticism. It claims that God is often directly planting thoughts in your mind on extra-biblical matters and decisions. This is because of the belief that there is an extra-biblical will of God for your life. Therefore, you need extra-biblical revelations from God through “intuitions” or “signs” to know this extra-biblical will of God. ⁴

This will be discussed in the following chapters. But one thing is clear: modern Christian mysticism violates the ancient and honored Christian belief in the “sufficiency” or “Completeness of Scripture.” This means God’s will for your life is completely communicated in Scripture.

The only authoritative revelation on Earth from God is written Scripture. This is why the ancient church had a saying: “*Do not go beyond what is written*” (1 Cor 4:6). This is why the Protestant Reformation had a saying: “Scripture Alone.” Nobody and nothing speaks for God to direct your life apart from Scripture. God’s will for your life is completely communicated in Scripture. Believing this will protect you from the deception and hurt that Deborah experienced.

The “*Scriptures*” are not just any writings, but “*holy*,” sanctified, set-apart, perfect writings (2 Tim 3:15). Only “*Scripture is inspired by God*” (2 Tim 3:16). ⁵ There is no biblical basis for believing that mere people, or your own thoughts and intuitions, are inspired by God. Therefore, Paul called the OT Scriptures “*the very words of God*” (Rom 3:2 NIV). You cannot confidently say that about any other words or even thoughts, except the words of Scripture.

Jesus illustrated His belief in the supreme authority of Scripture when He defeated all temptations from the Devil by simply quoting what “*Scripture says*” (Matt 4:4, 7, 10). If God’s written word was good enough for Jesus to defeat the Devil, then it is good enough for us. Likewise, Jesus and the Apostles, (even though they possessed direct revelation from God), are recorded 62 times saying, “*It is written*” when referring to the source of truth and guidance that people were to depend on.

The “Completeness of Scripture” for knowing God’s word and will for your life is illustrated when God told Joshua:

Be careful to obey all the [written] law my servant Moses gave you. Do not deviate from it to the right or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep speaking this [written] Book of the Law and continually meditate on it, so that you may be careful to obey everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. (Josh 1:7-8)

God’s advice to Joshua to be “*prosperous and successful*” in all the challenges facing him was to “*meditate*” on and “*obey*” written Scripture.

Paul’s admonition, “*Do not go beyond what is written*” is reflected in the Westminster Confession coming out of the Protestant Reformation:

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His glory, man’s salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture; unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. (VI:6)

Likewise, the respected theologian Wayne Grudem has written:

[I]t is in Scripture alone that we are to search for God’s words to us. God considers what He has told us in the Bible to be enough for us, and that we should rejoice in the great revelation that He has given us and be content with it. . . .

To be morally perfect in God’s sight, then, what must we do in addition to what God commands us in Scripture? Nothing! Nothing at all! In fact God has not spoken to mankind any more words which He requires us to believe or obey other than those which we have now in the Bible. . . . For Christians today, the words from God that we have in the Old and New Testaments together are sufficient for us during the church age. . . .

The discovery of this great truth could bring tremendous joy and peace to the lives of thousands of Christians who, spending countless hours seeking God’s will outside of Scripture, are often uncertain about whether they have found it. In fact, many Christians today have very little confidence in their ability to discover God’s will with any degree of certainty. . . .

We must insist that God does not require us to believe anything about Himself or His work . . . that is . . . not in Scripture. . . . The Bible contains all the words of God we need for trusting and obeying him perfectly. This also means that if someone claims to have a message from God telling us what we ought to do, we need never assume that it is sin to disobey such a message unless it can be confirmed by the application of Scripture itself to our situation. ⁶

Knowing that God's will for your life is completely communicated in Scripture is a great comfort to Christians because they desire to know God's will in all of their decisions. Those who believe that God's will for their life is somehow found outside of Scripture often live with a great deal of insecurity. They are looking for something that God has already given them in Scripture. If we apply the general moral direction of Scripture to decisions such as what job, house, church, or spouse to choose, then it is *impossible* to miss God's will in such decisions

So it is clear that when God provided the Scriptures, He intended to give us a dependable, complete, and objective body of truth that would communicate everything that He wanted to say to His people. Therefore, all the objective, clear, and dependable means of guidance offered through the Scriptures, diminishes (if not completely abolishes) the need for any of the subjective, obscure, questionable, and might we say, quite inferior means of guidance that are promoted among many in the Church today.

"Learn from us the meaning of the saying, 'Do not go beyond what is written'" (1 Cor 4:6). God's will for your life is completely communicated in Scripture. And if something is not spoken of in Scripture, then God does not have an opinion on it and you are free to pursue your desires. We discuss this more in the next chapters.

God's will for your life is confirmed by the Holy Spirit

As we discuss in the next chapter, God's will for your life is always moral, or between what is right and wrong. It does not include amoral issues like what good college to go to, or what good job to choose. Because God's will is always moral, and the Holy Spirit in you always produces moral desires, both the Scriptures and Spirit will always agree with one another on the moral will of God.

David said: *"I take joy in doing your will, my God, for your instructions are written on my heart"* (Ps 40:8). This was because the Spirit of God lived in his heart. And the Spirit gives us the desires to obey Scripture therefore confirming that Scripture is the word and will of God. Accordingly, Martin Luther wrote: "The Christian who lives in the Spirit no longer needs any law to teach him, for he knows it now by heart. Everything the law demands has become his nature and essence through the Spirit." ⁷

This is why the Christian instinctively knows the answer to the question: “What would Jesus do?” This is why so many Christians in the first 1500 years of the Church could be so powerful, even though they did not personally possess copies of the Scriptures. The will of God was immediately known and empowered by the Holy Spirit living in them. The moral will of the Spirit in us, confirms the moral will of the Father in Scripture. As pointed out in the next chapter, one of the reasons for this is that the “fruit” or desire of a person controlled by the Spirit will be to love God and people, which is essentially the whole will of God for your life.

Therefore, you can know the will of God for your life. As Paul said, “*Learn from us the meaning of the saying, ‘Do not go beyond what is written’*” (1 Cor 4:6). God’s will for your life are completely communicated in Scripture.

- Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- Recite Galatians 5:1 from memory.
- Memorize 1 Corinthians 4:6 in the above translation or another.

¹ A precept is “a command or principle intended especially as a general rule of action.”

² NT scholar Gordon Fee writes regarding 1 Cor 4:6: “Taking their clue from the verb *gegraptai*, which refers throughout Paul’s letters to the citing of Scripture, most interpreters think that the saying means something like “live according to scripture.” (*1st Corinthians*, 1987, 168).

³ M. Blaine Smith, *Knowing God’s Will* (1991), 132, 165-6.

⁴ While we cover the basics of divine guidance and decision making in these chapters, a more detailed study on this topic is available in Pastor Kurt’s book *Mega Mysticism*, online at <http://trainingtimothys.org/books/book-14-the-myth-of-mega-mysticism>.

⁵ For further on the “inspiration” of Scripture see Pastor Kurt’s book, *God’s Apostles* online at <http://trainingtims.wpengine.com/books/book-8-gods-apostles>.

⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan, 1994), 127-33.

⁷ Martin Luther, “Concerning the Letter and the Spirit,” in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, Timothy F. Lull ed. (Fortress, 2005), 85.

Chapter 3.10

Your Dad's Precepts II*God gives you a lot of freedom in your decisions*Genesis 2:16-17

Week 5

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - What are the “wills” of God in Scripture and biblical examples of them?
 - What are the problems of believing there is a *private will* for your life?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?

Kent had a very important decision to make. Should he go to college near home or on the west coast? His decision was going to affect the next four years of his life, maybe determine what kind of career he would have, and maybe even who he would meet and marry someday. He was afraid to make the wrong decision!

Understandably, Kent wanted God's guidance. Obviously the Bible was not going to tell him where to go to college. So he asked God for impressions and signs as he visited the campuses. But his feelings and the signs seemed confusing, and in the end he did not really know if he had made the decision God wanted him to make. Kent would have been helped by understanding the biblical instruction:

You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (Gen 2:16-17)

God gives you a lot of freedom in your decisions

In the verse above we see two different “wills” of God operating. First, He told Adam and Eve they could not eat from “*the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*” This is an example of His *prescribed will* which clearly and specifically communicates what is sin.

But God also granted Adam and Eve tremendous freedom to “*freely eat the fruit of every [other] tree in the garden.*” So God clearly communicated His will here, as He always does. They could not eat from one tree, but were free to eat from a multitude of others. God's permission to freely choose things that His word does not prohibit is His *permissive will*. And like the trees in the Garden of Eden, God's *permissive will* allows a great variety of choices, and more than many Christians believe.

Unfortunately it is popular today to claim there is a specific, extra-biblical, *private will* for your life. This includes such things like Kent's

decision of where to go to school, or what good job or church to choose, and what good Christian to marry. This idea is attractive because we don't want to make mistakes in such important decisions and it would be great if God would tell us clearly His perfect, *private will* in all the decisions we make. But there is no clear biblical support for such an idea, and it has caused more harm to Christians than many will admit.

Of course even godly and wise Christians make mistakes in important decisions. It is a part of being human and God has not promised us the ability to make perfect decisions. But we can always act morally in all our decisions and please God. And we can trust that He is in ultimate control of everything in our life, even our bad decisions, and will love us in and through whatever happens in our life.

In the previous chapter the primary point was God's will for your life is completely communicated in Scripture. In this chapter the primary point is God gives you a lot of freedom in your decisions. Both of these biblical principles are denied in the claim that there is an extra-biblical *private will* of God, which is a foundational belief of mysticism. And because this belief directly affects your security in Scripture to communicate God's will for you, we will address the different wills of God in Scripture. The table after this chapter summarizes them.

The certainty of the *predestined will* of God

First is the *predestined will* of God. These are things that God decides and makes certain will happen apart from any decisions or deeds of humans. These are the things Isaiah speaks of when he says, "*The Lord of Heaven's Armies has sworn this oath: 'It will all happen as I have planned. It will be as I have decided'*" (14:24). Such things would include when and where you were born (cf. Acts 17:26), the length of your life (cf. Job 14:5), your salvation (cf. Eph 1:4-6; Rom 9:10-24), and your spiritual gifts.

The Bible says: "*The Spirit has given each of us a special way of serving others. . . . But it is the Spirit who does all this and decides which gifts to give to each of us*" (1 Cor 12:7, 11). You do not choose your spiritual gifts, God chooses them for you. And they dictate and reveal the unique ways that God wants you to serve Him. This is what Paul is speaking of when he writes: "*We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*" (Eph 2:10). How will you know what good works God has predestined for you? By knowing and using the spiritual gifts God has predestined for you. They will be the most specific direction God gives you to know His personal will for your life.

All of the things in God's *predestined will* are the personal will of God for you. Because they are predestined, you cannot "miss" God's will in them. While these aspects of your life are relatively rare, they are the most

important parts of your life. But the fact that the predetermined things in your life are rare means God gives you a lot of freedom in your decisions.

The clarity of the *prescribed will* of God

In the previous chapter we discussed the *prescribed will* of God which is clearly revealed in Scripture. This is the will of God for your life that He expects you to know and obey. Which is why He clearly reveals it.

One of the reasons that Scripture is such a complete revelation of God's will for your life is that the will of God that you need to know is always moral. Moral decisions are between what is righteous and what is sinful. And this is the only will of God you need to know.

But mysticism claims that God has a will in many amoral things such as what good Christian to marry, or what good job or church to choose. But these are not moral issues. You can choose any good Christian, any good job or church and not sin. Therefore God does not have a will in them, nor is there direction for them in Scripture. This is because the will of God that you need to know is always moral. And the whole moral will of God is revealed in Scripture and desired by the Spirit living in us.

Another reason that the *prescribed will* of God in Scripture is so complete, is that the command to LOVE is such a complete revelation of God's will for your life. Paul writes: "*This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ*" (Phil 1:9-10 NIV). If you simply follow God's command to love, then you will "*be able to discern what is best,*" in any situation, and "*be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.*" What more direction do you need, to know the God's will for your life, than love? Not much.

The reason that the greatest commandments are to love God and people (cf. Matt 22:36-40) is that they are the most comprehensive revelation of God's will for your life. And the "Golden Rule" is extremely helpful as well, when we understand that God's will in a particular situation can be as simple as, "*in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you*" (Matt 7:12 NIV).

Mysticism can often imply that God will lead us to love certain people at certain times. But we don't need such guidance because Scripture tells us to love all people at all times. It is as if God is saying, "Needs that you see are a nudge from Me." This is not some sort of mystical revelation, but rather, obeying biblical commands. If you just love, you will be doing essentially all of God's will for your life in essentially every circumstance.

The freedom of the *permissive* will of God

A third biblical aspect of God's will is His *permissive will*. This concerns things in which God really doesn't have a will at all, but leaves completely up to your own free will and careful reasoning. The reason for this is that such issues are amoral in nature, and we cannot sin in them. Accordingly, God is not much concerned with giving us divine guidance in such decisions, and, as we have said, any moral guidance has already been clearly provided in Scripture.

God's *permissive will* is much broader than many assume. If you need to purchase a car and can choose between a red one and a blue one, should you think God has a particular will in the matter? Surely not. And what else would you put in this category of decisions that God, like any other good father, would simply want you to follow your desires if they are not sinful or otherwise foolish? More than many think.

A misunderstanding of this is demonstrated in mysticism which often complains that Scripture is not specific enough in telling you what to do, and you therefore need extra-biblical revelation to know His will. On the contrary, yet another reason that Scripture is such a sufficient revelation of God's will is that many of the decisions you make contain amoral elements that God leaves purely to your personal choice and reasoning.

Therefore, whatever is not addressed in some way by the commands, examples, principles, and Proverbs of Scripture, is one of those issues that God really does not have an opinion on. Unfortunately many Christians assume that God intends to minutely direct every step of their life, and constantly and supernaturally interject direct guidance to them. While many claim such mystical means are more spiritual, this is not God's way.

Like any good father, He does not wish to dictate everything in your life in minute detail, but rather, wants you to live morally, using your reason to think wisely, and pursue your desires. The fact that in the OT God dictated virtually every aspect of His people's lives reflected their spiritual immaturity. But because in the New Covenant we are indwelt with the Holy Spirit you already know and desire the moral will of God.

And whatever amoral issues that are not prescribed in Scripture, you have permission from God to choose according to your desires. If you were to ask God what He wanted you to do in a decision that is not addressed in Scripture, do you know what He would say? "Do what you want and I will bless it." God gives you a lot of freedom in your decisions.

Popular Bible teacher John MacArthur illustrates the freedom and scope of God's *permissive will* when he writes:

God's [*prescribed*] will [in Scripture] is that you be saved, Spirit-filled, sanctified, submissive, and suffering. God's Word makes all this clear. You say, "MacArthur, you were going to tell me what school I should go to. You were going to tell me God's will, specifically. You

haven't done it!" OK, let me give you the final principle, but hold onto your seat! You may want to jump up and shout!

If you are doing all five of the basic things [as prescribed in Scripture], do you know what the next principle of God's will is? Do whatever you want! If those five elements of God's will are operating in your life, who is running your wants? God is! The Psalmist said, "Delight yourself in the Lord; and He shall give you the desires of your heart" (Ps. 37:4). God does not say He will fulfill all your desires. But if you are living a godly life, He will give you the right desires.

People say to me, "Why did you go into your present ministry when you had such an enjoyable ministry before in another area?" I always answer, "Because I wanted to."

I had a friend come to me and say, "John, I don't know where the Lord wants me to serve." I said to him, "Marty, if you had your choice of any service in the world, what would you want?" He said, "Oh, I have such a burden for my people Israel. I speak French fluently, and Paris is just loaded with Jewish people who don't know Jesus. I personally would like to go to Paris as a missionary to the Jews."

I checked him on the five spiritual principles [God's *prescribed will*] and said, "Marty, have you done all these things?" He replied, "Yes, I honestly believe that I am committed to Christ in these areas." I said, "Marty, good-bye, have a nice trip."¹

The point is, when you have fulfilled the *prescribed will* of God, His *permissive will* is operative and you have the freedom to make choices according to good reasoning and desires.

The miracle of the *prayed-for will* of God

God invites you to pray so that He can make things happen that would not otherwise occur. We read of the *prayed-for will* of God in 1 John 5:14-15: "*This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him*" (NIV). You do not know if all the things you ask are God's will, but if they are and you ask for them, they will happen. This will be discussed more in chapter 3.20 of this study.

The myth of a *private will* of God

As noted above, the popular belief in a *private will* of God includes a myriad of extra-biblical and amoral issues. This mysticism claims God has one best college for you to attend, one best career for you to choose, or one ideal Christian mate to marry. According to mysticism, if you choose

another college, career, or mate, you have missed God's perfect and *private will* for your life.

Fortunately, this idea is unbiblical. A *private will* for your life vastly expands the contents of God's will beyond what He has predestined, prescribed, or will allow you the permission to freely choose. Accordingly, it adds a great number of things in which you can sin against God. This is because it makes otherwise amoral issues become moral ones because it is claimed God has a specific will in them. This would seem to violate God's command: "*Do not add to or subtract from these commands I am giving you*" (Deut 4:2).

The idea of an extra-biblical *private will* makes the will of God difficult to know. Thankfully, this is unbiblical. One thing clear in Scripture is that IT IS ALWAYS GOD'S RESPONSIBILITY TO CLEARLY COMMUNICATE HIS WILL. Search the Scriptures and you will never find an instance where God intentionally made His will obscure. And if He had a will for someone not communicated in Scripture, He always clearly communicated it in miraculous and unmistakable means such as sending Angels, an audible voice from a burning bush, a vision like Isaiah or John had, or a personal appearance of Jesus Christ. God never used the obscure and difficult means of "signs" and intuitions, and "peace" that mysticism promotes. Contrary to mysticism, God makes knowing His will easy. The hard part is doing it.

Some claim that a Christian must be willing to do anything for God before they can know His supposed *private will* for them. But there are no examples of this anywhere in Scripture. God always communicated His will regardless of who was willing to obey it. The same is true today. Willingness is not a requirement to know the aspects of God's will that we must obey because these things are completely communicated in Scripture.

Gary Friesen and John Maxon, authors of the very good book, *Decision Making and the Will of God*, explain the oppression that can come with the belief in a *private will* of God for your life:

For a small segment of believers, the situation is more than just frustrating, it is critical. One woman who adopted an alternative position [i.e. God's will is in Scripture] to the [mystical] view said that when she did, she began enjoying her Christian life for the first time. That sounded like an overstatement, until she explained.

In her sincerity to seek God's [*private*] will, she was continually plagued with feelings of guilt as well as frustration. She earnestly looked for indications of God's plan, but she had to admit to herself that she was never 100 percent certain that she had found it. The result was feelings of anxiety before every decision, and feelings of guilt following every choice she made. Since life is filled with decisions that must be made, she was not able to enjoy her Christian life. When she learned that "finding the dot" [of a *private will*] was

not the essence of Christian decision making, she was set free from the frustration and guilt. In their place, she found the joy that she knew Christians were supposed to have in Christ.²

Instead of some narrow, difficult-to-find tightrope involved in a mystical *private will*, an understanding of God's biblical *permissive will* makes your extra-biblical decisions a rather wide and delightful path with several options, all of which your Dad is willing to bless in your life. And the full sufficiency of God's *prescribed will* in Scripture tells you all you need to know to please Him perfectly. Your Dad has made His will clear to you in the moral commands of Scripture and moral desires of the Spirit. Finally, if there are extra-biblical things in your life that God has specifically planned for you, then they are part of His *predestined will* which will happen no matter what, and do not require your correct decision making.

God told Adam and Eve: "*You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden— except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*" (Gen 2:16-17). As with them, God has made His will for you clear, and gives you permission to make a wide variety of choices about your life. God gives you a lot of freedom in your decisions.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite 1 Corinthians 4:6 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Genesis 2:16-17 and consider how it applies to your life.
- ▶ Review the table on the next page: "The Wills of God."

¹ John MacArthur, *Found: God's Will* (Chariot Victor, 1977), 54-5.

² Gary Friesen and John Maxon, *God's Will and Decision Making* (Multnomah, 1980), 119.

The Wills of God

	Description	Examples in Scripture
<i>Predestined & Personal</i>	Things that God decides and makes certain will happen apart from any decisions or deeds of humans. Usually unrevealed to the person until it occurs. No free human decision involved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Salvation (cf. Eph 1:4-5) • Place & time of birth (cf. Acts 17:26) • Spiritual gifts (cf. 1 Cor 12:7, 11) • Some callings from God (cf. Moses, Jeremiah, Jonah, Paul)
<i>Prescribed</i>	God's moral will completely revealed in Scripture and confirmed by the desires of the Holy Spirit. Its fulfillment is dependent on your choice to obey.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loving God and people (cf. Matt 7:12; 22: 40; Phil 1:9-10) • Faithful with gifts (cf. 1 Pet 4:10)
<i>Permissive</i>	Led by personal desires & amoral reasoning. No additional revelation or divine guidance needed apart from Scripture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which Christian person you marry (cf. 1 Cor 7:1-38) • Which honorable occupation you choose (cf. Col 3:23). • What good church to join.
<i>Prayed-for</i>	God miraculously intervenes when He grants our requests. Can make things happen that would not otherwise occur.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hezekiah's healing (cf. 2 Kgs 20:1-5) • Miraculous deliverances (cf. Gen 32:9-12; 2 Kgs 18:13-19:37; Acts 12:1-18)
<i>Unbiblical Private</i>	Obscure & unfulfilled until we somehow discern it apart from Scripture through miraculous "signs" or mental impressions.	Nothing in Scripture about it. Any <i>personal will</i> of God apart from Scripture will be a part of His <i>predestined will</i> and will occur no matter what.

Chapter 3.11

Your Dad's Precepts III*Make wise and biblical decisions*

1 Corinthians 7:36

Week 5

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - How do the various “wills” of God apply to making decisions?
 - What is wrong with seeking “signs” from God for decision-making?
 - What Scriptures are used to support mysticism? What do you think?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?

Dave really liked Lisa. She was godly and fun. But marry her? That was a big step. Dave was very concerned about finding the right woman to marry because his parent's marriage had been painful and ended in divorce. Was Lisa the girl God had for him or not? How could he know? Dave was helped by understanding the *permissive will* of God and the freedom his Dad gave him to follow his desires. As the Apostle Paul wrote:

If . . . he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants.
(1 Cor 7:36 NIV)

Do your best to make biblical and wise decisions and trust God to bless you.

What does Scripture say about who to marry?

In 1 Corinthians 7, the Apostle Paul was giving instruction on how to make one of the most important decisions of your life: who to marry. If God was going to promise and provide some kind of “signs” or guidance for extra-biblical decisions, this would be it. But Paul says nothing of the kind.

God does have a *prescribed will* regarding the marriage decision. Paul writes regarding widows: “*she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord*” (1 Cor 7:39-40 NIV). Therefore, Christians are limited by God to marry Christians, and this is for obvious reasons.

God does not have a *predestined will* for you to marry a specific person. You are free to marry any Christian you want. Therefore, notice the freedom that God gives within His *permissive will* regarding a decision even as important as marriage:

If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if his passions are too strong and he

feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married.

But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing. (1 Cor 7:36-37 NIV)

God wants you to marry who you want to marry. Unfortunately, mysticism claims that God's will includes one "perfect" person for you to be married to, or that you need some sort of miraculous looking "sign" to feel free to marry and to choose a particular person. This is not biblical.

Many understandably want divine guidance in such an important decision. But your Dad has already given it to you. Marry a Christian you like and love them. Then you will be following God's will in marriage. Do your best to make biblical and wise decisions and trust God to bless you.

Does God guide us with signs?

A common example of mysticism is the seeking for miraculous "signs" from God to guide us in decision making. Of course, God will work in and around your life to fulfill His *predestined will* for you, or grant a prayer request. But usually you can only see this in hindsight. This is because you did not need to know at the time what God was doing. There was no decision on your part required for God's will to occur.

Still, many Christians seek for miraculous "signs" from God to guide them in decision making. Some claim that we are to follow the method used by Abraham's servant to find a wife for Isaac. The servant prayed:

O Lord . . . please give me success today . . . See, I am standing here beside this spring, and the young women of the town are coming out to draw water. This is my request. I will ask one of them, 'Please give me a drink from your jug.' If she says, 'Yes, have a drink, and I will water your camels, too!'—let her be the one you have selected as Isaac's wife. (Gen 24:12-14)

And you know the rest of the story. Rebecca arrives and does precisely as the servant had prayed (cf. Gen 24:15-21). Gary Friesen notes:

This passage provides apparent support for three specific aspects of the [mystical] view: (1) the granting of detailed guidance beyond the moral [biblical] will of God, (2) the validity of using a circumstantial fleece to discover God's will, and (3) the notion that God's individual will includes the specific person a believer is supposed to marry.¹

The question is this: does God intend this to be instruction on how to find the perfect wife? The answer is "no" for at least 2 reasons. First, Abraham's servant was given a very unique promise. The Prophet Abraham

told his servant, “*The Lord . . . will send his angel with you and make your journey a success, so that you can get a wife for my son from my own clan and from my father’s family.*” (Gen 24:40). This man was promised divine guidance and intervention from an Angel. If a real Prophet of God like Abraham could tell you the same thing, then perhaps there would be instruction here for how you can find a wife. But there are no Prophets like Abraham today, and it is unlikely that you will be promised guidance from an Angel to find a wife.

Another reason not to accept this passage as instruction on how to get guidance from God is that it would be foolish to do so. Dr. Friesen writes:

Of course, it could be done. Making cultural allowances, a father could hire a dating agency. He could then send its agent on a search to find a wife for his son. The agent could drive into a service station, offer a prayer, and sign up the first woman who meets his request for a drink by filling his water jug and checking his radiator!”²

This introduces a very important point. There is absolutely no instruction in Scripture on how to correctly interpret your circumstances as God’s guidance for decision making. This is because God rarely intends your circumstances to be a divine revelation of guidance to do something. Remember, his commands are already written in Scripture.

Some have used the example of “Gideon’s fleece” (cf. Judg 6:11-40) as a model of asking God for signs to guide them. What people forget is that Gideon saw and spoke with an Angel! The purpose of “Gideon’s fleeces” was to prove the Angel was from God, not to authenticate a decision. There is nothing to apply to decision-making in Gideon’s story, unless an Angel appears to you too. And if God wants you to lead and risk the lives of 300 men in battle against a huge army, maybe He will.

Of course God may “open doors” of opportunity for us. But there is no way for us to be certain such things are from God. Notice how even the Apostle Paul responded to an “opened door” he knew was from “the Lord”:

When I came to the city of Troas to preach the Good News of Christ, the Lord opened a door of opportunity for me. But I had no peace of mind because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye and went on to Macedonia. (2 Cor 2:12-13)

Paul did not view an “open door,” even for preaching the Gospel, as a clear command of God. So what would give you confidence that you can always interpret certain direction from God in your circumstances? Let us repeat: There is absolutely no instruction in Scripture on how to correctly interpret your circumstances as God’s guidance for decision making.

Imagine the potential foolishness of making decisions based on “open” and “closed doors.” You may not wisely consider the merits of your options because you want to put the burden on God to make the decision for you in

some miraculous way. Remember something that has many applications to your life: GOD WILL NOT DO FOR YOU WHAT HE HAS ALREADY ENABLED YOU TO DO. He has given you a mind with reason and the ability to make decisions without having to constantly intervene in your life to lead you like a child. NT scholar John Stott explained:

Truths about God's general will regarding marriage Scripture will tell you. But Scripture will not tell you whether your wife is to be Jane or June or Joan or Janet! How then are you to decide this major question? There is only one possible answer, namely by using the mind and the common sense which God has given you.³

Do your best to make biblical and wise decisions and trust God to bless you. If you want to ask God to do something very specific to guide you, you are welcome to. But do not be surprised or disappointed if He does not do so because He does not believe you need Him to do so.

Are there Scriptures that promise extra-biblical divine guidance for decision making?

One of the most misunderstood passages in the Bible is James 1:5-8:

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt . . . That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. (NIV)

Many interpret this as a promise that if we have a question or need direction that is not available in Scripture, then we can simply ask God and He will guide us. Many believe such guidance would come through an immediate and strong thought in our mind. Thankfully, this is not true.

Why do we say, “Thankfully”? Because the text demands that you do not doubt or question whatever thoughts or “answer” comes to your mind. “*When you ask*” for wisdom “*you must believe and not doubt*” that God will “speak” to you. If you doubt this, then you are a sinful, unbelieving person who “*should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.*” So if you ask for wisdom on an extra-biblical issue, can you trust without a doubt, whatever thoughts, intuitions, or “answers” come to mind as revelation from God? Humble people will admit they cannot.

So what is the text in James saying? The answer is to correctly define the “*wisdom*” that is being referred to. It is not extra-biblical wisdom for making all kinds of decisions. The wisdom you can confidently and always get from God is moral wisdom. Specifically, what is morally right or wrong in difficult circumstances (cf. James 1:2-4). The “*wisdom*” promised in James 1 is defined in James 3: “*The wisdom from God is first of all*

[morally] pure. It also loves peace, and is considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good [moral] fruit, impartial and sincere” (3:13, 17).

According to James, the wisdom God is willing to provide is moral: telling us what is evil or righteous in any given situation. And you can confidently possess this wisdom in Scripture.

The common interpretation of James 1:5-8 is wrong for another reason. There is not a single biblical example of God leading or communicating to one of His people through mental telepathy (i.e. placing thoughts or impressions directly in their minds). Why is this? Because no human can confidently know that such a thing is the revelation of God to them. If God just put a thought in your mind to move to Chattanooga, Tennessee how could you possibly know it was from Him?

This is why Scripture teaches that when God wanted to communicate apart from His written word, He personally appeared or spoke through visions, Angels, or other physical and undeniable ways. There are no exceptions of this in Scripture. Which is why it is rather unbiblical for people to claim God speaks to them through some sort of “still small voice” that they really do not hear with their ears. There are no promises or examples of such a thing happening to God’s people in Scripture.

Another promise often misunderstood is when Christ told His Apostles:

I have much more to say to you, but you cannot bear it now. But when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on His own but will tell you what He has heard. He will tell you about the future. (John 16:12-13)

Is this a promise to you that the Spirit “*will guide you into all the truth*” regarding your decisions? On the contrary, this was a unique promise to the Apostles promising them future revelation to write NT Scripture. That is why the promise included revelation about “*all the truth*” Christians need and prophecy “*about the future.*” This promise was fulfilled, for example, in the Apostle John’s writing of his Gospel and the prophecy of Revelation.

Others misunderstand the descriptions of the Holy Spirit as our *paraklēton* (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 1 John 2:1). Some translations interpret this word as meaning a “Counselor” and one who speaks to you. However, the correct interpretation is “*Advocate*,” or one who speaks for you. This meaning is clear in 1 John 2:1 and described in Rom 8:26-27.

Another commonly misused Scripture is Proverbs 3:5-6: “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart; And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight*” (NASB). The more literal translations are helpful here. “*Straight*” paths in the OT refer to moral living in obedience to God’s commands. Not some sort of extra-biblical issue.

The same applies to OT references to being lead in “*the way*” (cf. Ps 32:8; Isa 30:19-21). The same is true of NT references to being “*led by the*

Spirit" (cf. Rom 8:12-14; Gal 5:16-18). These verses refer to being controlled by the moral powers of the Holy Spirit. But even this leading of the Spirit does not occur from getting messages from Him. Rather, the leading of the Holy Spirit is a Person living through you!

Finally, there are references to the Holy Spirit guiding the early Church in specific decisions. In Acts 13:2 we read: "*The Holy Spirit said, 'Dedicate Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them.'*" How did the Spirit communicate this? Through the Christian "*Prophets*" that were present (cf. v. 1), not some "still small voice" in their head.

Likewise, the "Jerusalem Council" wrote to Christians: "*It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements*" (Acts 15:28). How could they say that? Because Apostles of Jesus Christ like Peter and Paul were present (cf. vs. 2, 6-7). And we must be very careful to claim there are biblical Apostles and Prophets (cf. Eph 2:20; 4:11) operating in the Church today.⁴

God simply wants you to do your best to make biblical and wise decisions and trust God to bless you.

The promise and problems with mysticism

The promise of mysticism is attractive: direct guidance from God for all your decisions. Because making decisions can be difficult and risky we love the idea that God would tell us what to do beyond His written word. And of course this makes God seem more personal and even loving toward us.

But there are many biblical problems with mysticism. Some of these we have already mentioned. First, there is nothing in Scripture about mystical guidance. If God was communicating to Christians in this way, it would be the most important thing happening in our daily lives. And we would expect a great deal of biblical promises, commands, examples, and instruction regarding how God communicates to us apart from Scripture. But there are none of these things.

This is why mystical teachers have to give us their personal examples of God putting thoughts in their mind to guide them because there is not a single biblical example of such a thing. The reason they have to write books explaining how to recognize and interpret the voice of God apart from Scripture is because Scripture has nothing to say about this. This should warn us that God never intended for us to live like the mystics do.

Secondly, mysticism makes knowing God's will obscure and frustrating. But God always makes His will clear. Thirdly, because mystical decision making often devalues the place of reason and rather depends on feelings, impulses, and trying to read "signs," it often leads to foolish decisions.

Fourth, mysticism makes issues that God deems amoral (i.e. cannot be morally right or wrong), into moral ones that we can sin in. If God really has a specific will for where you go to college or what Christian you marry,

then you will be living outside of His will (which is always sin) if you do not choose the college or spouse God wants you to. Again, fortunately this is unbiblical. Such decisions are generally amoral and God gives you freedom.

Fifth, mysticism eventually diminishes the authority of Scripture in your life as you seek the will of God apart from it. And this is why we are confronting it in these chapters on the security we have in knowing God's will in Your Dad's Precepts.

In addition, it is understandable to think that God planning and revealing a *private will* for your life is more loving; that He would choose your spouse, college, occupation, and church for you, and then tell you His choice. But contrary to mysticism, the Bible does not say, "God demonstrates His love toward us by revealing a *private will* for us" It says He did this by dying on the cross for us (cf. Rom 5:8).

Many of those who promote and seek extra-biblical guidance from God view their mysticism as a primary experience of His love. If it was removed from their life they would feel less loved by God. But your identity in Christ is not in extra-biblical guidance from God. There is no biblical support for a mystical relationship with God. We live by faith now, trusting a God we cannot see or hear or touch. And that is what God wants (cf. 1 Pet 1:4-8).

But your Dad is certainly personal! He lives inside of you, empowering you to live out His moral commands in Scripture. And He has a personal will for your life in His *predestined will* that includes choosing you for salvation and which spiritual gifts you will have to serve Him uniquely.

Mysticism is intimidating when others are claiming that God is regularly "speaking" to them, and guiding them apart from Scripture. These claims create a great deal of disappointment and envy among Christians. When God does not "speak" or "guide" as miraculously and personally as He is supposedly doing for others, we will wonder why. You might falsely conclude it is because you are sinning, or God does not care about you, or you are not spiritual enough to receive these supposed "messages."

Unfortunately, mystics are rarely honest enough to confess the multitude of times they thought God was telling them to do something and . . . they were wrong.

Finally, in many cases, mysticism leads to the sin of divination. This is "the art or science of interpreting symbolic messages from the gods" which includes "the interpretation of signs, dreams, and omens."⁵ Divination is seeking revelation beyond what God gives you, and that certainly includes mysticism. Gordon T. Smith writes regarding mysticism:

Christians are often left trying various methods to find this [*private*] will, and they often come dangerously close to a kind of superstitious divination. The Bible forbids divination, and the "fleece" approach to signs comes dangerously close to a magical use of time and things.⁶

God condemned pagan methods of finding His will: *“Let no one be found among you . . . who practices divination or . . . interprets omens. . . Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord”* (Deut 18:10, 12). Mysticism reduces Christianity to something no better than the pagan religions which interpret circumstances as messages from the gods. In mysticism, superstition and divination become divine revelation.

Theologian J. I. Packer summarizes our view of the “Completeness of Scripture” as a divine revelation of God’s will for your life when he writes:

It is not for us to forbid God to reveal things apart from Scripture, or to do anything else. He is God, after all! But we can insist that the New Testament discourages Christians from expecting to receive God’s word to them by any other channel than that of attentive application to themselves of what is given to us in Holy Scripture.⁷

Some antidotes for mysticism

It is the difficulty and fear we experience in decision making that makes us seek extra-biblical guidance from God. But in difficult decisions, you need more “research” rather than revelation. Mysticism often causes people to make decisions based on emotion instead of reason. God wants you to use the reasoning abilities He gave you to make good decisions. A lack of “peace” about a decision is not some sort of direct revelation from God. It could simply be the result of not having enough good reasons to choose a particular option, or doing something against your conscience, or even violating Scripture.

Finally, do not forget about the blessing of God. *“God is for us”* (Rom 8:31). The reason that some people look for mystical signs and feelings to make the “perfect” decision is because they do not trust in God’s ability and desire to bless a variety of options they choose. Do not rely on making a “perfect” decision more than your Dad’s love for you. Instead of asking for miraculous signs or wisdom from God to make decisions, it would be more biblical and helpful to ask him to bless your decisions. God’s blessing is what is most important for the success of any decisions you make.

Even in the critical decision of who to marry, your Dad says of His child, *“If he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants”* (1 Cor 7:36) and He will bless your decision. Do your best to make biblical and wise decisions and trust God to bless you.⁸

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite 1 Corinthians 4:6 and Genesis 2:16-17 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize 1 Corinthians 7:36 in the translation above or another.

¹ Gary Friesen (Multnomah, 1980), 56-57.

² Ibid.

³ John Stott, *Your Mind Matters* by John Stott (Intervarsity, 1973), 46.

⁴ For biblical and historical arguments that the gifts of Apostles and Prophets ceased in the early Church see the books *God's Apostles* and *God's Prophets* online at <http://trainingtims.wpengine.com/library/advanced-theology/>.

⁵ "Religion, Greco-Roman," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, eds. (Intervarsity, 2000), 920.

⁶ Gordon Smith, *Listening to God in Times of Choice* (Intervarsity, 1997), 99-100, 103.

⁷ J.I. Packer, *God's Words: Studies of Key Bible Themes* (Intervarsity, 1981).

⁸ More discussion on decision making is in *Christian Essential* study #5: *FRUIT*.

Chapter 3.12

Your Dad's Presence*You are never alone*

Hebrews 13:5

Week 6

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - Why is loneliness so painful?
 - What has God promised so that you will never be alone?
 - How does God's presence apply to my everyday life?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?

Jesus had very close friends. He lived and served with twelve men for over three years and called them His friends (cf. John 15:15). But during the most difficult time of His life, He was alone. The night before He was crucified He went to a garden to pray with His friends. He was “*anguished and distressed*.” He said to His friends, “*My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.*” But He found His friends sleeping three times (cf. Matt 26:36-46). None of them were able to understand or share the grief Jesus was feeling.

In the garden Jesus was arrested. What did His friends do? “*All the disciples deserted him and fled*” (Matt 26:56). Jesus was alone during the most difficult time in His life. But was He alone? Earlier that same night He told His friends: “*The time is coming—indeed it's here now—when you will be scattered, each one going his own way, leaving me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me*” (John 16:32).

Of course, there was one time in Christ's life when even His Father abandoned Him. When He became sin in our place (cf. 2 Cor 5:21), He cried out to the Father on the cross: “*My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?*” (Matt 27:46). Jesus became your sin and was separated from the Father, so you never would be. And because of this:

God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”
(Heb 13:5 NIV)

Your Dad's constant presence means you are never alone.

The problem of loneliness

God created you with the need for relationship. God said at the beginning of Creation: “*It is not good for the man to be alone*” (Gen 2:18).

Loneliness is the first thing God ever said was not good. It is one of the most painful human experiences. It is feeling like you are not connected, noticed, understood, or needed by anyone. And while other humans can help, no human can fully meet your need for relationship. Not even a spouse. This is why even in good marriages people can feel misunderstood, disconnected, and lonely. We discussed this more thoroughly in the previous study, *Your FOUNDATIONS*, in the topic of making people an idol in our lives.

If you are not married, or living alone, or an unpopular kid in school, or just find it hard to make friends, then loneliness can be a daily struggle for you. Even those who have lots of “friends” and are surrounded by people can still experience the great pain of loneliness.

Because most people have rejected a relationship with God, loneliness is a great curse of our age. In America, “As many as one-third admit to frequent periods of loneliness, which is a key factor in suicide rates.”¹

Loneliness in your Christian life is very damaging. When you experience painful events in your life and feel like your real Dad is not there it is even more painful. And it deceives you into thinking you must go through life alone and depend on yourself. When you feel alone, you are more tempted to sin and do things that will hurt your life. But “*God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you”* (Heb 13:5 NIV). Your Dad’s constant presence means you are never alone.

The presence of God

Again, we have explained in the previous study, *Your FOUNDATIONS*, that God created us with needs such as relationship. But God is the only one who can really meet those needs. Especially when you find yourself in situations like Jesus did when no one else seems to understand, care, or is available.

If you are a child of God You are never alone. Your Dad in Heaven is always watching you. He always knows everything about you and your day including your thoughts, actions, and struggles. He even knows how many hairs are on your head which probably changes every day! (cf. Matt 10:30). Listen to how close and personal David believed his Dad was in his life:

O Lord, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord. You go before me and follow me. . .

I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. . . Even in darkness I cannot hide from you. To

you the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are the same to you.

How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. . . . I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up, you are still with me! (Ps 139:1-12; 17-18)

Your Dad always sees you. Even if it feels like people do not see you. When you are in the dark at night He sees you. When you are sleeping He is watching you. And when you wake up He is right there! God is always so close to you that whenever you pray He hears every word.

You do not need to do anything to obtain the presence of God. He is already always with you. But you need to recognize this so you can experience His presence. God is never absent from you. But He can feel absent if you believe the lie that you are separated from Him. This is one reason “*God’s will for you in Christ Jesus*” is to “*Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances*” (1 Thess 5:16-18 NIV). These help you realize the presence of your Dad throughout your day and in the midst of painful things.

Not even death separates you from God (cf. Rom 8:38-39). When you die, your soul, the real eternal you, leaves your body immediately and goes to God in Heaven (cf. Phil 1:23). You will never be separated from the presence of God. He even lives inside of you! “*God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you”* (Heb 13:5 NIV). Your Dad’s constant presence means you are never alone.

All of this leads to an amazing and sobering truth. You are never doing anything alone in your life. If you could constantly imagine Jesus Christ being physically with you every moment of every day, you would experience what is spiritually true! When you ride in your car, He is in the seat next to you. When you are eating, He is at the table. When you are working, He is working with you. You are always a “we” or “us” and never just an “I” or “me.” God wants you to experience *everything* in your life with Him!

The constant presence of God in your life should also strengthen you against temptation because there is no such thing as a “secret sin.” It is amazing how we can deceive ourselves into thinking we can do something “when no one is looking” or “no one will know.” This presumed secrecy about sin gives it so much power! But what if you never forgot that God is always watching you?! Not to condemn you but because He loves you.

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable. (Heb 4:13)

From his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth—he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do. (Ps 33:14-15)

“I am watching them closely, and I see every sin. They cannot hope to hide from me. . . Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them?” declares the Lord. (Jer 16:17; 23:24)

Men, Jesus Christ is right beside you when you are on the Internet. Would He like what you are looking at? Women, Jesus is there when you are talking about people who are not present. Would He like what you are saying about them? Again, never forget that God is always watching you. Not to condemn you, but to strengthen you and comfort you because He loves you.

God is always with you and watching you. Always. He promised this. *“God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you”* (Heb 13:5 NIV). Your Dad’s constant presence means you are never alone. And if God is always with you, what is He doing? Protecting and providing for you, which are the topics of the next chapters.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite 1 Corinthians 7:36 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Hebrews 13:5 in the translation above or another.
- ▶ Read the next chapter to prepare for your Barnabas Group this week.

¹ George Gallup Jr. *Emerging Trends*, vol. 19, #3 (March 1997).

Chapter 3.13

Your Dad's Protection*Nothing happens to you without your Dad's permission*

1 Corinthians 10:13

Week 6

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - Why do you need your real Dad's protection in this world?
 - How does your Dad protect you in this world? What is His promise?
 - Why does He allow difficulties and temptations in your life?
 - Why are you not always able to immediately overcome what God allows in your life?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?

Satan hated Job. This was because Job loved God and gave God glory. And this is why Satan wanted to physically hurt Job. But God said “No.” Later the Devil wanted to kill Job. But again, God said “No” (cf. Job chs. 1-2). Of course, God did allow the Devil to cause great loss and pain in Job's life. The reason for this will be given in the chapters on your Dad's Purpose later in this study. But the vital promise in this chapter is that:

God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. (1 Cor 10:13 NIV)

Nothing happens to you without your Dad's permission

You live in a war zone

When you are attacked by surprising and painful things, or tempted in a great way, you can feel like you must be unique. It seems like your life is harder than others. But the Bible says, “*No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind*” (1 Cor 10:13).

The immediate context here was a warning against the sin of idolatry (cf. v. 14). But in the NT the Greek word for “*temptation*” (*pierasmos*) refers to any tests, trials, and difficulties in your life. In fact, there is little difference between difficult hardships and temptations because trials usually tempt you to sin. Pain and difficulties tempt you to not trust and obey God and stay controlled by the Spirit of love, joy, and peace.

Why do bad things happen to you? As described in chapter 3.1 of this study, part of the reason is that “*the world around us is under the control of the evil one*” (1 John 5:19). “*Your great enemy, the devil . . . prowls*

around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8). There is a very powerful being who rules a multitude of other evil beings. You cannot see them but they can see you. And they hate you and are constantly trying to hurt and control your life.

The Scriptures warn you that the struggles in your life, *"are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against . . . evil spirits in the heavenly places"* (Eph 6:12). When you became a Christian you were dropped into a war zone and the *"fiery arrows of the devil"* (Eph 6:16) are flying all around you all the time in the form of enticements and hardships that tempt you to sin. This is why Jesus not only told us to pray *"daily"* for our bread, but to pray every day that our Dad would *"rescue us from the evil one"* (Matt 6:13)! Every day you need protection from the Devil as much as you need food.

Job's experience illustrates that Satan's *"purpose is to steal and kill and destroy"* (John 10:10) your life. He stole Job's wealth, killed his children, and destroyed his health, reputation, and perhaps even his marriage (cf. Job 1:13-2:7). If your Dad did not protect you and your loved ones from the Devil, he might torture and kill all of you today. As Jesus said, *"He was a murderer from the beginning"* (John 8:44). But your Dad rules over everything and everyone in His Creation. This includes the Devil. God completely rules over Satan and his demons so nothing happens to you without your Dad's permission.

Your Dad is constantly filtering your life

"God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear" (1 Cor 10:13 NIV). Every time you are tempted to sin or confronted with a difficult spiritual test, your Dad wants you to know that it has passed His evaluation and approval first. Nothing happens to you without God's permission. THAT is a lot of control over your life. You do not need to be in control of your life, because God is.

In a world where the Devil hates you, there are many horrible things that could happen. But the most powerful and loving Person in the Universe stands in front of you and all around you to guard your life. Because your Dad is not bound by time, He has essentially stopped everything coming into your life before it happened, evaluated it, and only lets things pass with His permission. EVERYTHING IN YOUR LIFE IS FILTERED BY GOD.

If you became a Christian later in life you especially know this is true. Think about your life in the kingdom of darkness under the authority of the Devil. There was no loving filter on your life. It did not feel like anyone was protecting you. But since becoming a child of God, your life has been filtered by God and the bad things that happened to you no longer do.

Do not be a "Christian atheist": a true child of God, but who lives like there is no God. Who lives in fear of what might happen to them because

their “worldview” has no Almighty Dad who is filtering their life. That is not the world you live in. God is in your world and He is your Dad.

There are no random events in the Universe. It is not subject to luck or mere chance. Absolutely nothing just happens. God makes a decision about EVERYTHING in His Universe BEFORE it happens. Even what He will allow you to choose in His *permissive will* or what He will include in His *predestined* and personal will for you. And what He will allow to happen to you. This is God’s sovereignty, His ultimate control over everything and everyone. It means nothing happens to you without your Dad’s permission.

This is why Jesus said: “*Aren’t two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground [and dies] apart from your Father’s will*” (Matt 10:29 NET¹). “*Your Father*” cares about every little thing in your life and is filtering what happens to you. Nothing happens to you without your Dad’s permission. Including when you die. If a bird cannot die without your Father’s permission, then neither can you. You will not die one second sooner than God has decided. Job said of all humanity, “*The length of his life is decided beforehand--the number of months he will live. You have settled it, and it can’t be changed*” (Job 14:5; cf. Ps 139:16). Nothing happens to you without your Dad’s permission.

Your Dad is constantly leading you in victory

So why does God let anything bad happen to you? The ultimate answer is the same one we see in Job’s life. God allows difficulties and temptations in your life to test you and give you an opportunity to glorify Him. Again, this is a topic that will be discussed in later chapters regarding Your Dad’s Purpose for your life. On the New Earth that is coming, nothing bad will ever happen to you for all eternity. But on this Earth, God wants your love and faith in Him to be tested for His glory. So bad things will happen.

What does your Dad allow to pass through His filter on your life? As in Job’s case, the Devil may ask God permission to do all kinds of nasty things in your life to test and tempt you. But your Dad monitors and evaluates your circumstances and spiritual maturity so closely that, “*He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear*” (1 Cor 10:13 NIV).

Why will He “*not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear*”? Because He always wants you to be victorious over your tests and temptations! When Paul was experiencing a difficulty in his life, he said, “*But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ*” (2 Cor 2:14 NASB). The Greek word here was used to describe a king leading his people to victory over their enemies. Your King is always doing this in your life. Leading you to victory. Victory over sin. Victory over your difficulties in the sense that you can experience the powers of the Spirit (love, joy, peace) no matter what is happening. That is victory! And that gives God glory! Whatever temptation or trial you may experience, you can be certain

you can overcome it for God's glory. This is the only kind of temptation or trial God will allow in your life. The kind that can glorify Him.

Your Dad never puts you in a fight with sin that you cannot win. He never allows you to be in a situation that you cannot learn how to trust and obey Him and experience love, joy, and peace in it. This means you NEVER have a good excuse to sin. God has the ability to always set you up to win. God has the power and wisdom to control everything and everyone around you and "fix" and manipulate every "contest" in your life so you can win.

As we said above, your Dad monitors and evaluates your circumstances and spiritual maturity so closely that, "*He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear*" (1 Cor 10:13 NIV). This was demonstrated in David's life. God allowed a lion and a bear to attack his sheep, but he prevailed. God knew David could handle such difficulties. And overcoming them prepared him for his future encounter with Goliath (cf. 1 Sam 17:34-36). God did not bring a Goliath into David's life before the lion and the bear. God grew David's faith first. This is because, "*God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear*" (1 Cor 10:13 NIV).

So why does it often FEEL like the tests and temptations in your life ARE "*beyond what you can bear*"? Because God does not promise you will be able to IMMEDIATELY overcome every temptation and hardship in life. The promise is really: "*God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear*". . . . EVENTUALLY.

God allows trials and challenges to reveal weaknesses in your life because He knows you are ready to change. "*God . . . always leads us in triumph in Christ*" (2 Cor 2:14 NASB). But conforming you into the character of Jesus not only requires time, but some failure. God's grace covers your failures. And whatever God allows into your life, He knows you are ready to grow through it and eventually overcome it. We will discuss this more in the next chapter. "*God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear*" (1 Cor 10:13 NIV). Nothing happens to you without your Dad's permission.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite Hebrews 13:5 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize 1 Corinthians 10:13 in the above translation or another.

¹ "*Dies*" is implied by the sparrow falling from the sky and the context in v. 28 is death. "*Father's will.*" The lit. Eng. is "apart from your Father" without specifying what about the Father. But most scholars and some trans. (NIV 1984, RSV, TEV, NET, GNT) agree that Jesus is speaking of God's sovereign control over His Creation (cf. Ps 104:29). "Without God's consent, not even sparrows die" (Nolland, *Matthew*). Some translations imply that God merely cares or knows about the death of a sparrow, but is not doing anything about it. This would not give much reason for Jesus' conclusion: "*So, don't be afraid*" "*of those who want to kill your body*" (vs. 28, 30).

Chapter 3.14

Your Dad's Provision I

*God is Always Working to Change Your Heart
or Your Circumstances*

1 Corinthians 10:13

Week 7

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - What are two ways God enables you to endure difficulties and temptations? What is an example of each in your life?
 - How do you know when you should leave a painful situation?
 - Why is it important to leave painful situations when you can?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?

Dave hated his job. It paid good money and it was what he went to school for. But he did not enjoy it and the stress he experienced at work was exhausting. But maybe this is just the way things were supposed to be. He had a family to provide for, and a mortgage to pay for. And he really didn't know what else he would do. And maybe God just wanted him to stay at that job to learn more character and how to be thankful.

There was no way to make Dave's situation easy. Knowing what to do, (or what God is doing!) in such situations is rarely simple. But the biblical promises and principles in this chapter helped make things clearer.

God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. (1 Cor 10:13 NIV)

God is always working to change your heart or your circumstances.

In the previous chapter we discussed the first part of this amazing promise. Here we will study the second part: “*God is faithful. He . . . will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*” There are two ways “*God is faithful*” in your life in the midst of your trials and temptations. First, as discussed in the previous chapter, “*He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear*” Your Dad is constantly filtering your life and “*always leads us in triumph in Christ*” (2 Cor 2:14) by only permitting situations you can overcome.

Secondly, “*God is faithful*” in your temptations and trials because *He . . . will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*” There are two

ways God provides “*a way out*” so you have victory in your tests and temptations. God is always working to change your heart or your circumstances. Always. Your Dad will never leave you in a situation where He is not working in your heart or around you in your circumstances “*so that you can endure*” your difficulties and have victory over whatever He allows to happen in your life.

Your Dad may want to change your circumstances

Your Dad is often working around you, in your circumstances, to “*provide a way out*” of a difficulty or temptation “*so that you can endure it.*” God not only controls what trials and temptations are allowed in your life, but He controls their DURATION. He is constantly ending difficulties in your life. He knows that if some tests and temptations lasted longer than He allows, you would not “*endure it.*” He told the church in Smyrna: “*Don’t be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days*” (Rev 2:10). But no longer because your Dad is ultimately in control.

If you will think about it for a moment, you will realize that the great majority of your difficulties came and then were gone. You had money troubles, but they changed. You were in a difficult relationship, but it changed. You were sick, but got better. In fact, many of your difficulties only last a few days or less. This is your Dad working around you to “*provide a way out*” of a difficulty “*so that you can endure it.*”

Unfortunately, some Christians do not take the “*way out*” of trials and temptations that God has provided for them. For example, when we are tempted to pursue sexual immorality, God will always provide an immediate “*way out*” so you can obey His command to “*flee from sexual immorality*” (1 Cor 6:18).

Sometimes your idolatrous dependence on a person or thing is causing tremendous pain in your life and God “*will provide a way out*” from them. But you choose not to because you are afraid to displease someone or trust God.

The Apostle Paul told slaves: “*Are you a slave? Don’t let that worry you—but if you get a chance to be free, take it*” (1 Cor 7:21). God wants you to seriously consider leaving painful or difficult circumstances if you have the opportunity to do so. Think of someone in Dave’s situation above. Perhaps God would provide them with another job they would enjoy more, but maybe for less money. And because they are so attached to the money they are making, they will not take a “*way out*” that God would provide them. Likewise, perhaps your Dad “*will provide a way out*” from a painful situation, but you will not make a change because you are afraid.

Unfortunately, when your Dad creates a “*way out*” of a painful or tempting situation and you do not take it, you will not be able to “*endure*

it.” Remember, one way that God helps you to be victorious in life is giving you “*a way out*” of temptations and unnecessary painful situations. But if you remain in something you are not supposed to, you will be overcome by the temptation and continue to experience pain and spiritual defeat in it.

Some Christians think God just wants them to stay in miserable circumstances. But consider this. How much energy, time, and even money can be unnecessarily wasted in the painful and difficult circumstances of your life? And when you are living like that, how much do you have available to give to God and others? Severe trials often exhaust all of your physical, mental, emotional, financial, and even spiritual resources.

If you are having money troubles, you probably do not have as much money to give to others. If you are in a painful and exhausting relationship, you may not have much love and energy to give to others. If your job is extremely demanding you may not be able to give your family the love they need, which is a whole lot more important than money.

The idea that God wants you to constantly be in difficult, tempting, and exhausting situations is not true because God also wants you to be serving and giving to others, and your trials and difficulties often hinder that.

But doesn’t God purposely allow temptations and difficulties in your life? Yes, because as we discuss below, He wants you to grow. But THERE IS A TIME TO GROW AND A TIME TO GIVE. There is a time that God wants you in difficult circumstances so you can grow, and there is a time that He wants you out of those circumstances so you can give.

So if God creates “*a way out*” of an unnecessary painful situation, do it. It is not for you to decide when and how many trials and tests you will need to experience for your growth. That is God’s decision. Job did not choose his test and trial. God chose it for him. Your responsibility is to be as wise and free as possible to love, serve, and give to God and others. So avoid as many unnecessary difficulties in your life as you can.

Remember that when God creates “*a way out*” of an unnecessary painful situation, He will not have you violate His commands to do it. No matter how painful your marriage to a Christian may feel, God does not want you to leave your spouse. As a parent you cannot just abandon a difficult child. Nor does your Dad want your pain to constantly cause you to make foolish and harmful decisions. In these situations, God wants to change your heart instead of your circumstances.

But do not underestimate the freedom your Dad gives you to leave unnecessary painful situations. Your Dad gives you permission and freedom to live according to your DESIRES much, much, more than many Christians think. If changing your circumstances would not violate a biblical command, be unnecessarily foolish, or bring harm to others, then God is eager to help you take a “*way out*” that He “*will provide*” for you. The Apostle Paul illustrated this principle when he wrote: “*Are you a slave?*”

Don't let that worry you—but if you get a chance to be free, take it” (1 Cor 7:21). Your Dad loves you. He wants you to be happy. And He wants you to be free to love, serve, and give to Him and others.

“God is faithful. He . . . will also provide a way out so that you can endure it” (1 Cor 10:13 NIV), no matter what it might be. Therefore, God is always working to change your heart or your circumstances.

Your Dad may want to change your heart

But God often wants to change your heart before He changes your circumstances. And changing your heart is another way *“God is faithful. He . . . will also provide a way out so that you can endure it”* (1 Cor 10:13 NIV). In painful situations it is easy to think the only relief available is to change your situation. But changing your heart can be the most freeing thing of all!

For example, imagine there is a person in your life that is cruel and hurtful to you. And because of the mean things they say or do to you, you cannot stand to be around them. They make you mad. In fact, if you were honest, you hate them.

It may be easy to simply change your circumstances and leave or avoid that person. And that may be exactly what even God wants you to do eventually. But think for a moment what would happen if you actually FORGAVE that person! And kept forgiving them. What if you learned to trust God with whatever you felt their sin was costing you. And you loved them even though you did not like them. Do you know what would happen? You could SMILE at that person when they were mean to you. Even laugh about it. Then you would make them mad!

THAT is freedom. That is allowing God to change your heart. It is another way that God may want to *“provide a way out”* of a difficult relationship or painful circumstance *“so that you can endure it,”* even staying in it, and experiencing love, joy, and peace, and glorifying God!

What about other painful and difficult circumstances that make you feel afraid, stressed out, and even depressed? Again, God may want to change your circumstances. But what if you learned to trust and experience God in your situation? What if you *“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you”* (1 Pet 5:7 NIV)? Changing your heart will probably significantly reduce the emotional pain of your circumstances. Remember, it is not your circumstances that are causing you to feel anger, fear, or depression in your life. These feelings are caused by the lies you are believing about your situation, not what is happening in your situation.

Changing your “heart” always changes your “eyes.” Adopting God’s truth in your painful situation gives you His perspective. And it is important to have God’s “eyes” when looking at your circumstances because He sees them truthfully, as they really are. And changing your heart enables you to more accurately understand your situation and make the right decisions.

It is difficult to know what to do in such situations. Should you leave a job because there are people there you do not like? Should you give up on a task because it causes you too much hardship? When does God want you to grow and when does He want you to give up?

Again, these are not simple questions. But Jesus shared a principle that will be helpful: *“First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye”* (Matt 7:5). Jesus was saying you should not trust your perspective on someone or something until your heart is free from things like anger or fear.

If you leave or diminish a relationship with a difficult person in anger, you cannot know if that was the right thing to do. If you forgive them, and *“First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye”* and whatever they are doing to cause pain in your life. If fear drives you to change your circumstances, it may hinder you in making the right decision. If you trust God and gain His peace, you will see your situation more accurately and be more able to discern and do what is best.

God is always working to change your heart or your circumstances. But He often wants to change your heart before he changes your circumstances. And changing your heart and perspective is another way He can *“provide a way out so that you can endure”* (1 Cor 10:13 NIV) whatever difficulty your Dad permits in your life.

When God does not change your circumstances

No matter how long and painful your trials and temptations may be, the Apostle was right to call them all, *“light and temporary”* (2 Cor 4:17). This is because you are going to live forever and ever in a perfect Paradise.

But some of your painful circumstance may last the rest of your life on Earth. Your Dad may not change them. And there is nothing you can do to change them either. You might be imprisoned for serving Christ and die there. You might get sick and never be healed. The Apostle Paul experienced something like this. He wrote:

I have received such wonderful revelations from God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud. Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.”

So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor 12:7-10)

Throughout the history of the Church there has been considerable debate about what Paul's "*thorn*" was. Perhaps he intentionally left it vague so that Christians experiencing a variety of painful things could be encouraged by his example.

It would seem Paul went through three stages in his response to his "*thorn*." Initially he despised it, refused to accept it was God's will, and "*begged the Lord to take it away*." And this is a legitimate response to any difficulty you encounter. Again, Jesus told us to pray every day that God would rescue us from evil (cf. Matt 6:13). Your Dad always invites you to pray and ask Him to remove your difficulties, change a person, or heal your body. And He sometimes grants such requests. But He did not grant Paul's.

What are we to understand from the fact that Paul says, "*Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away*"? It means he persisted in prayer for a while, but eventually accepted his "*thorn*." Paul did not plead a fourth time. He asked. It was not granted. And he accepted it. We do not know how long it was between his last request and the Lord's answer. But there was likely a period of time that God wanted Paul to simply accept his "*thorn*" and the reality that God was not going to take it away.

Paul was stuck with a painful "*thorn*." Whatever it was, he could not change it himself and God was not going to change it. So what did God do? He changed Paul's heart.

When he first experienced the "*thorn*" he hated it and desperately wanted it changed. At some point he began to accept it. But later Paul could say he would be "*glad to boast about*" his "*thorn*" and even "*take pleasure*" in it! What happened? His Dad gave him a truth to set him free from his pain.

Not the physical pain that the "*thorn*" caused, but the even greater emotional anguish he was experiencing because of what he feared his "*thorn*" would cost him. Would it hinder his ability to serve God? Could he ever be happy again if the "*thorn*" was never removed? What about the burden it might place on others?

His Dad answered all of these fears when He said: "*My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness*." And because Paul believed his Dad's promise, it changed his heart to "*pleasure*" about his painful "*thorn*" instead of despising it. "*The truth will set you free*" (John 8:32) from the painful lies you are believing in your painful circumstance.

When Paul wrote to the Romans: "*Be transformed by the renewing of your mind*" (12:2 NIV) he was speaking from experience. Paul could not change his "*thorn*," but he could be transformed into someone who saw his "*thorn*" the same way God saw it. The way it really was. A "blessing in disguise" to be thankful for.

What did God's answer mean? God's "*grace*" and "*power*" would give Paul everything he needed. Not just to "get by," but to become even more

powerful. Whatever the “*thorn*” was going to cost Paul and others, God was going to work in miraculous ways to make up for it. Because Paul’s “*thorn*” made him “*weak*” in some way, limiting his own abilities, God was going to give him more “*grace*” and “*power*” than He gave other people. He was going to give Paul “*the power of Christ*” so it could “*work through*” him, and be demonstrated in his life in greater ways than before. Greater ways than most others would experience it.

Paul was not going to be weaker in any way that really mattered. He was going to be more powerful in every way that really did matter. God was not going to reduce the effect of his ministry, but actually increase it. Paul understood that through his “*thorn*” God was protecting him from the dangers of pride, not punishing him for already being proud.

Paul understood and believed that God was going to replace his human power with God’s supernatural power. And again, this made him, “*glad to boast about*” his “*thorn*” and “*take pleasure in*” it. This is because everything that Paul wanted the most, that would truly make him happy, required the supernatural power of God more than his own power. So Paul was glad to trade his power for God’s power!

How about you? Would you be willing to be “*weak*” and have your life limited and even painful in some way so that you could experience more of God’s “*power*” in you and around you? If God denied your request to restore your human power, but promised to increase His power, would you “*take pleasure in*” that?

We will all probably get our opportunity to find out. No doubt your Dad will keep a painful “*thorn*” or two in your life. And if you will let the truth of God transform you, you will go from despising, to accepting, and finally delighting in your “*thorn*.” And impacting your world and glorifying God in greater ways than you ever imagined because of it.

Paul knew from experience: “*God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it*” (1 Cor 10:13 NIV). But he knew “*a way out*” that God may “*provide*” to eliminate the power of a temptation, or the pain of a trial, is to change your perspective rather than your situation. God is always working to change your heart or your circumstances “*so that you can endure*” life’s testing with God’s grace and for God’s glory.

- Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- Recite Hebrews 13:5 from memory.
- Memorize 1 Corinthians 10:13 in the above translation or another.

Chapter 3.15

Your Dad's Provision II*God is for you and will generously bless your life*

Romans 8:31-32

Week 7

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - What are among the most powerful four words in Scripture?
 - What promises from God can help us not be afraid of the future?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?

Kurt looked back on over thirty years of following God. He remembered that as a young Christian man, he wondered what kind of life he would have. Who would he marry? What would his children be like? What kind of job would he have? What would he do for God? And he remembered being a little anxious about all those things.

If only he could have known then, what he knew now. God was going to bless his life far beyond what he could even imagine. Sure, there had been difficulties and disappointments. And he had made some mistakes. But when Kurt thought about all the ways God had blessed him over those years, he knew he had experienced what the Apostle Paul was talking about:

If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? (Rom 8:31-32)

God is for you and will generously bless your life

God is for you

So many Christians live in fear of the future. They always think the worst is going to happen. Perhaps the painful events in their life before God was their Dad, tempt them to think their life now will be just as painful. Perhaps they think God's whole will for their life is to cause horrible things in order to test their faith. Whatever the reason, far too many Christians fear the future. They forget the most repeated command in Scripture: “*Do not be afraid.*” If your Dad tells you not to be afraid, then there must be nothing to be afraid of! And if you are, it is because you are believing a lie.

You learned in the last chapter that your Dad does allow difficulties and tests of faith in your life. But not to ruin your life. If you will speak to any Christian who has been following God for some time, they will give you the

same testimony as David who said: *“Once I was young, and now I am old. Yet I have never seen the godly abandoned”* (Ps 37:25). Your Dad will always come through for you. Always.

Hard things will happen, but the overall experience of a child of God is tremendous blessings. The honest confession of any sincere Christian at the end of their life will be: “God was good to me.” This is because of who your Dad is. The Bible says many times *“God is good”* (cf. Ps 100:5; 106:1; Ps 136:1; 145:9; Jer 33:11; Nah 1:7). And He is your Dad. And He is a very generous Dad who greatly enjoys blessing His sons and daughters.

Think about what the Apostle Paul is saying about your Dad in our text. Within a rhetorical question, is the powerful statement: *“God is for us.”* Just four small words. But very powerful words if you believe them.

First, God is for you. It is one thing to have the support of a human being. Even a powerful human being. But the One who is for you is the most powerful Person in the Universe, the Almighty *God* and ultimate Creator and Ruler of everything and everyone. God is for you!

Secondly, God is for you. This is a promise. Whatever you have experienced in the past, God’s word does not lie. No matter what happens to you in your future, God’s word does not lie. God is for you, all the time, everywhere, and in all things, with no exceptions!

Thirdly, God is for you. That little word means a lot. God favors you. He supports, values, helps, and blesses you. Your real Dad is not standing above you just watching and waiting for you to fail. He is standing behind you, and working in front of you, to help you succeed in all that is good. He is cheering for you and rejoicing over you every day. God is for you!

The Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs! (Zeph 3:17)

Finally, God is for you. God is not just for all those saints in the Bible like Abraham, Moses, Joshua and David. God is for you just like them. And like them, Your Dad has a unique plan to bless your life. What He told His OT people is certainly true of you: *“The Lord declares, ‘I know the plans I have for you. My plans are to prosper you and not to harm you. My plans are to give you hope and a future’”* (Jer 29:11 NIV).

Like many Christians, you may firmly believe that God is going to give you a *“hope and a future”* after this life. But do you believe that God has made *“plans to prosper you and not to harm you”* in this life? God is for you. God just loves you. What else do you need to know about this life? *“God is for us.”* God is for you and will generously bless your life!

God is generous

You do not have a stingy Dad in Heaven. Paul reminds us: “*he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all.*” Notice how much God was willing to do and give, when you had a need in your life. God gave up His own Son when you needed forgiveness. He responds just as generously with all of your needs. God has already fulfilled your greatest need at the greatest cost to Him. So why do you doubt that He will “*also give [you] everything else*” you need. The Apostle says elsewhere: “*This same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.* (Phil 4:19). You will always have everything you need and much, much more.

Many Christians fear they will not even have what they need. But God loves you and promises you much more than that. God wants to generously bless your life in all kinds of ways. David proclaimed from his experience with God that He is the One, “*who satisfies your desires with good things*” (Ps 103:5 NIV). God is good and intends to be good to you.

You may struggle to believe this because you know you do not deserve such generosity. No one deserves the blessings or kindness of God. But God loves to give His children much more than they deserve. He, “*gives generously to all without finding fault*” (Jms 1:5 NIV). Your Dad’s blessings are not dependent on your performance. He likes to bless you when you do not deserve it.

Remember, “*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rom 5:8 NIV). God gave you the most, when you deserved it the least. If someone gave you a billion dollars when you were their enemy, why would you doubt they would give you a nickel when you become their friend? This is how it is with your Dad.

Do not be afraid

Your real Dad wants you to be like the Proverbs 31 woman who “*is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future*” (v. 25). Do you smile and laugh when you think about the future because you know God is going to be there blessing you?

Think about how good God has been to you in the past. Think about how good He will be to you in your eternal future. So why is it so hard to think He will be good to you in between those times?

Your Dad forgives you for being so anxious about everything. But He encourages you not to be. In fact, He invites you to, “*Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you*” (1 Pet 5:7). Make a decision every day to trust in your Dad’s provision and goodness no matter what happens. To believe “*God is for you*” and will bless you. Jesus taught us:

Why do you have so little faith? So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. (Matt 6:30-33)

Your Dad does not want you focused on meeting your needs like “unbelievers,” but to be focused on serving and loving others. And while you do so, He promises to take care of you.

Why is it important to “*Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously*” if God is going to bless you? Because if you seek God for the purpose of getting rich, then His blessings will become an idol to you and you will fail to serve and please God. This is another danger of the false “health and wealth gospel.” But your Dad says:

Don't love money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never abandon you." So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me?" (Heb 13:5-6)

Do not be so afraid of making decisions. Christians are often overly anxious about avoiding mistakes and become paralyzed about life. But knowing that your Almighty Dad is for you and is always working to bless you, will help you feel more freedom in your decision making.

This does not mean you should be foolish. But you need to rely more on your Dad's desire and ability to bless your decisions, rather than striving so hard to make perfect decisions. Again, your Dad is willing and able to bless all sorts of options! If you were to ask God Himself what He wanted you to do in many of your decisions, He would say, “Do whatever you want and I will bless it.” A vital motto of the Christian life is this: “Do your best and trust God to bless the rest.” Do your best to make good and God-honoring decisions, and trust God to bless what will often be imperfect decisions.

More frightened and skeptical Christians have a difficult time believing this. But they forget: “*God is for us, [so] who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?*” (Rom 8:31-32). The answer is Yes! God is for you and will generously bless your life.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite Hebrews 13:5 and 1 Corinthians 10:13 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Romans 8:31-32 in the above translation or another.
- ▶ Complete Project 3E “Fighting My Fears” on the next page. Also, stretch yourself to spend “1 hour with God” using the P.O.W.E.R. plan for God Times in Appendix A.

Project 3E

Fighting My Fears

So many Christians constantly struggle with fear on a daily or weekly basis. And their worry destroys the love, joy, and peace God wants to give them.

How can you fight your fears and worry? First **Recognize it!** So many Christians live with fear and worry and do not even notice it as a sinful feeling coming from their sinful nature. They have worried so much for so long, they think it is a normal and acceptable part of the Christian life. It is not. Again, the most repeated command in Scripture is “*Fear not,*” and the Bible says: “*Don’t worry about anything*” (Phil 4:6). Start monitoring your emotions throughout the day and notice worry when it occurs.

Secondly, **Reveal the lie** causing your worry. Remember that fear, like any sinful emotion, is always caused by believing a lie. When you are afraid, worried, or anxious, ask yourself, “Why do I feel this way? What am I believing that is making me afraid?” With some careful meditation you will be able to discover the lie about God or yourself that is making you worry.

Thirdly, **Realize the truth** that will set you free. This is how you practically obey and experience the command to “*Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you*” (1 Pet 5:7). What does God want you to believe about your fear? Replace the lie that is controlling you with the truth of God. This will practically transfer your fears to God.

Use the following table to analyze and start fighting some of your recurring fears. Pray the “heart prayer” from Ps 139 for God’s help with this project:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me; And lead me in the everlasting way. (Ps 139:23-24 NASB)

My Fears	The Lie I am Believing	The Truth that Sets Me Free

Chapter 3.16

Your Dad's Personality I*You are Wonderfully Made*

2 Corinthians 5:17

Week 8

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter and Appendix G, answer the following questions:
 - What are the four basic types of human personality?
 - Why is it foolish to try changing your personality?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?

Debbie hated her personality. She wished she was more outgoing and likeable like the popular people she knew. She wasn't a very good talker and did not make friends easily. Sometimes she even tried to be someone different but that was exhausting and felt fake. She just wished God had made her differently. But the truths in this chapter changed her life.

You created the deepest parts of my being.

You put me together inside my mother's body.

How you made me is amazing and wonderful. (Ps 139:13-14 NIV)

Your Dad made your personality amazing and wonderful!

Appreciating your God-given personality

Your Dad, the most creative, compassionate, purposeful, and powerful Person in the Universe created you. He thought carefully about how He wanted you to be special and unique. Then He “*put*” you “*together inside*” your “*mother's*” womb. And “*created the deepest parts of*” your “*being*” to be an “*amazing and wonderful*” masterpiece that uniquely displays a part of what He is like!

The Hebrew word for “*the deepest parts of my being*” (*kilyâ*) literally means “kidneys.” “When used figuratively, the term refers to the innermost aspects of personality.”¹ The text is not referring to the internal organs of your body, but the psychological makeup of your soul. You did not inherit your personality. Nor did you learn your personality. God uniquely and personally created your personality.

Perhaps you got your nose, eyes, hair, and height from your dad. But you got your personality from your real Dad. Genes determined your physical body, but God determined your personality. Your personality is

the unique expression of your soul, the eternal spiritual part of you. While all humans are made in the image of God, the unique personality of your soul will uniquely reflect an aspect of your Dad's personality forever.

God not only loves you, but He likes you, and likes how He made your personality. But like Debbie above, many Christians struggle with appreciating their personality and comparing themselves to others. But are they seeing reality? Does their Dad and Creator believe He made a mistake? Your Dad made your personality amazing and wonderful! So who sees things correctly? The person who thinks they are defective in some way? Be assured, God always sees things exactly the way they are. We are the ones with a distorted view of reality. God made your personality *"amazing and wonderful"* (Ps 139:13 NIrV).

David in Psalm 139 praised God for making *"the deepest parts of [his] being . . . amazing and wonderful."* Could you do the same? Could you tell God like David, *"You created the deepest parts of my being. You put me together inside my mother's body. How you made me is amazing and wonderful"* (Ps 139:13-14 NIrV). Your Dad made your personality amazing and wonderful!

Recognizing & understanding your God-given personality

Through research we have been able to determine that God used essentially only six elements (oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium, and phosphorus) to create the human body. Likewise, it would seem He used essentially four distinct ingredients of human personality to make all humans. These have been recognized from ancient times and confirmed in modern research. These Four Basic Personality Traits can be labeled:

Leader: Strong, driven, daring, decisive. Wants to complete the mission.

Relater: Friendly, inspiring, optimistic, fun. Wants to enjoy people.

Helper: Reliable, peaceful, productive, humorous. Wants to serve people.

Thinker: Precise, creative, committed, quiet. Wants to be right.

A helpful comparison table of these Four Basic Personality Traits is provided at the end of this chapter. Also, you will read a more detailed description of them in your project this week. Before you do, understand a few basic things about human personality.

First, some have claimed that understanding and valuing human personality traits is a harmful thing. Of course, these different personalities are not taught directly in Scripture. But a great deal of research has confirmed them and many Christians have found them to be very helpful in understanding themselves and loving others. The fact is, they reflect who

God has uniquely made you to be. They are part of your identity from God. And as you will see in the next chapter they are essentially synonymous with your spiritual gifts, which is certainly a biblical topic.

Clearly it is important to understand your personality and the personality of those around you. Especially when the great majority of married couples have exactly opposite personalities! This is because people sense their need for those who are strong in their weaknesses. It is truly remarkable how many outgoing, people-oriented personalities marry more private, task-oriented people, and vice-versa. This natural attraction to our opposite usually results in two people becoming one “whole” human possessing all Four Basic Personality Traits in some measure.

Secondly, it is neither possible nor desirable to perfectly categorize people. It is helpful to think of the Four Basic Personality Traits as the available ingredients that make up a person’s personality. Many people will have some of the attributes of a personality but not others. A dominant trait will cancel opposite traits. Therefore the simple four categories will not perfectly describe anyone. But most are amazed at how accurate they are.

The unlimited variety of how these ingredients of personality can be blended reveals God’s creativity. The Four Basic Personality Traits are like the three primary colors God created: blue, red, and yellow. From blending these, every other color is created. Like a custom color, you are a special blend of the Four Basic Personality Traits. That is how creative God is. And that is how much He cared about what you would be like. But remember that every blend of personality is a reflection of what God, your Dad, is like Himself.

Most people have at least two of the Four Basic Personality Traits with one being primary and the other secondary. Fortunately, the secondary trait often makes up for weaknesses in your primary trait.

Thirdly, no personality is better than another. Unfortunately, the World places a higher value on some traits than others. Outgoing leader types are often viewed as the model of what humans should be. The more quiet and contemplative types tend to be overlooked. But all the God-given personalities of humans originate in God and again, display a unique but equally valuable part of who He is. Your personality may not be noticed and promoted in a World that is attracted to charisma. But the value of your personality is not found in how well it reflects what the World likes, but how well it reflects to the World what God is like. God is asking you to be faithful with who He made you. He is not asking you to be someone else.

When your personality is controlled by the Holy Spirit it will glorify God and bless people. But when your personality is controlled by your sinful nature, it will reflect the worst parts of humanity and hurt people. It is God’s Spirit that makes your personality beautiful. It is sin that actually makes you ugly.

It is wrong, hurtful, and even arrogant to expect people to be like you. If you are good with people, it is because God made you that way. And it is wrong for you to expect others to be the same or value your personality higher than others. Likewise, if you are good with details and thinking deeply about things, do not look down on people who were not made that way. Accept that God has made all personalities “*amazing and wonderful.*”

Finally, what is the essential difference between The Four Basic Personality Traits? IT’S WHAT MAKES YOU HAPPY. For example, accomplishing important and influential goals makes a task-oriented person happy. On the other hand, gaining and building relationships makes a people-oriented personality happy. And what makes you particularly unhappy is unique to your personality as well. Some personalities seek and thrive in changing environments. Other personalities despise change.

Accordingly, you will discover that the strengths of each personality are uniquely designed to accomplish what will make that particular person happy. Accomplishing tasks makes a Leader personality happy, so they are good at this. Making new friends makes a Relater personality happy, so they are good at this. Being useful to people in helpful ways makes a Helper personality happy and being accurate makes a Thinker personality happy. So they are good at these things. Therefore, what uniquely makes a person happy is what shapes their personality.

Accepting your God-given personality weaknesses

All personality traits have two kinds of weaknesses: natural and sinful. You can change the sinful tendencies of your personality traits, but you cannot change your natural weaknesses.

One of the most foolish things you can attempt is to strengthen the natural weaknesses of your personality. For example, if someone with a more public personality (i.e. Leader, Relater) tries to be strong in details like those with a more private personality (Thinker), they will make a lot of mistakes, and frustrate themselves and others. Likewise, if someone with a more private personality (Helper, Thinker) tries to spend a lot of time influencing, befriending, and speaking to a lot of people, they will get exhausted. And they probably will not enjoy it very much.

Do not waste your time trying to change your personality. You cannot create your personality, but only discover the one God gave you. If you are not a person who is good with details, it is because God didn’t want you to be. He probably wanted you to be more effective with people. If you are not a good public communicator, it is because God did not want you to be. He probably wanted you to be good at details and serving behind the scenes. Do not try to be someone God never intended for you to be.

Sometimes efforts to strengthen our natural personality weaknesses are motivated by a desire to be independent and not need others. God never

intended one person to have all the personality strengths. He wants you to live and work with others and be blessed by their personality strengths. Your God-given weaknesses will be the strengths of other people with different personalities. So acknowledge your natural weaknesses and view them as an opportunity to connect with others to more completely represent God to the World.

While you cannot change your natural weaknesses, you can change your character and the sinful weaknesses of your personality. These reside in the bad programming of your mind and you can “*be transformed into a new person by renewing your mind*” (Rom 12:2). And when you do, you will experience the powers of the Spirit more consistently and overcome the sinful weaknesses of your personality traits. All personalities can grow in the “love, joy, peace” of the Spirit. And when you do, it brings out the very best of your personality and suppresses the worst.

Personality traits are not substitutes for powers of the Spirit. A Leader may appear to have more self-control, but their anger reveals they are just controlling. The shy Thinker may appear more meek, but their selfishness reveals otherwise. The Relater can seem more loving until loving you is not fun anymore.

But when a naturally impatient and harsh Leader acts kind and gentle, that is the Spirit living through their personality. Likewise, when a naturally undisciplined and egotistical Relater becomes meek and self-controlled, they are being controlled by the Holy Spirit. When a naturally lazy and antagonistic Helper becomes loving and peaceful, it is the work of the Spirit in them. When a naturally selfish and moody Thinker experiences love and joy, they are experiencing the Spirit.

But even a Spirit-controlled Leader is not going to be very emotional. A Spirit-controlled Relater is not going to be good with details. Even a Spirit-controlled Helper is not going to be decisive. And a Spirit-controlled Thinker will not be energized by people. All of these are God-given weaknesses of your personality. But they can be balanced by a secondary trait. A Leader/Thinker will be more emotional, a Relater/Thinker will be better with details, etc.

When you fight against who God made you, and try to be someone you are not, you will not be effective, authentic, happy, or a blessing to others. Instead of wasting energy trying to change your personality, God wants you to form relationships with others who can help your weaknesses.

Another good reason to focus on the strengths of your personality is they will energize you. Focusing on your weaknesses will exhaust you. So, it is vitally important to pursue occupations and ministries that use your personality strengths instead of your weaknesses. It is also important to have people in your life who have personalities the opposite of yours.

It is possible that your best and easiest friendships will be with those who share your personality. These are often the people you will really “click with,” understand the best, and who will encourage you the most. So have one or two of these people involved in your life as well.

Discovering your unique God-given design

As noted, a summary table is provided at the end of this chapter for The Four Basic Personality Traits. Also a more detailed description of the personalities is provided in Appendix G. It is a rather lengthy appendix because the goal is to help you more deeply understand how God made you.

This week you will complete Project 3F and take a brief personality survey, and then be directed to read the extended descriptions of your specific Basic Personality Traits.

God made humans complex. We are trying to keep it simple. But even getting a basic understanding of your personality traits is just the beginning of important things you need to understand about how your Dad made you.

In the next chapter you will study your spiritual gifts which are a reflection of the new personality God has given you.

In *Christian Essentials* study #4, *FREEDOM*, you will confront and seek to resolve the sinful weaknesses of your personality traits.

In the study #5, *FRUIT*, you will study how you can better love people according to their personality. And there will be more specific instruction on how to use your spiritual gifts. But for now, simply focus on better understanding the person God made you to be.

David said to God, “*You created the deepest parts of my being. You put me together inside my mother’s body. How you made me is amazing and wonderful*” (Ps 139:13-14 NIV). Your Dad made your personality amazing and wonderful! And He wants you to understand how He made you.

- ▶ Recite Romans 8:31-32 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Psalm 139:13-14 in the translation above or another.
- ▶ Return to the beginning of this chapter and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Review the table on the following page: “The Four Basic Personality Traits.”
- ▶ Complete Project 3F by reading appropriate parts of Appendix G: “The Four Basic Personality Traits” as directed there. Then record your basic personality traits here: Primary/secondary:
- ▶ Complete Project 3G by reading and completing Appendix H. Record your Sensitivity Score here: _____ (out of a possible 27 with 14 indicating a high level of sensitivity).

¹ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, R. Harris, G. Archer, B. Waltke, eds. (Moody, 1980), 440.

The Four Basic Personality Traits

Attributes	Leader	Relater	Helper	Thinker
% of People	18%	28%	40%	14%
Goal in Life	Completing the mission	Enjoying people	Serving people	Being right
Strengths	Strong Driven Daring Decisive	Friendly Optimistic Inspiring Fun	Reliable Peaceful Productive Humorous	Precise Creative Committed Quiet
Likes & Energized By	Action Achievement Challenge People	Appreciation Talking Entertainment People	Helping Listening Predictability Privacy	Accuracy Asking why Details Privacy
Dislikes & Exhausted By	Failure Rules Wasting time	Rejection Details Pessimism	Change Conflict Being rushed	Errors Chaos Public Speaking
Change	Likes	Likes	Dislikes	Dislikes
People vs. Tasks	Tasks	People	People & Tasks	Tasks
Relationships	Initiator	Initiator	Responder	Responder
Emotion	Unemotional	Emotional	Unemotional	Emotional
Natural Weaknesses	Non-relational Non-emotional Overlooks details	Forgetful Disorganized Very emotional	Slow Indecisive Indifferent	Very private Very serious Workaholic
Sinful Weaknesses	Harsh Impatient Independent	Undisciplined Need approval High ego	Lazy Stubborn Antagonistic	Selfish Negative Moody
Good Careers	Entrepreneur CEO	Sales Public speaker	Teacher Support roles	Accountant Doctor
Spiritual Gifts	Pastor	Giver Encourager Comforter Evangelist	Servant	Teacher
Good Ministries	Leader	Church planter Counselor Greeter	Small group leader Deacon(ess)	Teacher
Small groups	Encourages action/service	Grows them numerically	Leads them best	Grows them with the Word
Demonstrated in God	John 3:16-17 John 4:34 Mark 3:13-14	Zeph 3:17 Luke 8:4 1 Tim 6:17	John 4:34 John 6:38 John 19:30	Gen 1:1-2 Gen 1:26 Col 1:15-17
Bible Characters	Nehemiah Paul	David Peter	Jonathan Barnabas	Ezra Luke
Encouraging Bible verses	Matt 28:18-19 Acts 20:24 1 Cor 4:3-4 1 Cor 15:10	John 10:10 Eph 4:32 1 Thess 5:16-18 1 Peter 4:9	1 Cor 4:2 Col 4:17 James 1:19 Matt 5:9	Ezra 7:10 Luke 1:3-4 Eph 4:29 1 Tim 4:16

Chapter 3.17

Your Dad's Personality II*Your New Desires & Powers*

Romans 12:6

Week 9

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - What is a spiritual gift?
 - How do you know God's “personal will” for your life?
 - What are your spiritual gifts? How does this relate to your personality?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?

Kurt's personality is a Leader/Thinker. The least relational mix of all the personalities. He has the personality of the famous and forceful General George Patton, commander of the Third Army in WWII. How does a man with that personality make his wife, three daughters, and two sons feel loved? How could a General George Patton kind of guy be a Pastor who communicates grace and love?

By the power of the Holy Spirit. His power is greater than any personality and works to soften rough edges and strengthen sinful weaknesses of any personality. A Leader/Thinker does not naturally have love, patience, and gentleness toward people, but Kurt did because of the Spirit in him. More than that, soon after becoming a Christian, he discovered that God gave him the spiritual gift of a Comforter which also balanced the traits of being a Leader/Thinker. Kurt was humbled and grateful to think about the spiritual gifts God had given him, which really were reflections of the personality God gave him. It all reminded him that:

**In his grace, God has given us different gifts
for doing certain things well. (Rom 12:6)**

Your Dad gives you unique spiritual desires and powers
to serve Him and His people.

Your Dad gave you a special gift to serve Him

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Roman Christians:

In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to

encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly. (Rom 12:3-8)

A spiritual gift is a special power and desire that your Dad uniquely gives you to serve Him. Like your personality, you do not choose your spiritual gifts, but the Holy Spirit chooses them for you. *“It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have”* (1 Cor 12:11). God uniquely created your personality to display a part of His personality. Likewise, the Holy Spirit has recreated you with spiritual gifts to provide a unique part of His ministry to the Church. Your spiritual gifts were given TO YOU.

As with your personality, your Dad gave you spiritual gifts to complement others, not to be self-sufficient. *“Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ’s body”* (Rom 12:4). By understanding and using your spiritual gifts, you fulfill your *“special function”* in the Body of Christ, the local church.

Your spiritual gifts are designed to help your local church in some unique way. *“A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other”* (1 Cor 12:7). Using the analogy of our physical bodies, the Apostle Paul communicated the reality of the local church as well when He wrote: *“Our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it”* (1 Cor 12:18). Through the spiritual gifts God has given you, He has made you the part of your local church that He wanted you to be.

In the early church, a person’s spiritual gifts defined their life enough that they were named after them. The Apostle Paul and Philip the Evangelist are examples. Likewise, the Scripture says *“Christ himself gave . . . the pastors and teachers”* (Eph 4:11). If you are given the spiritual gift of teaching, you are not merely a Christian with the gift of teaching, but you are a Teacher for Christ. Your gifts define your roles for God. Likewise, you are not just a Christian with a gift but you are a Servant, Giver, Encourager, Comforter, Evangelist, Pastor, or Teacher in your local church.

“In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well” (Rom 12:6). Your Dad gives you unique spiritual desires and powers to serve Him and His people.

The importance of your spiritual gifts

The passage quoted above is from Romans chapter 12. Right before the Apostle launches into a discussion regarding spiritual gifts, he wrote:

Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. For [in relation to what he just said] by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of

yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith [spiritual gift] God has distributed to each of you. (Rom 12:2-3 NIV)

Whenever you see a “for” in Scripture you need to stop and recognize what it is there for. The word (Gr. *gar*) connects the previous statement with what follows. Paul intended to communicate a relationship between knowing “*what God’s will is*” (v. 2) and understanding “*the faith*” (v. 3) God has uniquely given you through your spiritual gifts.

Your spiritual gifts are probably the most specific direction your Dad will ever give you for what He wants you to uniquely do for Him. This is why earlier in chapter 3.10 we said God’s “personal will” for your life is defined by your spiritual gifts. This is what Paul is speaking of when he writes: “*We are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*” (Eph 2:10). How will you know what good works God has predestined for you? By knowing and using the spiritual gifts God has predestined for you. They will be the most specific direction God gives you to know His personal will for your life. Your spiritual gifts are your unique assignment from Him and He wants you to be faithful with them.

The Apostle Peter wrote: “*Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms*” (1 Pet 4:10). God has given you a special grace to be “*faithful*” with in order to serve Him in a special way. If you do not use your spiritual gifts you will miss a very important part of God’s will for your life. By using your spiritual gifts, you fulfill the unique will of God that He wants you to be faithful with. You fulfill the part in the local church that God has assigned to you. “*In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well*” (Rom 12:6). Your Dad recreated you with unique spiritual desires and powers to serve Him and His people.

Also, notice that your spiritual gifts are a special gift of God’s “*grace*.” In other words, you experience God’s grace when you use your gifts. Therefore, understand something very important: **THE MOST PLEASURABLE AND FULFILLING THING YOU WILL EVER DO IN YOUR LIFE IS BLESS OTHERS THROUGH YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS.** Experiencing God’s “*grace*” as you love others with your special desires and abilities, and seeing your gifts help others, is the very best thing on Earth. This is so important for your Christian life that we devote a whole chapter to this in Your Dad’s Pleasure.

“*In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well*” (Rom 12:6). Your Dad gives you unique spiritual desires and powers to serve Him and His people.

Identifying your spiritual gifts

The Apostle mentions several specific spiritual gifts here in Romans 12. Others are listed in Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 12:8-10. It is helpful to put all the gifts listed in Scripture into three categories as displayed in the table at the end of this chapter. The Member Gifts are the foundational gifts in the local church. Virtually every Christian has one or more of these gifts. The Ministry Gifts are more often exercised by those having leadership and pastoring responsibility in the Church. The biblical and historical evidence regarding the “Scripture and Sign” gifts suggests they are not operating today.¹

The seven Member and Ministry Gifts of Servant, Giver, Encourager, Comforter, Evangelist, Pastor, and Teacher are fairly complete in describing the various spiritual gifts operating in the Church today.

Fortunately, identifying your spiritual gift is rather simple. Essentially, you need to ask yourself one question: WHAT ARE MY FAVORITE WAYS TO SERVE GOD AND HIS PEOPLE?

So many Christians think that God usually expects them to serve Him in a way that they will not like. That is not true! Your Dad put special desires and abilities in you and He wants you to serve Him according to those desires.

It is important to distinguish spiritual gifts from natural talents like music or organizing. A person with the gift of Servant might use their natural talent of music or organization to serve in the local church but natural talents are not spiritual gifts.

Keep in mind that your spiritual gifts may change over time. The gifts of Servant, Giver, and Evangelist are common among young Christians. But as they mature, and are faithful with those gifts, the Spirit may make them a Pastor or Teacher to meet needs in the local church. Changing needs in your local church are often a reason the Holy Spirit may change a person's gifts. Even if the Spirit gives you different gifts later in your Christian life, your initial gifts, like Servant, may remain. However, you may discover that other early gifts like Evangelism are no longer operating in your life.

You should be aware of changing desires to serve God and His people because the Spirit may change your gifting. If you do not recognize this, you will be serving in a way that exhausts you. God wants you to serve with His grace, and His grace is known by your desires. How do you want to serve God and His people? That is the grace God is giving you.

It is also important to know and accept what God has not gifted you to do. Of course, all Christians are expected to evangelize, serve, lead, encourage, give, and have compassion at various times. But your spiritual gifts tell you what God Himself wants you to focus on in your life. Do not allow guilt or church leaders to make you focus on a ministry that God did

not give you grace to desire and focus on. Your ultimate Boss is your Dad, and your ministry desires tell you what He wants you to be doing.

This is another way He wants you serving Him out of grace instead of guilt. God will give you grace and desire to do what He wants you to do (i.e. your spiritual gifts), but He may not give you grace to do what others want you to do.

It is important to not be jealous of the spiritual gifts of others or to compare yourself to others. For example, someone with the supernatural gift of Evangelist is given a special power from God to speak the Gospel to people with boldness, consistency, and joy. If you do not have this gift, your Dad does not want you to compare your evangelism to theirs. Likewise, most Evangelists will not be the Servants or Teachers that others are.

Of course some gifts may seem more valuable than others. Paul addressed this in 1 Corinthians 12:15-26. He warned of the “one big ugly eyeball disease.” Eyes are naturally thought to be a very important part of the body and by analogy, everyone in a body would want to be eyes. But how could the eyes function all by themselves?

Likewise, church leaders can unfortunately value certain gifts, such as Teachers or Evangelists, over others. Especially if they themselves possess these gifts. Then it can be expected that everyone needs to act like they have these gifts, and other gifts are neglected. This disobeys Scripture and God’s plan. He is the One who decides which gifts you have and are to use. And remember, you will be rewarded the same as anyone else for the faithful use of your gifts, no matter what they are.

It is easy to think the more public and people-oriented gifts like Evangelist, Pastor, or Teacher are more important than the more private and task-oriented gifts like Servant. But what did Jesus say to His disciples when they were feeling jealous about positions of leadership and influence:

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matt 20:26-28 NIV)

Jesus was not “great” because He had the charisma to draw a crowd or be popular. What made Him great was how He served.

The Member and Ministry Gifts listed in Scripture give us a general idea of the kinds of desires and abilities the Holy Spirit gives Christians. As with personality traits, most Christians have more than one spiritual gift.

In this study the goal is simply to recognize your spiritual gifts. This can be done by viewing the table at the end of this chapter.

A Christian’s desire to use their spiritual gifts is greatly influenced by how consistently they are controlled by the love of the Spirit. Demonic strongholds of anger, anxiety, confusion, shame, inadequacy, loneliness, and depression seriously hinder their operation. Therefore, many will have

a better understanding of their spiritual gifts after they have completed *Christian Essentials* study #5: *Your FREEDOM*. Accordingly, you will study and apply your spiritual gifts in more detail in study #6: *Your FRUIT*.

What is the relationship between your personality and spiritual gifts?

They are practically identical. For example, a person with a Leader personality is difficult to distinguish from someone with the spiritual gift of Leader. Likewise, the spiritual gift of a Servant is practically identical to the personality of a Helper. In a very real sense, whatever spiritual gifts you have, they are shaped by your personality traits.

One important outcome of this is that you do not need to “discover” your spiritual gifts. You are already and always living out your God-given personality traits whether you identify them or not. You do not need to take a test to find out you have the gift of Leading because you will already be acting like one, and this is because you will have the personality of a Leader.

The Four Basic Personality Traits are shared by non-Christians and they could score high on a test for many of the spiritual gifts like Leaders or Servants. In addition, because your spiritual gifts will reflect your personality traits, you in essence will use your spiritual gifts in the workplace and home.

When then do your personality traits become your spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit as God intended? When they are used in the local church. That is when they truly fulfill the purpose God gave them to you. In one sense your spiritual gifts are always operating when you are controlled by the Spirit. But they only fulfill their intended function when they are being used to build the kingdom of God and bless other believers.

“In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well” (Rom 12:6). Your Dad gives you unique spiritual desires and powers to serve Him and His people.

- ▶ Look at the following table and get some idea of your spiritual gift(s).
- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite Psalm 139:13-14 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Rom 12:6 in the translation above or another.
- ▶ Turn two pages and complete Project 3H: “Recognizing My Unique Design.”

¹ For biblical and historical arguments that the miraculous gifts of Apostles, Prophets, miracle workers, and tongues all ceased in the early Church, see books #8-#12 available online at <http://trainingtims.wpengine.com/library/advanced-theology/>.

Types of Spiritual Gifts

Gifts	Desires & Abilities	Example
Member Gifts (Rom 12)		
Servant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passion & ability to discern & meet practical needs in the local church. • Operates in a great variety of ways, often using natural talents. 	Jesus (Matt 20:24-28; 25:31-40; John 13:1-5)
Giver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passion to give sacrificially, and primarily financially, to meet practical needs in the local church. 	Macedonian Christians (2 Cor 8-9)
Encourager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passion & ability to discern & meet needs for encouragement in the local church to believe God's promises and obey His commands 	Barnabas (Acts 4:36; 14:20-22; Heb 3:12-13)
Comforter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passion & ability to have compassion for and help the very needy. 	Jesus (John 8:1-11)
Ministry Gifts (Eph 4)		
Evangelist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passion to save people. • Boldness to share the gospel. • People to share the gospel with. 	Apostle Paul (1 Cor 9:15-23; 2 Tim 2:10)
Pastor Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passion to see people spiritually motivated to accomplish a spiritual task in the local church. • Passion to see people spiritually protected & cared for in the local church. • Ability to discern spiritual needs and meet them. • Ability to carry and deal with many spiritual problems. 	Nehemiah (Matt 28:19-20; Prov 29:18) Jesus (John 15:13; 21:15-17)
Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passion to see people spiritually grow in the local church. • Passion & ability to know & teach the doctrines of Scripture to change people's lives. 	Timothy, Titus, Ezra (1 Tim 4:13; 5:17; 2 Tim 2:15; Ezra 7:10)
Miraculous Gifts (1 Cor 12)		
Apostle Prophet Divine Wisdom & Knowledge Miracle Working Healing Tongues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given to receive or authenticate new divine revelation for Scripture (cf. Heb 2:4; 1 Cor 13:8). • Biblical abilities not being duplicated by Christians today. • Commonly demonically duplicated. (cf. Matt 7:22-23) 	Jesus Apostle Paul Prophet Isaiah Prophet Agabus

Project 3H

Recognizing My Unique Design

We have been studying David's praise to God, "**How you made me is amazing and wonderful**" (Ps 139:14 NIV). It is important to recognize for a moment how God has uniquely created you in the following four areas. Your love languages were discussed in the previous study, *FOUNDATIONS*, and you are encouraged to record this here. The three remaining God-given characteristics have been discussed in the previous two chapters and the results can be recorded here as well.

My Love Languages

Primary:

Secondary:

My Personality

Primary:

Secondary:

My Sensitivity Score _____ (out of a possible 27, with 14 indicating a high level of sensitivity).

My Spiritual Gifts

Primary:

Secondary:

Thank God for who you are! And be faithful to who He has made you.

Chapter 3.18

Your Dad's Personality III*Your Dad Made You an Awesome & Amazing Creation*

1 Peter 3:4

Week 9

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - What part of you did God directly and uniquely create?
 - What truly makes a person attractive to other people?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?

Julie felt ugly. She hated looking in the mirror because she never liked what she saw. And it did not seem like any boy was ever attracted to her either. She was jealous of pretty girls. And to be honest, she was angry at God for not making her more attractive. But Julie began to understand that it is not what is on the outside that makes a person truly beautiful, but what is on the inside. And since Christ was in her, she was truly beautiful.

You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God. (1 Peter 3:4)

What really makes you attractive to your Dad and people is His Spirit in you.

The problem with physical beauty

The World has taught us that physical beauty makes you more valuable. But your Dad tells you, “*Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world*” (Rom 12:2). Through media and movie stars the Devil-dominated World has taught us that an attractive physical appearance makes someone more important and loved. Why then does your Dad not want you to “copy” such values? Because if you are a woman who believes like the World, then you will never feel pretty enough. If you are a man who lets the World define what makes you valuable, then your body will never be big or muscular enough. There will always be someone prettier or bigger than you. And because you evaluate yourself the same way the World does, you will always feel jealous and ugly. Or invest a great deal of time, attention, and money on your physical appearance just like the World does.

Of course, some things and some people are more physically attractive than others. Most people would say a lilac bush in full bloom is prettier than a cactus. A cocker spaniel puppy is cuter than a snake. And some people are

more physically attractive than others. Even God's word notes that Abigail *"was an intelligent and beautiful woman"* (1 Sam 25:3 NIV), *"Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful"* (Esther 2:7 NIV), and David *"was dark and handsome, with beautiful eyes"* (1 Sam 16:12).

But the Bible says of Jesus, *"There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him"* (Isa 55:2). Jesus was not a very nice looking man. If you saw him you might even think He was ugly. Those paintings and pictures you see of him that make Him look handsome are a lie. Likewise, people said of the Apostle Paul, *"in person he is unimpressive"* (2 Cor 10:10 NIV).

The reality is that through the force of random nature, some people possess more physical beauty than others. What is not reality is that this makes pretty people more valuable, happy, and attractive than others.

First, if your value depended on your physical appearance, then God would have made everyone equally physically attractive. He would never want physical appearance to dictate someone's value. But the reason He lets genetics determine your physical appearance is because the shape of your nose, the color of your hair, and the height of your body have no real effect on how valuable, happy, or attractive you are. *"There was nothing beautiful or majestic about [Jesus'] appearance, nothing to attract us to him."* *"In person"* Paul was *"unimpressive."* Did that make any important difference in their lives? No! Did it matter at all what they looked like? No!

Secondly, having an attractive appearance is certainly not a guarantee of happiness either. Beautiful people are some of the most miserable people. And some very plain looking folk are the happiest people you will ever meet. In fact, because beautiful people are especially tempted to get their self-worth from being physically attractive, they often obsess over how they look. And most of them never think they look good enough. How many truly skinny or pretty women do you know who still think they are overweight and unattractive? And they are not happy.

Real beauty

The Apostle Peter wrote something especially to Christian women, but it also speaks to men who feel badly about their physical appearance:

Don't be concerned about the outward beauty of fancy hairstyles, expensive jewelry, or beautiful clothes. You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God. This is how the holy women of old made themselves beautiful. (1 Pet 3:3-5)

There is a command from God here: *"Don't be concerned about the outward beauty."* A primary goal of people in the World is to be pretty or handsome and they devote a great deal of time and expense to try to attain

this. Don't place an unnecessary and unhealthy emphasis on your physical looks. Do not waste time and money on "*hairstyles . . . jewelry*" and "*clothes*" trying to make yourself physically attractive according to the World's standards. Your Dad does not want you to "*be concerned about the outward beauty*" (1 Pet 3:3).

He does not want you to believe the Devil's lie that your real worth is in your physical appearance. "*Charm is deceptive, and beauty does not last; but a woman who fears the Lord will be greatly praised*" (Prov 31:30). It is not "*beauty*" that will earn you the praise of God or people who know what is truly valuable.

If some people will judge you by what you look like, it does not mean you have to do the same. "*People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart*" (1 Sam 16:7). This is because what is in your "*heart*" is what matters to both God and people. "*You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within*" (1 Pet 3:4). This is not just a cliché. This is not just to make plainer looking people feel better about themselves. God knows what is true and He says what is on the inside is what really makes people beautiful. What really makes you attractive to your Dad and people is His Spirit in you.

God did not directly, purposefully, and uniquely create the appearance of your body. Genes determined your physical body. But as discussed in a previous chapter, He did directly, purposefully, and uniquely, "*create the deepest parts of [your] being*" and "*made [you] amazing and wonderful*" (Ps 139:13-14 NIV). God determined your personality, and it is what makes you "*amazing and wonderful*" to God.

More specifically, it is your Spirit-controlled personality that makes you attractive to people and pleasing to God. You must decide again if you want to please God or silly, worldly people. Physical appearance is highly valued by some people, but do you really want to live to please them? "*The unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit*" is what "*is so precious to God*" (1 Pet 3:4). And if you are pleasing the Creator and Master of the Universe because of what He sees in your life, why do you care about what mere humans think?

The most beautiful, handsome, "*amazing and wonderful*" thing the World will see in you, is the powers of the Spirit being revealed through your personality. That "*gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God.*" "*This is how the holy women of old made themselves beautiful*" (1 Pet 3:4-5). And it is how any man or woman will always make themselves truly attractive to others: Revealing Jesus Christ through them.

"*There was nothing beautiful or majestic about [Jesus'] appearance, nothing to attract us to him*" (Isa 55:2). But He was certainly attractive! Why, because of what He had on the inside. And you have the same Person living in you. You can be just as attractive as Jesus was.

It really is what is inside a person that makes them attractive. Scripture says, “*What is desirable in a man is his kindness*” (Prov 19:22 NASB), and “*A kindhearted woman gains honor*” (Prov 11:16 NIV). Even the World would agree with that. It is sin that actually makes people ugly. “*A beautiful woman who lacks discretion [Heb. taam, lit. “taste”] is like a gold ring in a pig’s snout*” (Prov 11:22). Have you ever seen the slimy hairy snout of an old sow up close and personal? It’s ugly. And not even a gold ring will change that. Likewise, the physical beauty of a woman who lacks tact, taste, and grace will not be able to hide her ugliness.

It is the Spirit inside of you that makes you attractive. And that is good news because you have a lot more control over what your heart looks like than what your body looks like. If you want to be truly attractive to people for the glory of God, focus on your heart, not your body. What really makes you attractive to your Dad and people is His Spirit in you, not your physical appearance.

How your body looks is not important. But this does not mean your body itself is not important. The Bible says:

Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body. (1 Cor 6:19-20)

Because “*your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit*” God wants you to care for it. You “*honor God with your body*” by using it to serve Him and others. This is another reason to care for your body and its health. Unnecessary bad health is a needless hindrance to serving and honoring God with your body. Do your best to ensure your body can serve God.

No matter what you look like, “*You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God*” (1 Pet 3:4). What really makes you attractive to your Dad and people is His Spirit in you.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite Romans 12:6 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize 1 Peter 3:4 in the translation above or another.

Chapter 3.19

Your Dad's Personality IV*Your Dad Created You to be Male or Female*

Genesis 1:27

Week 9

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - What are some differences in how a man and woman are created?
 - How is a real man defined in this chapter? What do you think?
 - How is a real woman defined in this chapter? What do you think?
 - Why should you embrace and fulfill your God-given gender?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?

Ron grew up with a feminine dad and a controlling mother. As long as he could remember he had to depend on his mom for leadership and could not depend on his father for anything. This confusion of gender roles in his family distorted his view of what a real man was. So when a caring but dominating homosexual man befriended Ron, he was willing to endure the abuse because the man “loved” him more than anyone ever had.

Later when he became a Christian, Ron replaced the empty image of a man in his dad, with the liberating masculinity he could experience from his real Dad. He married a girl and learned that living out his gender as God intended brought joy to his life and blessing to his family.

God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

(Genesis 1:27)

Embracing the uniqueness, and fulfilling the roles of your God-ordained gender, blesses God, the world, and your life.

The God-ordained differences in genders

In the beginning of Creation and humanity, God warned the woman, “*You will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you*” (Gen 3:16). The punishment for Eve’s sin was not that her husband would lead her. That was God’s intention from the beginning when He made the woman “*a helper*” for the man (Gen 2:18). The curse was that the sinful nature of women would rebel against God’s desire for men to lead them.

Accordingly, this Devil-dominated World regularly ignores and even attacks God’s purpose for your gender. How many movies and TV shows depict women who are leading men, or even fighting and beating up men?

Our culture, programming in the public schools, and negative experiences with our gender, all work to confuse a lot of Christians on what it means to be a man or a woman. And no one will experience happiness if they are confused or conflicted about their gender.

Therefore, it is vital that you understand, appreciate, and fulfill your God-ordained gender. Scripture says: “*God created human beings*” to be “*male and female*” (Gen 1:27). Your Dad created the first two humans with two different and distinct genders. And He created humans to produce offspring that would be male or female.

God intentionally and obviously made men and women differently. When Paul told the Corinthian congregation, “*act like men*” (1 Cor 16:13), it was because men are made and expected to act in a certain way. Likewise, the Bible often directs instructions specifically to men or women because they are different (cf. Eph 5:22-25; 1 Tim 2:8-13; Tit 2:2-6).

The God-ordained differences between a man and woman are not just physical, but also hormonal, emotional, and mental. Mental distinctions between the genders have been observed in the biological differences in male and female brains. Not in the sense of intelligence, but sensitivities.

Emotional differences in a man and woman are reflected in the Apostle Peter’s description of wives “*as the weaker partner*” (1 Pet 3:7). He is not speaking of mental or even physical strength as much as emotional strength. A woman’s brain and biology make her generally more emotionally sensitive than a man. Which also makes her more relational.

In contrast, a man is generally stronger emotionally, more logical in his thinking, and more task-oriented. This is why a man gets a lot of his identity and fulfillment from his work and women get this primarily through relationships.

This reflects God’s unique purpose for a man and woman. God made His gender specific purposes clear at the very beginning of Creation when He announced, “*I will make a helper who is just right for him*” (Gen 2:18). Man was created from the beginning to be a LEADER, and the woman was created to be a HELPER.

God puts something in a man that gives him an undeniable desire for, natural ability in, and deep fulfillment through his God-given role as a LEADER in the home, church, and world. Likewise, God puts something in a woman that gives her an undeniable desire for, natural ability in, and deep fulfillment through her God-given role as a HELPER in the home, church, and world.

Nonetheless, we should be careful not to stereotype the genders in a distorting way. Jesus went to the temple one day cracking a whip and forcibly drove people out (cf. John 2:15). That is the kind of thing we would expect of a real man. But Jesus also liked being around “*little children*” (cf. Matt 19:14), told His male friends He loved them (cf. John 13:34), and

gently washed their feet (cf. John 13:1-5). And He was a real man then too. As the King of all kings, Jesus is the greatest LEADER of all. As the Savior of the world, He is the greatest HELPER of all.

Unfortunately, the World diminishes and ignores the God-ordained differences between a man and woman. Therefore, a vital need for Christians is to highlight those differences. But we must allow room for a person's personality and gifting. God may give a man a quiet personality and a heart to serve. And He may give a woman a strong personality and a heart to lead. Still, God wants them to embrace and fulfill the biblical role of their gender. It just may look different than how others do it.

You must rebel against the World and the worldliness in the Church if you are going to be happy with your gender. The World will not tell you how to do this. Perhaps your dad or mom or friends cannot even tell you, and show you, how to be a real man or woman. But your Dad will.

"God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). Embracing the uniqueness, and fulfilling the roles of your God-ordained gender, blesses God, the world, and your life.

What is a real man?

So what is a real man and a real woman? There is considerable confusion and discussion about this, not only in the World, but the Church as well. But the only Person in a position to correctly define a real man and woman is their Creator. And His answer to what is a real man and woman is simple. First we will address men.

A REAL MAN IS A MAN WHO PURSUES HIS GOD-ORDAINED ROLES WITH THE POWERS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. He is a loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled Leader, Provider, and Warrior in his home, church, workplace and world.

This is a real man. An angry, apathetic, fearful, harsh, controlling, or lazy man is not a real man, but a counterfeit of what God created him to be.

Unfortunately, both the World and worldliness in the Church have worked to feminize men. In the minds of too many Christians the ideal man is a home body, nurturing his family, and helping his wife in the home.

Too many men in the Church are tame. They are ferocious about nothing, and thought to be good and safe because of it. But Jesus the man is described as *"the Lion of the tribe of Judah"* (Rev 5:5)!

Too many men in the Church are fearful and weak. A real man in Scripture was a fearsome Warrior like Joshua, Caleb, and David. This is what was said to *"the most excellent of men"* in Psalms:

Gird your sword on your side, you mighty one; clothe yourself with splendor and majesty. In your majesty ride forth victoriously in the cause of truth, humility and justice; let your right hand achieve

awesome deeds. Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king's enemies. (Ps 45:2-5)

That is how God describes a real man. If a real man is a Warrior, what and who is he supposed to be fighting? Sin in his life, and evil in the lives of others. Your spiritual war and how to have victory in it, and help others do the same, is a primary focus of the *Christian Essentials* studies.

However, here we will remind a man of his greatest battle in the World. You are being hunted by the Harlot. Opportunity to commit adultery with your eyes is everywhere. Never in the history of men has evil been so easy. With just a click of a button you are under her wicked spell and utterly defeated. But a real man does not get whipped by a sinful woman on a computer screen or otherwise. It is tragic that David could defeat a Goliath but get beat by a Bathsheba. Real men will not do that.

A real man named Job said, *"I made a covenant with my eyes [and his God] not to look with lust at a young woman"* (31:1). This is perhaps the foremost reason Scripture says, *"That man was the greatest of all the men of the east"* (1:3 NASB). Job was not a great man because he was rich or powerful. That is easy to accomplish. Let us say that again. Becoming a man with money and position is easy. Job was a great man because he was pure, *"blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil"* (1:1). These are the things that will truly make you a great man.

God the Father wants His sons to be real men. What a tragedy that so many women want their man to be as sensitive, talkative, and relational as they are. American Christianity makes a man small when it belittles his dedication to his work, and persuades him that providing well for the physical needs of his family is somehow worldly, and emotional intimacy with his wife and children is the ultimate achievement. A man trying to have the strengths of a woman will be miserable. God did not put man on this Earth to just be close to people and vulnerable with people. He put men here to DO something. To SAVE someone. To GO somewhere.

Which is why we must be careful how we raise our boys. This World and many parents want them to be more like nice little women. To sit still and study for hours. To help mom in the home. To be safe. When do we help them be who their Dad created them to be? To try hard things. To do hard things. To have an impact on others because of their character and deeds.

God put men here to DO something. To SAVE someone. To GO somewhere. Which is why it is unfortunate that so much ministry in the Church is all talk and no action. Typical small groups and Bible studies appeal to women because they are verbal and relational. God made men to actually accomplish something, and too many Church ministries fail to help them do that. God wants His sons to be real men, not just talkers and nurturers, but leaders, workers, and warriors.

A real man is a man who pursues his God-given roles with the powers of the Holy Spirit. He is a loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled Leader, Provider, and Warrior in his home, church, workplace and world.

“God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). Embracing the uniqueness, and fulfilling the roles of your God-ordained gender, blesses God, the world, and your life.

What is a real woman?

A REAL WOMAN IS A WOMAN WHO PURSUES HER GOD-GIVEN ROLES WITH THE POWERS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. She is a loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled Helper, Homemaker, and Comforter in her home, church, and world. This is a real woman. An angry, fearful, depressed, pushy, complaining, selfish, worldly, and lazy woman is not a real woman, but a counterfeit of what God created her to be.

“The Proverbs 31 woman” was *“a wife of noble character”* (v. 10 NIV) and demonstrated many of the things God wants His daughters to be.

Helper is how God described the purpose for creating woman (Gen 2:18). And if a woman is not living a life of helping others, she is not being a real woman. She is first a Helper to her husband. *“Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life”* (Prov 31:11-12). A real woman who is married is first, above all things, a Helper for her husband. Whatever he needs, and she can provide, her Dad wants her to give to her husband generously and cheerfully. To *“bring him good all the days of her life.”*

Secondly, a real woman with children is a Helper to them. The World belittles the simple serving and sacrifices of being a mother. But a real mother knows that serving the basic, everyday needs of her family is why God made her a woman. *“She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family. . . When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet”* (Prov 31:15, 21).

A real woman, the kind that lives up to what God created her to be, is not only a Helper to her family. When she is able, *“She extends a helping hand to the poor and opens her arms to the needy”* (Prov 31:20). Likewise, *“A believer named Tabitha”* was a Helper because, *“She was always doing kind things for others and helping the poor”* (Acts 9:36). A real woman is a Helper to those outside of her home.

Still, a biblical woman is a Homemaker. *“She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness”* (Prov 31:27). This does not mean she will not have work outside of her home. *“She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. . . She sees*

that her trading is profitable" (31:16, 18). The "Proverbs 31 woman" had business interests outside of her home. But she never neglected caring for her family to pursue them.

Speaking of real women, the Bible says: "*These older women must train the younger women to love their husbands and their children, to live wisely and be pure, to work in their homes, to do good, and to be submissive to their husbands*" (Tit 2:4-5). That is a NT description of a "Proverbs 31 woman."

It was because she was a Helper and Homemaker that, "*Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her: 'Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.' . Honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate*" (Prov 31:28-31). Again, all because she was a Helper and a Homemaker.

Finally, God put woman on this Earth to be the softer side of humanity. To be a Comforter to their man; relationally, emotionally, and sexually. To be a Comforter to their children when they are hurt by this harsh world. To be a Comforter to needy people in the Church and World with their words of wisdom and deeds of service.

To be a Comforter a real woman of God must know the truth and share the truth. "*She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue*" (Prov 31:26). To be a Comforter she must not live in fear. "*She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future*" (Prov 31:25).

Unfortunately, the Devil-dominated World encourages women to be more like men. Feminism has distorted the biblical roles of Helper and Homemaker to make a woman somehow less valuable than a man. But God the Holy Spirit is a Helper. And the world should have learned by now that when a woman neglects her home, people suffer. Modern feminism hurts and demeans women, it does not help them.

How dare we expect a woman to do everything as well as a man. What a tragedy that men want their women to be as tough, unemotional, and logical as they are. You will make a woman something less than a real woman if you are ungrateful for her commitment to her home, and persuade her that money and ministry are more important. Her Dad disagrees. A woman trying to have the strengths of a man will be miserable.

A real woman is a woman who pursues her God-given roles with the powers of the Holy Spirit. She is a loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled Helper, Homemaker, and Comforter in her home, church, and world.

"*God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them*" (Genesis 1:27). Embracing the uniqueness and fulfilling the roles of your God-ordained gender, blesses God, the world, and your life.

Why should you embrace and fulfill your God-ordained gender?

There are several reasons that a man and woman should pursue and fulfill the God-ordained purpose for their gender. First, when a man is acting like a real man, and a woman is acting like a real woman, then humanity fulfills its purpose to display the full image of God. Man alone does not have all the characteristics of God. This is why God made woman to reflect His more feminine attributes.

Of course God the Father and God the Son are clearly described as men. In particular, the Father exercises the initiating and leading role in the Trinity that reflects masculinity.

Without being dogmatic, it can be suggested that the Holy Spirit is portrayed in Scripture with more feminine characteristics. We read:

The Spirit helps us with our weakness. We do not know how to pray as we should. But the Spirit himself speaks to God for us . . . with deep feelings that words cannot explain. (Rom 8:26 NCV)

The Spirit is described as Someone who “*helps us*,” reflecting the unique purpose of women. The Spirit is not only portrayed as the helper of humans, but the Helper of the Trinity, being sent by both the Father and Son to carry out the decisions and plans of God. “*Deep*” sympathetic “*feelings*” reflect the emotional part of women that make them special to men and the world. And the Spirit is described as having the ability to articulate our feelings and needs when we are not able to, something that women seem to have a knack for. Finally, most would agree that women generally talk considerably more than men, perhaps reflected in the speaking role of the Spirit described here.

So the first reason men need to be real men, and women need to be real women is to fulfill their purpose by displaying the full characteristics of the Trinity to the world. And you cannot do that unless you are being a real man or a real woman.

The second reason you should embrace and fulfill your God-given gender is this: men need women to be women, and women need men to be men. Men need supportive Helpers and women need protective Leaders. If you are not a man to the women in your life, then you will deprive them of something God intended you to bless them with. And if you are not a woman to the men in your life, then you will likewise deprive them of something God intended you to bless them with.

This leads to the third reason that men should act like men and women should act like women: everyone will be happier! God made humanity male and female to make the world a happier place. Wherever His design for gender is resisted, whether it be in the home, church, workplace, or world, people suffer. These places simply are not as pleasant if men are acting more like women, and women are acting more like men.

We are wrong to impose our 21st century American values on the story of Deborah in the OT and claim it was a good thing when she led the nation of Israel. But be assured in OT Jewish culture it was a dishonorable thing to have a woman leading the nation and the army into battle (cf. Judg 4:4-9). Later God lamented about the nation of Israel: “*Childish leaders oppress my people, and women rule over them*” (Isa 3:12). Because of God’s unique purposes for men and women He did not think it was a good thing to have women ruling over His people.

Likewise, whoever rebels against God’s purposes for gender will suffer. A man will not be happy acting like a woman, and a woman will not be happy acting like a man. Have you ever met a happy man who was a stay-at-home “mom” caring for a bunch of little children? Have you ever met a happy woman who was leading a bunch of men in a demanding and risky endeavor? You probably will not because of how God designed them.

Likewise you will never meet a happy husband who is not sacrificially loving his wife as God commanded. Nor will you ever find a happy wife who is not submissively following her husband as God commanded.

When men act like women, and women act like men, it makes people just as ugly and depressed as the places they are living. The World pays dearly for their rebellion in this. Its homosexual and transgender agendas cost them peace and dignity, and earn them the wrath of their Creator against Whom they are rebelling.

A real man and a real woman is a beautiful and blessed being. You will not find happier and more attractive people than real men and real women. “*God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them*” (Genesis 1:27). Embracing the uniqueness, and fulfilling the roles of your God-ordained gender, blesses God, the world, and your life.

Gender and personality traits

Your God-given personality can certainly influence how you live out your gender. It is possible that God may give a man the personality of a Helper and a woman the personality of a Leader. Nevertheless, even modern research confirms God has made men and women different:

Cognitive psychologist Marco Del Giudice and his team compared the personality traits of men and women in a sample of over 10,000 and found huge differences. Women scored much higher than men in Sensitivity, Warmth, and Apprehension, while men scored higher than women in Emotional Stability, Dominance, Rule-Consciousness, and Vigilance. There was only a 10% overlap between the distributions of these traits in men and women. Essentially, the study suggests that when it comes to personality, men and women belong to two different species. ¹

Even if a man's primary personality trait is a Helper, he will naturally live this out in a masculine way. A male Helper will not have all the vision and drive of a Leader, but he will still very much dislike following a woman. His leadership will look different, but he is still a man and he will lead people in his own way. Likewise, a female Leader will want to lead someone or something, but she will prefer to do it under a godly man's authority.

Regardless of a man's personality, he will need and desire respect and will feel most loved when he is receiving it. Likewise, regardless of a woman's personality, she will greatly appreciate someone paying close attention to her and caring for her.

God has given men the role of loving Leader in the home, church, and world. He has given women the role of supportive Helper in the home, church, and world. And men and women will be the happiest when they are fulfilling their God-ordained roles regardless of their personality.

However, how a man or woman fulfills their roles will look different depending on their personality. How then could a husband with the personality of a Helper, be the leader of a wife who has the personality of a Leader? Delegating is the key. A Helper husband can choose to delegate a task that needs considerable drive and communication to his Leader wife. And if delegation is done correctly (agreeing on goals and limits, supportive encouragement, and later evaluation) then the Helper husband is effectively leading his Leader wife.

Sometimes a man acts or appears more submissive because of bad upbringing, a domineering, angry, and controlling wife, or bad experiences as a leader. But God did not make him that way and false beliefs are causing him to act and think contrary to his nature. Some personalities, even of males, are adverse to conflict so they will not thrive in the home as a leader when there is constant resistance to it.

Likewise, a woman may act or appear more domineering because her mother was the same way, or her husband is lazy and uncaring and she is forced to lead. But her Dad did not make her that way. No matter what her personality, she will be the happiest by serving a loving male leader.

"God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). Embracing the uniqueness and fulfilling the roles of your God-ordained gender, blesses God, the world, and your life.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite Romans 12:6, and 1 Peter 3:4 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Genesis 1:27 in the translation above or another.

¹ "Gender Differences in Personality Are Larger than Previously Thought," online at <https://www.psychologytoday.com>.

Chapter 3.20

Your Dad's Power I

Prayer is Powerful
1 John 5:14-15

Week 10

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - What is the remarkable promise in 1 John 5:14-15?
 - What is the requirement to experience this promise? How can we be certain of doing this?
 - What are some additional helps for effective prayer?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?

Kurt needed to sell his house. He needed to move and had already purchased another house for his family. And if he did not sell his current house in three days he would be spending a lot of money on both houses.

That evening Kurt went to his bedroom and began praying to His Dad for help to sell the house. While he was praying he heard the doorbell ring. His wife told him it was someone who wanted to see the house. The visitor walked through the house for a few minutes, said he wanted to buy it, and less than 3 days later he did. Kurt experienced the biblical teaching that:

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him. (1 John 5:14-15 NIV)

Your Dad gives you a lot of power through prayer when you ask according to His will.

The power of prayer

In the promise above God is offering you His almighty power. And His power is great! One day Jesus told His disciples that it was impossible for people “*to enter the Kingdom of God*” (Matt 19:24). Then Matthew wrote: “*Jesus looked at them intently and said, ‘Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible’*” (v. 26).

And Jesus would look intently at you, in whatever seemingly impossible situation you find yourself in, and say the same thing: “*With God everything is possible.*” As we will discuss below, there is a requirement to be granted God’s almighty power. But the power itself is unlimited. The

Apostle John said we can ask for “*anything*” and can receive “*whatever we asked*” (1 John 5:15).

Imagine for a moment your very good friend is the President of the United States. And he told you if you ever needed anything, he wanted you to just ask him. You would feel very powerful because your friend is very powerful. In his autobiography Billy Graham tells a story to illustrate this. The first time he met President John F. Kennedy the President asked him if there was anything he could do for him. Billy responded that the government of a South American country was refusing his request to host a crusade there. President Kennedy turned to an aid and said, “Take care of that,” and it was.

You have a Dad infinitely more powerful than any human President, and He invites you to ask Him to do anything. One of the most painful things in life is to feel powerless in a situation. But because God is your Dad you are never powerless. Your Dad gives you a lot of power through prayer when you ask according to His will. The “Entreaties” portion of the P.O.W.E.R. Plan for your God Times and Barnabas Groups encourages you to take advantage of this tremendous promise of God.

Praying according to the *prescribed will* of God

What is the requirement for you to be given God’s almighty power in any situation and be absolutely certain He will do what you ask? You simply need to “*ask anything according to His will*” (1 John 5:14).

How can you be certain of His will? It is revealed in Scripture. Therefore another way of stating this promise is you can pray anything commanded, promised, or otherwise revealed in Scripture as God’s will and be absolutely certain God will grant your request! This is praying according to the *prescribed will* of God discussed earlier in this study. This is why every request in “The Lord’s Prayer” is something God has already promised to do (cf. Matt 6:9-13). Jesus wants you to pray according to the revealed *prescribed will* of God.

The Apostle Paul described such a prayer when he wrote the Ephesians:
Now that you have been firmly rooted and established in God’s love, I pray that you will be able to mentally grasp, together with all Christians, how wide and long and high and deep is God’s love for you, even though we cannot fully understand it. Then you will be filled up to all the fullness of God. (Eph 3:18-19)

Is there any doubt *this* is God’s will for you and all Christians in your life? Surely your Dad wants you and them to know and experience His love in deeper ways? Therefore, this is a prayer you can pray with absolute confidence that God will work to make it happen. And think of the amazing affect that would have on your life and the life of others!

Some might struggle with being confined to only asking things according to the will of God revealed in Scripture. But the prayers that Scripture guarantees are the best and most powerful prayers imaginable. You cannot invent or ask better things for yourself or others than the commands and promises God gives you in Scripture. For example, the following are three prayer requests that you can be certain will happen because they are God's will:

- That you and other Christians would grow in your love and obedience to God (cf. Matt 22:37-38).
- That you and other Christians would grow in your love for others (cf. Matt 22:39).
- That you and other Christians would grow in your knowledge and experience of God's love for you (cf. Eph 3:18-19).

And when God grants such prayers, all of the best and most important things in your life and the life of others will happen.

The power of praying according to the *prayed-for will* of God

There is a third amazing promise in 1 John 5:14-15. You do not need to confine your prayer requests to things commanded and promised in Scripture. You can ask your Dad for anything. But, if your request is not something commanded or promised in Scripture, you cannot have absolute confidence it will be granted.

On one hand, the possibilities are endless. There are all kinds of things you can supernaturally change in your life, the life of others, and anywhere in the world! Kurt merely asked that his house would be sold in three days and God granted that prayer and miraculously worked to make it happen. This is an example of the *prayed-for will* of God also discussed earlier in this study. It brings into existence things that would not have happened if they had not been prayed for.

But because God's *prayed-for will* is not revealed in Scripture, you cannot know such a request is His will until you ask and He grants it. So you can ask for anything that would not violate the moral *prescribed will* of God in Scripture!

But God is no "genie in a bottle." While He is willing to grant you the same power that spoke the Universe into existence, He knows you do not have the necessary wisdom to handle such power. The power of God requires the wisdom of God in order to avoid chaos and disaster. Therefore, all requests must be evaluated by His wisdom first, and you should be very thankful for that.

It is easy for us to think that everything that is our will, should be God's will too. Why would He deny your request to help or heal someone? That is one of the most difficult questions a human can ask, and God rarely reveals

the answer. The Apostle Paul answered it best when he wrote: *“Oh, how great are God’s riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways!”* (Rom 11:33).

Remember, as discussed earlier in this study, your Dad may want to change a “heart” instead of a circumstance, because this would be the best.

One mature believer wrote regarding an ingredient for powerful prayer:

“Why are some agonizingly sincere prayers granted, while others are not? I still have questions. But one thing I do know. It’s a way of prayer that has resulted consistently in a glorious answer. This is the Prayer of Relinquishment.

I got my first glimpse of it in the fall of 1943. I had been ill for six months with a lung infection, and a bevy of specialists seemed unable to help. Persistent prayer, using all the faith I could muster, had resulted in—nothing. I was still in bed full-time.

One afternoon I read the story of a missionary who had been an invalid for eight years. Constantly she had prayed that God would make her well, so that she might do his work. Finally, worn out with futile petition, she prayed, “All right. I give up. If you want me to be an invalid, that’s your business. Anyway, I want you even more than I want health. You decide.” In two weeks the woman was out of bed, completely well.

This made no sense, yet the story would not leave me. On the morning of September 14—how can I ever forget the date?—I came to the same point of abject acceptance. “I’m tired of asking,” was the burden of my prayer. “I’m beaten. God, you decide what you want for me.” Tears flowed. I had no faith as I understood faith, expected nothing.

And the result? It was as if I had touched a button that opened windows in heaven. Within a few hours I had experienced the presence of the Living Christ in a way that wiped away doubt and revolutionized my life. From that moment my recovery began.

Through this incident, God was trying to teach me something important about prayer. Gradually, I saw that a demanding spirit, with self-will as its rudder, blocks prayer.

The Prayer of Relinquishment says, “This is my situation at the moment. I’ll face the reality of it. But I’ll also accept willingly whatever a loving Father sends.” Acceptance, therefore, never slams the door on hope. Yet even with hope our relinquishment must be the real thing, because this giving up of self-will is the hardest thing we human beings are ever called on to do.

Admit the possibility of what you fear most. Force yourself to walk up to the fear, look it full in the face—never forgetting that God and his power are still the supreme reality—and the fear evaporates. Drastic? Yes. But it is one sure way of releasing prayer power into human affairs.”¹

Jesus said the following to help you trust your Dad's goodness in His response to your prayers:

You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him. (Matt 7:9-11)

Your Dad is a very good dad and He will always give you something good in answer to your prayers. And if He does not give you exactly what you asked for, be assured He is giving you something even better. Your Dad gives you a lot of power through prayer when you ask according to His will.

Helps for powerful prayer

God's word tells us several other things to help us experience His power through our prayers. First, WE NEED TO PRAY! The Bible says: "*You don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it*" (James 4:2). There simply are things that will not happen because we do not ask God for them. Remember, only God's *predestined will* occurs no matter what anyone does. But God's *prescribed* and *prayed-for wills* will only happen if people choose to obey and pray.

Secondly, your request not only needs to be "*according to His will*" (1 John 5:14), but so does your life. The Apostle Peter wrote: "*You husbands must give honor to your wives. . . Treat her as you should so your prayers will not be hindered*" (1 Pet 3:7). Sin can hinder God in granting your requests (cf. Ps 66:18-19; John 9:31; James 5:16). If you are asking God for something and it is not happening, search your conscience for any sin you are aware of and stop doing it. You should be careful not to assume this is the only reason for God's denial of a request. Paul prayed for his "*thorn*" to be removed and his request was denied, but not because of sin in his life (cf. 2 Cor 12:7-10). Still, continually choosing a sin you are aware of can hinder God in granting your prayers.

Thirdly, seek to be a part of God fulfilling your request. Jesus taught:

Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. (Matt 7:7-8)

Jesus wants you to add action to your prayers. Do not just ask God to do things if you can "*seek*," "*knock*," and work for them. Remember, God will not do for you what He has already enabled you to do. There is much wisdom in the saying: "Pray as if everything depends on God and work as if it all depends on you." When Kurt needed to sell his house he distributed

many fliers for advertisement. The man who knocked on his door and bought his house saw one of them. Add your action to your asking.

Fourth, be desperate about something! If there is no crisis in your life, be desperate about a crisis occurring in the lives of others. DESPERATION is the fuel of consistent, earnest, God-pleasing prayer. You can devise a plan to pray consistently and force yourself to be disciplined to follow it. But desperation removes the need for discipline. When we are desperate for God to do something, we will pray like we should!

Finally, some are confused about which Person of the Trinity we should pray to: the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit? There is freedom in this as they are all God. But the Bible consistently instructs us to pray to the Father, in the name of the Son, being controlled by the fruits of the Holy Spirit (cf. Matt 6:9; John 15:16; Eph 6:18). Praying in the name of Jesus simply means praying what He would pray, or praying according to His will. So in agreement with 1 John 5:14-15 Jesus said, *“The Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name”* (John 15:16).

“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him” (1 John 5:14-15 NIV). Your Dad gives you a lot of power through prayer when you ask according to His will. ²

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite Genesis 1:27 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize 1 John 5:14-15 in the translation above or another.

¹ “The Prayer of Relinquishment,” Catherine Marshall, *Guidepost* (October 1960).

² Of course there are other aspects of God’s power provided for our life. The powers of the Holy Spirit, including love, joy, and peace are among them. We have briefly discussed this aspect of God’s power in *Christians Essentials* study #2: *Your FOUNDATIONS*, chapter 2.4 and will do so in more detail in study #5: *Your FREEDOM*.

Chapter 3.21

Your Dad's Power II*The Power of Praise*Philippians 4:6-7

Week 10

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - Why is praising God so powerful?
 - What does it mean to give thanks in everything instead of for everything?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?

Mary was struggling. She had just lost her baby a few days ago and was struggling to trust God or experience His love. Things seemed really dark and depressing. Then she remembered the promise in Philippians 4:6-7. She began thanking God for all the wonderful things He had given her including her salvation, her husband, her other children, her church and her friends. And as she put even the loss of her baby in perspective, she experienced what Scripture promises—“*the peace of God which surpasses understanding*.” The Bible says:

Do not worry about anything. Instead pray about everything, asking God for what you need. Do this with giving thanks to God. When you make your requests known to God in this way, the peace of God which surpasses understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:6-7)

The power of praise can change your life no matter what.

Life is really hard sometimes. How do you overcome the circumstances in your life and experience the joy of God? By praising Him. The power of praise can change your life no matter what.

The Apostle Paul instructed us to “*not worry about anything*” but to talk to God “*about everything*.” This is the power of prayer that we discussed in the previous chapter. But here Paul tells us to add a very important ingredient to our prayers that we often forget: praise. If you want to experience “*the peace of God which surpasses understanding*,” you need to do more than just pray, but you also need to praise.

Praise will also “*guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus*” by protecting you from the destructive power of bitterness, discouragement, and depression.

Why is praise so powerful? Because it restores your perspective in hard times. When bad things happen you tend to allow them to color your whole life. Humans have a tendency to forget the 100 things that are going well in their life, and focus on the 1 thing that is not. And this destroys their joy. Praising God essentially reminds us of all the wonderful promises in God's word. And all of these promises are greater than anything you might lose on Earth. Praise reminds you of the 100 things God has blessed you with in the midst of the 1 thing you have lost. The power of praise can change your life no matter what.

This is why immediately after sharing the wisdom of Philippians 4:6-7, the Apostle Paul wrote:

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. (Phil 4:8)

Focusing your mind on such things will make you a more thankful and joyful person. This is not merely positive thinking or avoiding your difficulties. This is keeping your mind fixed on REALITY. The truth about your life is this Christian: no matter what you lose in this life, you have so much more to be thankful for. Always.

Because praise is such a powerful benefit to our lives, the Bible warns us of what happens when we do not do it. The Apostle Paul wrote something that applies to all humans and describes a downward spiral of sin all starting with their refusal to praise God:

Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship him as God or even give him thanks. [Therefore] they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. As a result, their minds became dark and confused. Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. And instead of worshiping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshiped idols. (Rom 1:21-23)

Praising God and obeying His command to “*Do everything without complaining*” (Phil 2:14), protects your heart and life.

Eve experienced the danger of not praising God in difficulties. She lived in a perfect Paradise. She had everything she needed and much, much, more. God was blessing her greatly and she could have been very happy. But the Devil tricked her into focusing on the one thing God would not give her. Eve could eat from any of the other wonderful trees in the Garden. And the only reason God was forbidding her to eat from the one tree was that it would hurt her. But because she listened to the Devil, she completely forgot the many, many wonderful things God had done for her. Her whole focus became the one thing God was not going to give her. As a result, she became discontent, doubted God's love, and turned away from God.

But imagine in the midst of the Devil speaking to her, Eve quoted Psalm 103: “*Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits*” (Ps 103:1-2 NIV). If Eve had done that in the midst of her temptation to be discontent, the serpent would have been silenced, Eve’s heart would have been protected, and she would have remained happy. Praising God reminds you of what is really important, and how good God has been to you.

The Apostle Paul wrote elsewhere: “*Always be joyful. Pray constantly. Give thanks in everything because this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus*” (1 Thess 5:16-18). How can you possibly obey the command to “*always be joyful*”? By praying “*constantly*” and giving “*thanks in everything*.” Why does Paul say to do this constantly? Because it is so powerful! The real key to increasing your joy and happiness is not changing any of your circumstances, but increasing how often you thank God for every good thing you already have.

Notice in this verse we are to “*give thanks in everything*,” not for everything. God is not expecting you to thank Him for the hard, sad, and painful things that occur in your life. Even God is sad about many things that happen in your life. But in every circumstance there are much greater things you can still be thankful for. These include God’s complete forgiveness, constant love, and promise of making everything perfect one day, no matter what is happening today. These things are not changed by hardships in this world. Therefore, in the midst of any difficulty, “*in everything*,” you can still “*give thanks*” for many things.

Again, life can get very, very hard. You will sometimes feel like you are living in darkness and oppression and will struggle with depression and temptation. What is the most powerful thing you can do at these times? Give thanks! Praising God breaks the power of oppression no matter how painful your circumstances may be. If you are thanking God in everything, you can be sad about events, but still have a joy inside. This is because you remember what God has done for you and what He will do for you. The power of praise can change your life no matter what.

Happy are the people who know how to praise you. LORD, [they] live in the light of your presence. In your name [character] they rejoice and continually praise your goodness. (Ps 89:15-16 NCV)

How do you maintain your joy in life? How do you experience the light of God’s presence even in the darkest times? By learning to joyfully worship God for His character all day long. Learn to be a thankful person. Then you will be a spiritually powerful person.

“Do not worry about anything. Instead pray about everything, asking God for what you need. Do this with giving thanks to God. When you make your requests known to God in this way, the peace of God which surpasses

understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6-7). The power of praise can change your life no matter what.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite 1 John 5:14-15 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Philippians 4:6-7 in the translation above or another.

Chapter 3.22

Your Dad's Pleasure*The most pleasurable thing in life is blessing others*

2 Corinthians 5:17

Week 11

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - What is a primary reason given in this chapter for why we choose to sin?
 - What is your favorite way to serve God and people (your spiritual gift)? When have you experienced a lot of pleasure in serving God and people?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?

King David was at the highest point of his life. *“The king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his surrounding enemies”* (2 Sam 7:1). *“David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people . . . and David’s sons were priests”* (2 Sam 8:15, 18). He was so blessed by the goodness of God for him that *“King David went into the temple and sat before the LORD and prayed, ‘Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?’”* (2 Sam 7:18). God had given David almost Heaven on Earth.

But then everything changed because: *“One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of his palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful”* (2 Sam 11:2). He desired this woman so much that this godly and very blessed man sinned with her and murdered her husband to cover it up (cf. 2 Sam 11). Why? To experience pleasure.

This is the same reason Eve sinned. She really did have Heaven on Earth. A perfect place, a perfect husband, a perfect life in an intimate and blessed relationship with God. But then everything changed because of something she saw too. *“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it”* (Gen 3:6). In a Garden offering her immense pleasures, even from food, Eve violated the only command God had given her. Why? To get one more pleasure.

The greatest human king and the first woman illustrate the immense power of our God-given need for pleasure. And the deceptive and disastrous effects of trying to experience it apart from God. Your Dad wants to provide your need for pleasure in truly satisfying ways, instead of

frustrating and sinful ways. And one vital secret to experiencing the pleasure God provides is this:

It is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35).

The most pleasurable thing you will experience in this life
is blessing other people.

Here is the full text of our verse. The Apostle Paul said to the church elders in Ephesus: *“I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”* (Acts 20:35).

Why would you make the sacrifices of time and energy to *“help those in need by working hard”*? Living like that is never easy. We normally feel like we have enough problems of our own, and it can feel overwhelming to help others with their needs and problems. Why was Paul *“a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard”*? One reason was that he experienced Christ’s promise: *“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”*¹ The original Greek word translated *“blessed”* (*makarios*) means *“happy.”* Jesus said that serving and giving to others will give you pleasure. Which is the basis for the primary point of this chapter: The most pleasurable thing you will experience in this life is blessing other people. If you doubt this, then simply try it, and you will find it to be true.

As we have discussed elsewhere in the *Christian Essentials*, many Christians doubt that personal happiness is a goal God wants you to pursue.² But happy Christians glorify God. And experiencing joy is a primary reason Jesus wants us to obey His commandments (cf. John 15:10-11). The Apostle Paul even said: *“God . . . richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment”* (1 Tim 6:17)! Your Dad wants His children to experience an abundance of happiness, and He tells you how: *“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”* The most pleasurable thing you will experience in this life is blessing other people.

The empty pleasures of the World

But unfortunately, even Christians seek to fulfill their God-given need for pleasure in worldly and sinful ways. *Webster’s Dictionary* defines pleasure as the “feeling of happiness, enjoyment, or satisfaction.” And because pleasure (happiness) is perhaps the ultimate desire God created us with, it is a powerful force in our lives.

How do humans seek pleasure apart from God? Like David, many men seek it in sexual immorality. This is why it is estimated that at any given moment in the world 40 million female prostitutes are working. In the United States alone, an estimated 30,000 people view pornography on the Internet every second. And men are six times more likely to do so than

women. Every day in America there are 68 million searches on the Internet for pornography.³

Like Eve, many women seek pleasure in food. This is one reason that “the chocolate industry is worth an estimated \$110 billion a year.”⁴ What is the world’s ultimate purpose for illegal drugs, alcohol, movies, music, sports, and all entertainment? Pleasure. As the Apostle Paul wrote: “*There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of . . . pleasure rather than lovers of God*” (2 Tim 3:1-2, 4).

What is the result of such idolatry? Notice the headings in your Bible after David sinned. David has Uriah murdered, God rebukes David through the Prophet Nathan, David and Bathsheba’s baby dies, David’s son Amnon rapes David’s daughter Tamar, David’s son Absalom murders Amnon, Absalom conspires against David forcing the king to flee Jerusalem for his life, causing a civil war in Israel, and later, Sheba son of Bikri leads all of Israel to desert David. 2 Samuel chapters 2-10 recount the wonderful victories, blessings, and honor of David. Chapters 12-20 describe his greatest griefs. And David’s sin with Bathsheba in chapter 11 is the turning point of it all.

What kind of destruction did Eve’s sinful seeking of pleasure bring her and others? It is beyond description or imagination. Eve’s bite of the forbidden fruit caused sin to enter the world and all the pain it has caused every human being since then.

What kind of pain has the world’s idols of pleasure caused people today? Let us look at pornography specifically. 50% of those viewing Internet pornography have lost interest in real sex. Severe depression was reported twice as frequently among Internet pornography users compared to non-users. Among those considered addicted to pornography, 40% lose their spouse, 58% suffer great financial loss, and 33% lose their jobs. Those psychologically diagnosed as being addicted to sexual immorality are twenty-three times more likely to state that “Discovering online sexual material was the worst thing that ever happened in my life.”⁵

The world’s pleasures never satisfy. King Solomon was in a unique position to test this and wrote:

I said to myself, “Come on, let’s try pleasure. Let’s look for the ‘good things’ in life.” But I found that this, too, was meaningless. . . I also tried to find meaning by building huge homes for myself and by planting beautiful vineyards. I made gardens and parks, filling them with all kinds of fruit trees. . .

I collected great sums of silver and gold, the treasure of many kings and provinces. I hired wonderful singers, both men and women, and had many beautiful concubines (“He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines” 1 Kgs 11:3).

I had everything a man could desire! . . . Anything I wanted, I would take. I denied myself no pleasure. I even found great pleasure in hard work, a reward for all my labors.

But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless—like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere. (Eccl 2:1, 4-5, 8, 9-11)

If anyone in all of history was going to have their need for pleasure satisfied by things in this World, it was Solomon. He tried EVERYTHING you could ever try. And concluded “*it was all so meaningless.*” God is honest that sin can be enjoyable, but it is only “*the fleeting pleasures of sin*” (Heb 11:25) that you will experience. And the pleasure that sin promises will never be as great as the pain it causes.

Why were all of Solomon’s worldly pleasures so unsatisfying? Because he sought pleasure apart from God. God knows that having sex with the one woman you are committed to for life, is more satisfying than even 1000 of the most beautiful women that Solomon sinned with. And all the wealth Solomon amassed, and all the hard work he did, was all for himself. This is why it was all so empty.

But in the end, Solomon wrote: “*Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands*” (Eccl 12:13). He came to that conclusion the really hard way, choosing to try everything else. You can have the same conviction by just believing what Jesus said, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive*” (Acts 20:35). The most pleasurable thing you will experience in this life is blessing other people.

Enjoying pleasures from God

God has created us with a passion for pleasure. He wants you to seek the most pleasure and happiness you can find in this life. Why? Because seeking the most pleasure and happiness you can find in this life is the same as seeking to love and serve Him! Your passion for pleasure is designed to eventually lead you to God.

This is why “*God . . . richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment*” (1 Tim 6:17). Your Father wants to provide all the pleasure you need so that you do not need to get it from the world. This is good news! God’s pleasures come without the guilt, regret, pain, loss, embarrassment, waste, and emptiness of the world’s pleasures. When “*God . . . richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment*” it is morally pure and completely painless.

How does God provide such pleasure? How can virtually everything God gives us be a source of pleasure? The answer is in our text for this chapter: “*It is more blessed to give than to receive*” (Acts 20:35). You can bless others with everything God gives you. And when you do, you will bless yourself in the best possible way.

For example, it was to “*those who are rich in this world*” that the Apostle said, “*God . . . richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment*” (1 Tim 6:17). In the next verse he tells them how they could truly enjoy what God had given them: “*do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share*” (v. 18).

Christians with money will be tempted to spend it on themselves, deceived by the world into thinking this is how to experience the best and most lasting pleasure. But Jesus said, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive*” (Acts 20:35). And the Apostle wanted to remind wealthy Christians of this.

But this secret to real pleasure does not just apply to giving money. Almost everything God gives us can be used to bless other people. You can use your time and energy to bless people in all kinds of ways. For example, it is because of God’s desire for you to experience maximum pleasure in this life that He gave you spiritual gifts. These special desires and abilities of the Holy Spirit include serving, encouraging, giving to, and being compassionate toward people (cf. Rom 12:7-8). Any Christian who has experienced having a positive impact on the life of another human through using their spiritual gift knows it is among the most pleasurable and satisfying things in life.

This is why we must help our children experience the pleasure of helping others. The world’s pleasures will pull at them. But if they experience the significance and satisfaction of being used by God to make someone’s life better, they will recognize the emptiness of mere entertainment for themselves.

Notice that David neglected the pleasure of serving God and was therefore vulnerable to the pleasures of the World. Before his sin the text says, “*In the spring of the year, when kings normally go out to war, David sent Joab and the Israelite army to fight the Ammonites. . . However, David stayed behind in Jerusalem*” (2 Sam 11:1). That was his first mistake. Neglecting an opportunity to serve God in order to serve himself. And what happened? He no doubt became bored. Boredom is one of the most dangerous feelings in the world. It may not be sin itself, but selfish and sinful pleasures become very tempting when we are bored. As the Christian philosopher Soren Kierkegaard wrote: “Boredom is the root of all evil.”⁶

There is nothing wrong with many of the pleasures you can find in this World. Again, “*God . . . richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment*” (1 Tim 6:17), including nature, food, sports, hobbies, music, and sex. But how can we ensure that these pleasures are not sinful and unsatisfying? By finding a way to bless others through them.

For example, God has a plan for satisfying a person’s God-given need for sexual pleasure. The Bible says to men:

Let your wife be a fountain of blessing for you. Rejoice in the wife of your youth. . . Let her breasts satisfy you always. May you always be captivated by her love. Why be captivated, my son, by an immoral woman [Like the ones on the Internet]. (Prov 5:18-20)

God created sex to be pleasurable. But He has created you so that the only really satisfying, meaningful, and lasting pleasure we will experience from sex will be in a biblical marriage. And even the greatest pleasure in marital sex comes from being a blessing to your spouse.

Likewise, God has provided delicious foods for your pleasure. But their pleasure will be deeper, more meaningful, and longer lasting if the food is shared with others.

How about all the seemingly menial tasks a wife and mother performs for her family? The Bible says, “*She looks for wool and flax and works with her hands in delight* [Heb. *chephets*: “pleasure”]” (Prov 31:13 NASB⁷). Why did the work “*with her hands*” give her pleasure? Because her work was blessing those in her family by making clothes for them and feeding them (cf. vs. 15, 21-22).

Jesus said, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive*” (Acts 20:35). The most pleasurable thing you will experience in this life is blessing other people.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite John 15:15 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Acts 20:35 in the translation above or another.
- ▶ You will experience the pleasure spoken of in this chapter as you complete your Barnabas Group service project together. Have you planned or completed this yet?

¹ The saying of Jesus in Acts 20:35 is not found in the Gospels. But the Apostle Paul received personal revelations from Christ (cf. 1 Cor 11:33; Gal 1:12; Acts 18:9-10) and Jesus had probably personally told him what Paul quotes here.

² For further on God’s goal for us to be happy in this life see chapter 2.3 in *Christian Essentials* study #2: *Your FOUNDATIONS*.

³ Internet pornography statistics from “Infographic: Porn Addiction in America” (Dec 30, 2013) online at <http://christianpost.com>.

⁴ “Cocoa-nomics” (Feb. 17, 2014) online at: <http://thecnnfreedomproject.blogs.cnn.com/category/chocolates-child-slaves/>.

⁵ “Infographic: Porn Addiction in America” online at <http://christianpost.com>.

⁶ Soren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, 1843.

⁷ Translations that render *chephets* in Proverbs 31:13 as implying busyness (e.g. NLT) rather than pleasure (e.g. NASB, NETS) miss the meaning of the original Hebrew here. Keil and Delitzsch translate it as “the pleasure and love of her work.”

Chapter 3.23

Your Dad's Purpose*Your Dad's ultimate purpose is to reveal His greatness*

Romans 11:36

Week 11

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - What is God's ultimate purpose for everyone and everything?
 - What does glory mean? What are examples?
 - How do we glorify God? What is the difference between publicly and privately glorifying God? Why is this important to understand?
 - What are some things that would privately glorify God?
 - What was especially meaningful to you about this chapter?

Sometime around 4000¹ years ago, “*There was a man named Job who lived in the land of Uz*” (Job 1:1). One day, “*the Lord asked Satan, ‘Have you noticed my servant Job? He is the finest man in all the earth. He is blameless—a man of complete integrity. He fears God and stays away from evil’*” (v. 8). Then Satan dared God, “*reach out and take away everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face!*” And your Dad accepted Satan's dare. “*‘All right, you may test him,’ the Lord said to Satan. ‘Do whatever you want with everything he possesses’*” (vs. 11-12).

And how Satan tested Job! He took away all of his wealth. Satan even murdered all ten of Job's children in one day! (vs. 13-19). When that was not enough to make Job curse his Dad, God allowed Satan to inflict Job's body with “*painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head.*” In mourning and pain, “*Job scraped his skin with a piece of broken pottery as he sat among the ashes*” (2:7-8).

Why would your Dad allow Satan to do this to a man He was so proud of? Why would your Dad allow so much pain in the life of a man He said was blameless? Why would Satan dare God about such a man? And why would God accept such a dare? The answer to these questions is among the most important truth you need to understand. It explains your ultimate purpose in life. The Bible says:

Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Cor 10:31)

Your ultimate purpose in life is to reveal the greatness of God.

Why are you here? Why did your Father create the Universe and everyone and everything in it? Why is there both good and evil? What is the

ultimate purpose for your life? What is the ultimate purpose for everything? The answer to all of these questions is summed up in one word: Glory!

Glory is the revelation of someone's greatness to inspire awe. Their greatness comes from their beauty, power, wealth, wisdom, and character. And the revelation and recognition of who they are results in praise, honor, amazement, adoration, and glory (cf. Rev 5:12). You read elsewhere in the *Christian Essentials*:

We get some idea of what glory is when we think of movie stars, music stars, and sports stars. People adore and worship them. What they do to merely entertain people is considered so valuable they are among the most worshipped people on Earth. People feel a great sense of awe when they personally meet one of Earth's stars.

But God's stars reveal a lot more glory than any of Earth's stars. In fact, Creation is perhaps the best way to understand God's glory: *"The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship"* (Ps 19:1). The majesty, intricacy, and sheer size of mountains, oceans, planets, stars, and galaxies reveals the wisdom and power of God. Whatever power, wisdom, or beauty is displayed in Creation, we can know that the Creator is infinitely more so. ²

The purpose of Creation is to glorify God. Which is why *"Everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory"* (Rom 11:36). Therefore, *"Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God"* (1 Cor 10:31) because your ultimate purpose in life is to reveal the greatness of God.

The Cosmic War

Why doesn't everyone glorify your Dad as they were created to do? Because your Dad has an enemy called the Devil. And he has been working since his rebellion against your Dad to steal the glory, worship, and praise of God for himself. This Cosmic War for glory between God and the Devil is the underlining theme of all of Scripture, and the background of all human history. Why is there good and evil? Because there is a war for glory between God and the Devil. And the worship, devotion, and obedience of humans is the primary source of the glory that either God or the Devil receives. *"In a multitude of people is the glory of a king, but without people a prince is ruined"* (Prov 14:28).

The Devil is in no way your Dad's equal. But the battle for glory between them is very real. Because their desires for glory and worship and devotion are very real. And the pain and trouble that occur in the lives of humans like Job who are in the middle of this War is very real as well.

The Cosmic War for Glory is why Satan dared God about Job. And it is why God accepted the dare. There is an ancient and ongoing war between

them for glory. And the worship and obedience of humans is at the center of that war. Job's choices had the potential to glorify the Devil or his Dad. If he would have cursed God because of his painful circumstances, His lack of faith and unconditional love for God would have glorified the Devil and given Satan something to boast about. But because Job chose to love God even when God allowed everything to be taken from him, Job's love for God revealed the greatness of God to the Devil, Angels, and demons who witnessed it.

On the other hand, humans glorify Satan, and give him honor when they obey and worship him. This is why the Apostle Paul warned even Christians: *"the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons"* (1 Cor 10:20 NIV). When people depend on, pursue, and love the things of this World to meet their needs, it is as if they have entered the temple of Satan and are offering sacrifices of worship to the Devil and glorifying him.

Which makes it especially sad when we are devoted to worldly things and give Satan our enemy devotion and glory. When you love, pursue, and depend on money, you worship Satan. When you love, pursue, and depend on being popular, you worship Satan. When you seek your security and significance through what the world offers, you worship Satan. Job worshipped God above all else and glorified God as much as any human ever has. And he embarrassed the Devil. *"Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God"* (1 Cor 10:31) because your ultimate purpose in life is to reveal the greatness of God and embarrass the Devil.

Publicly glorifying God

How specifically do you glorify God and fulfill your ultimate purpose? Jesus described one way when He said: *"Let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father"* (Matt 5:16). You glorify God when people see you acting like God to represent God. When they see the love and holiness of God living through you, and you make it known that it all comes from God, you reveal His greatness and inspire awe in Him.

The following testimony of a Chinese Christian concerning her harsh and hardened jailer is an example of publicly glorifying God:

When jailer Kane next came on duty, she did not seem as stern as before. She stood in front of my cell. "It's really strange," she said. For the first time I had the impression she was speaking to me. I opened my eyes hesitantly. "What is strange, Mrs. Kane?" I asked her.

"The faces of people these days. It isn't only in the prisons. It's on the outside as well. Everybody is nervous and tense and angry. Even the children look wicked. I must confess that the faces of people

irritate me. That's why I find your jail cell so different." I was surprised and asked her what she meant.

She had difficulty expressing herself. "What shall I say?" she began. I--I guess it's because I find the faces of those in this cell peaceful."

"Peaceful?" I echoed. "In here?"

"That's right. Your face and that of the prisoner in cell three and the one in cell five are all peaceful." The ones she mentioned were believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jailer Kane went on, "It almost seems as though you have the faces of angels. And I can't understand it. Nowhere else have I found peaceful faces in this world."

That night a change occurred in our relationship, and I said to her. "You said that our faces look peaceful and you said it was strange. Would you like to know why we can look peaceful in such a place as this?"

"Yes," she said, "I want to know about it." ³

"*Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God*" (1 Cor 10:31), even if it means having a smile on your face while in jail, because your ultimate purpose in life is to reveal the greatness of God.

Privately glorifying God

This Chinese Christian was able to glorify God publicly because her jailer saw her supernatural peace in the midst of suffering. But is it necessary for humans to see your devotion to your Dad for Him to be glorified? Thankfully no!

Unfortunately, when most Christians think about glorifying God, they only think of the public kind of glory that comes from other humans seeing your greatness for which you give God the credit. But there is another kind of glory that is even more important and constantly available. It is privately glorifying God. This is the kind of glory your Dad gets because of what only He, the Devil, and Angels and demons see you do.

Private glory is the kind Job gave to God in his suffering. Before the Devil's dare, Job publicly glorified God as "*the greatest man among all the people of the East*" (1:3). Everyone knew his great wealth and power came from the God he worshipped. But then he lost everything. Did Job then cease to glorify God? Not at all!

Of course to the humans around him, including his friends, Job was an embarrassment. In fact, publicly, the destruction of Job's life made his God look very bad. But God did not care about that because there is a glory that is more important to Him than what humans see. It's the devotion and faith that only He, the Devil, and Angels and demons see in our lives. It is when we privately glorify God by loving Him even in the midst of great suffering.

This is why the Paul wrote: “*We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings*” (1 Cor 4:9 NIV). The Apostle understood that like Job, his whole life was on display before heavenly beings. The word translated “*spectacle*” comes from the Greek word *theatron*. NT scholar Albert Barnes explained:

The theater, or amphitheater of the ancients was composed of an arena in which the combatants fought, and which was surrounded by circular seats rising above one another to a great height, and capable of containing many thousands of spectators.

Paul represents himself as on this arena or stage, contending with foes. Around him and above him are an immense host of human beings and angels, looking on at the conflict, and awaiting the outcome. He is not alone or unobserved. He is made public; and the universe gazes on the struggle. . . The expression means that he was public in his trials, and that this was exhibited to the universe. ⁴

Paul said: “*We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings*” (1 Cor 4:9) because his life and ministry did not look very significant to his critics in Corinth. He said:

Our dedication to Christ makes us look like fools . . . We are weak . . . we are ridiculed. Even now we go hungry and thirsty, and we don't have enough clothes to keep warm. We are often beaten and have no home. We work wearily with our own hands to earn our living. We bless those who curse us. We are patient with those who abuse us. We appeal gently when evil things are said about us. Yet we are treated like the world's garbage. (1 Cor 4:10-13)

But it did not matter that mere humans thought his life and ministry were insignificant. Because his life and devotion to God were “*on display*” and he was “*made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings*” (1 Cor 4:9). And on that stage where Paul lived his life, he privately glorified God and embarrassed the Devil by the devotion and sacrifices he made for Christ and people.

This is why a demon told the “*seven sons of Sceva, 'I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you?'*” (Acts 19:14-15). Paul was famous with demons because of how much he served God. Likewise, an Angel told a young man who was a slave in Babylon, “*Daniel, you are highly esteemed*” (Dan 10:11). By who? Humans? No. God and the Angels. They saw Daniel's faith in God when he refused to defile himself by eating the king's food, and prayed three times a day to the real God at the risk of his life (cf. Dan 1:8; 6:10, 13-16). Like Job, these men privately glorified God before Angels and demons because of their faithful devotion in the midst of suffering.

It is because of the value that God places on your private devotion to Him, that Jesus said, “*Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will*

reward you" (Matt 6:4 NIV). You can glorify God publicly by living like Him in front of people. But it is more important and available to glorify Him in private because of what He, the Devil, and Angels and demons see you do for God.

Why do God, the Devil, and Angels and demons marvel so much about our lives? Because we are doing something they have never done: *"We live by faith, not by sight"* (2 Cor 5:7 NIV). The Bible says, *"You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy"* (1 Pet 1:8). To love and trust God even though you have never seen Him is a remarkable thing. It is a God-glorifying thing. The beings in Heaven and Hell marvel at your faith in God. We are often tempted to hate living by faith, and we yearn to see God. But that is because we underestimate the value of living by faith.

But the unique opportunity to glorify God with our faith will only last a short time. When Jesus appears again we will be living by sight for eternity. Faith and even hope will no longer be needed (cf. Rom 8:24-25, 2 Cor. 4:18, 5:7, Heb. 11:1). You will never have another opportunity to do something really hard for God. To live differently than your culture, to love people who do not love you, to put your faith in God you have never seen.

Understanding and believing how you glorify God privately should greatly encourage you and give meaning, purpose, and value to everything you do and experience. Your Father is always watching you. Not to condemn you or criticize you. *"Now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus"* (Rom 8:1). Your Father in Heaven is watching you because He gets a great deal of pleasure from all the things you do for Him and others. We get pleasure from watching movies. God's greatest pleasure is watching you do good. You bless God! When you glorify God! We can spend a lot of time watching people on TV act like they are doing important things. Why not go out and love God and people and do something really important yourself!

It is encouraging that people do not need to notice your devotion to God for you to give Him great glory. Usually the world does not care if you love God. But He, the Devil, and Angels and demons care. And therefore essentially everything you do can glorify God in the heavenly realms even if no one on Earth sees or cares! This is why we can always obey the command: *"Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God"* (1 Cor 10:31).

This is why you should live to served and please Christ instead of people. Of course as you serve Christ you will serve people. But your ultimate motivation must be serving and pleasing Christ because people will often not understand or appreciate what you do for them. If you are serving people in order to please them you will often be disappointed by their lack of appreciation. But Christ sees, appreciates, and is glorified in

the heavenly realms by your every act of love. This is why you should live to serve and please Christ instead of people.

Privately glorifying your Father in Heaven is the one thing that no one can ever take from you. No matter where you are, or what is happening to you, or what other people are doing, you can always glorify God with your faith, love, obedience, suffering, and sacrifice!

If you do not believe you can fulfill your ultimate purpose in a jail cell, then you do not understand your ultimate purpose. If you think your life would be insignificant if you were confined to a hospital bed, then you do not understand what really matters to God. It is ultimately your faith that glorifies God, not your works, because sometimes you cannot “work.” It is not what you accomplish on Earth or what people see that glorifies God. It’s what you try and even fail at for God, because He sees. Like Job, it is not your earthly wealth or fame that glorifies God. But what you are willing to suffer for God in the sight of Him, the Devil, and Angels and demons.⁵

In the last chapter of this study you will read more about the kinds of things that will privately glorify God and you will be rewarded for.

“Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). Your ultimate purpose in life is to reveal the greatness of God.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite John 15:15 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize 1 Corinthians 10:31 in the translation above or another.
- ▶ Complete Project 3I on the following page, “How Do I Glorify God”?

¹ Most Bible scholars date Job’s life sometime around the life of Abraham, c. 2000 B.C.

² Excerpted from chapter 2.8: God’s Glory Purifies Us, in Study #2: *FOUNDATIONS*.

³ Excerpted from Esther Ahn Kim, *If I Perish* (Moody, 1977), 247-48.

⁴ Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Whole Bible*, online at

<http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bnb/view.cgi?bk=45&ch=4>

⁵ Glorifying God is an immense and essential topic for the Christian and will be discussed in more detail in *Christian Essentials* study #5: *FRUIT*.

Project 3I

How Do I Glorify God?

You have just read some amazing truths about the importance of everything you do in life. EVERYTHING has the potential to give God glory! And it is especially that “private glory” rather than “public glory” that you are encouraged to really think about.

Jesus promised: “*Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you*” (Matt 6:4 NIV). Take a moment and think about some of the everyday things you do because of your faith in God and love for people. What are some of those things that “*Your Father . . . sees*” you do “*in secret,*” that He will “*reward you*” for?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Chapter 3.24

Your Dad's Paradise*Your destiny is to be with your Dad*

Psalm 16:11

Week 12

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - What three words do we suggest sum up the coming Kingdom of God on the New Earth? What other words would you use?
 - What do we mean by saying that some things on the New Earth will be the same as things on this Earth and other things will be different? Why is this important to understand?
 - How do we describe the coming Kingdom in a phrase?
 - What will you like the best about living in the Kingdom of God on the New Earth?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?

You will fill me with joy in your presence; with eternal pleasures at your right hand. (Psalms 16:11)

Your destiny is full of joy and eternal pleasures with your Dad.

The eternal Kingdom of God on the New and Perfect Earth

Where will you live for eternity? What will your life after this life be like? David foresaw the answers to these questions and said you will be filled “*with joy*” and “*eternal pleasures*” from the “*presence*” of God and from the power (“*right hand*”) of God. Your destiny is full of joy and eternal pleasures with your Dad.

Jesus showed His servant John a glimpse of the New World He was creating for us. John wrote:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.”

And the one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new!" And then he said to me, "Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true." (Rev 21:1-5)

There are three words that could summarize the Bible's description of the coming Kingdom of God on Earth: PERFECT, NEW, and FOREVER.

First, it will be perfect because "God's home" will be there. Where God makes His eternal home is going to be a perfect place with absolutely no sin or defects anywhere. Because it will be where God lives, "*there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain.*" Nothing bad or hard or painful or sad will ever happen there. And God's home will be your home!

One great difference in life on the new Earth will be the absence of all sin. Sin is what causes all the "*death . . . sorrow . . . crying*" and "*pain*" on this Earth, and all these things cease forever because sin ceases forever. The Bible says "*We are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness*" (2 Peter 3:13). Jesus describes the New City as a place where, "*Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life*" (Rev 21:27).

The "Lord's Prayer" will be granted and God's will will be done on the New Earth as it is now in Heaven (cf. Matt 6:10). There will be no Satan or demons controlling the world. People will not have the desire or even ability to sin. On the New Earth, everyone and everything will be absolutely holy and will perfectly and always obey God's commands.

Life on the New Earth will be perfect. There "*will be no more death,*" so there will always just be LIFE! There will be no more "*sorrow,*" so there will always just be JOY! There will be no more "*crying,*" so there will always just be LAUGHING! There will be no more "*pain*" or loneliness or fighting or disappointment or embarrassment or danger or weakness or sickness or trouble or temptation or sin, so there will always just be PLEASURE! Your life will always and only be perfect and eternal HAPPINESS!

Secondly, the coming Kingdom of God on Earth will be new. Jesus said, "*I am making everything new!*" Because the New Earth will be perfect it will certainly be drastically, almost unimaginably, different from this Earth we live on now. Stop for a moment and imagine what will be different on the New Earth if, "*there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain.*" There will be no more tests of faith. Nothing we ever do will feel overwhelming, difficult, boring, or useless.

But Jesus' promise to make "*everything new*" does not mean nothing will be familiar. One of the most important and often ignored attributes of the New Earth is how much it will be like life on this Earth. There will be land, trees, people, friends, animals, work, cities, houses, gardens, food, and parties! We will not float in space but walk on dirt. But it will be new

and amazing dirt! We will not be merely spirits, but live in physical bodies. But they will be new and amazing bodies!

We will not lose our Christian spouses, children, and friends. But our relationships with them will be new and perfect! We will not lose our most favorite things on Earth like having fun, loving friends, creating things, and serving God. But all of these things will be new and perfect in amazing ways! So in some ways, the Kingdom of God on the New Earth will be like life on this Earth. But in every way *“everything”* will be *“new”* and perfect. Which is why Jesus called it, *“the paradise of God”* (Rev 2:7).

Thirdly, the perfect and new Kingdom of God on Earth will be eternal. Jesus said, *“there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.”* This Earth has been corrupted with sin and therefore will be destroyed. But there will be no sin on the New Earth and therefore it will be eternal. And all of the perfect and new things about life on the New Earth will never end. This is very different from life on this Earth. We experience glimpses of peace, joy, and pleasure, but then they are always interrupted with strife, grief, and pain. Nothing good lasts very long on this Earth. But on the next Earth, every day will be perfect forever.

Perhaps one promise that sums up what the eternal Kingdom of God on the New Earth will be like for us is when God said: *“My people will be happy forever because of the things I will make”* (Isa 65:18 NCV). All of this is why the eternal Kingdom of God on the New Earth could be described as: All of the best things in this life perfected forever, with none of the bad. Our life there will include:

- New and perfect relationship with God forever.
- New and perfect Creation and Earth forever.
- New and perfect nations and cities forever.
- New and perfect homes and land forever.
- New and perfect capital city forever.
- New and perfect bodies and minds forever.
- New and perfect relationships forever.
- New and perfect work forever.
- New and perfect peace and prosperity forever.

We will take a closer look at each one of these below. Fortunately, we are not confined to the NT for information about what life will be like in the Kingdom of God on the New Earth. God made many wonderful promises to the future saved remnant of the nation of Israel. And those in the Church can now claim those same promises. Why? Because Christ *“has made the two groups [OT and NT saints] one . . . His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two”* (Eph 2:14-15 NIV). Christians have inherited both *“citizenship”* in the future of Israel, and the *“covenants of promise”* God made to them (Eph 2:12). This is confirmed by the fact

that NT scholars agree that many of the promises in Revelation are references to OT promises (cf. Rev 7:16; Isa 49:10).

Therefore, our information about what life will be like in the Kingdom of God on the New Earth is greatly expanded to include the OT Prophets. They revealed many wonderful promises about the coming eternal kingdom that Christians can claim! Many of these will be shared below and include what King David said to God about your future life in this place: *“You will fill me with joy in your presence; with eternal pleasures at your right hand* (Psalms 16:11). Your destiny is full joy and eternal pleasures with your Dad. What will that be like? We hope to provide some biblical answers to that question in the following pages. This chapter is longer than most in the *Christian Essentials* but it will be worth it!

New and perfect relationship with God forever

It is natural to wish that God would give us a lot more detail about what our eternal life in the Kingdom of God on the New Earth will be like. Why is there so little information in Scripture about this? Because He has told us HE WILL BE THERE with us:

“Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them” (Rev 21:3).

“I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people” (2 Cor 6:16 NIV).

“When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am” (John 14:3).

What else do you really need to know about your eternal life in the Kingdom of God on the New Earth? You will be with the most wonderful Person imaginable forever! He describes the eternal Kingdom of God on the New Earth like this: *“Come and share your Master’s happiness!”* (Matt 25:23 NIV). You will share eternal happiness with Him!

What will your relationship with God be like? First, it is a mistake to think God is, or will be, an invisible spirit. He has a body. God the Son certainly has a body and will forever (cf. Luke 24:37-42; John 20:19-20; Phil 3:20; Heb 13:8). The incarnation was an eternal thing.

The same is true of God the Father. We have pictures of Him in Scripture portraying Him as having a body (cf. Dan 7:9-10; Rev 4:1-3), and there is no reason to assume that these are mere illusions and not true reality. Just because the Bible says, *“God is spirit”* (John 4:24) does not mean He cannot have a body. God the Spirit has no body, but God the Son and God the Father have bodies. Remember, we are made in His image, and we have a spirit, but also a body. In other words, God is more human than many think. We will not be in fellowship with a blob of energy, but a Person. Speaking of God the Father, the Bible says, *“God’s servants will serve him. They will see his face”* (Rev 22:3-4 NIV).

When will we “see his face”? It would seem particularly in times when everyone on the New Earth will visit the New Jerusalem to worship Him and celebrate festivals:

The nations will walk in its light [the New Capital City Jerusalem], and the kings of the world will enter the city in all their glory. Its gates will never be closed at the end of day because there is no night there. And all the nations will bring their glory and honor into the city. (Rev 21:24-26)

Who will not fear you, Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous deeds have been revealed. (Rev 15:4)

All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, Lord; they will bring glory to your name. (Ps 86:9)

Everything on earth will worship you; they will sing your praises, shouting your name in glorious songs. (Ps 66:4)

Here is another message that came to me from the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. “This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies says: The traditional fasts and times of mourning you have kept in early summer, midsummer, autumn, and winter are now ended. They will become festivals of joy and celebration for the people . . . People from nations and cities around the world will travel to Jerusalem . . . to seek the Lord. (Zech 8:18-22)

New and perfect Creation and Earth forever

The Bible says there will be “a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared” (Rev 21:1). Again, some things will be the same and some things will be different.

There will be a sky (i.e. “a new heaven”), but no longer a sun or moon or night. “There will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them” (Rev 22:5; cf. Isa 60:19).

There will be a New Earth, which is generally described as a world-wide Garden of Eden! God promises His people, “I will make their deserts like Eden. I will make their dry and empty land like my very own garden. Joy and gladness will be there” (Isa 51:3 NIRV). Likewise, God describes the New Earth like this:

I will open up rivers for them on the high plateaus. I will give them fountains of water in the valleys. I will fill the desert with pools of water. Rivers fed by springs will flow across the parched ground. I will plant trees in the barren desert. (Isa 41:18-19)

Yes, there will be an abundance of flowers and singing and joy! The deserts will become as green as the mountains of Lebanon, as lovely

as Mount Carmel or the plain of Sharon. There the Lord will display his glory, the splendor of our God. (Isa 35:2)

The grapevines will be heavy with fruit. The earth will produce its crops, and the heavens will release the dew. (Zech 8:12)

“The time will come,” says the Lord, “when the grain and grapes will grow faster than they can be harvested.” (Amos 9:13)

The New Earth will be like a lush, fertile, and beautiful Garden of Eden with “*rivers*,” “*pools of water*,” and an abundance of trees, plants, and flowers. And there will be mountains.

In the last days, the mountain of the Lord’s house will be the highest of all—the most important place on earth. It will be raised above the other hills, and people from all over the world will stream there to worship. (Isa 2:2)

So there will be mountains, but one gigantic mountain higher than all the others where God Himself will live in the New City.

And apparently there will even be animals. God says: “*The wolf and the lamb will feed together. The lion will eat hay like a cow*” (Isa 65:25). This should not surprise us as God wanted animals on the Earth at His first Creation, and He rescued them from the Flood so they would be on the Earth afterwards. God likes animals and it would seem they will be a part of our lives for eternity. There will be dogs, cats, horses, birds, sheep, cows, lions, and maybe even dinosaurs on the New Earth.

But the animals will be different. For example, there will be lions, but they “*will eat hay like a cow*.” And these animals will never die because there will be no more death on the New Earth. Therefore, neither we, nor other animals, will be eating animals.

Finally, unlike any place on this Earth, the weather on the New Earth will always be perfect. God promises, “*In the proper season I will send the showers they need*” (Ezek 34:25). “*The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat*” (Rev 7:16 NIV). Certainly there will never be a drought, blizzard, tornado, hurricane, flood, earthquake, or tsunami ever again. These are all a part of the curse on the Earth that will be removed (cf. Rom 8:19-22).

New and perfect nations and cities forever

Revelation describes an immense New City and says of it:

The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the world will enter the city in all their glory. Its gates will never be closed at the end of day because there is no night there. And all the nations will bring their glory and honor into the city. (Rev 21:24-26)

There will be new and perfect nations in the Kingdom of God on the New Earth. And there will be “*kings*” ruling them. Evidently cities will be built, lived in, and governed over. Jesus promised some servants they “*will be governor over five cities*” and others “*will be governor of ten cities as your reward*” (Luke 19:17, 19).

The government of these nations and cities will be perfect. First of all, because Christ will be the ultimate King of everyone. “*The Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day there will be one Lord—his name alone will be worshiped*” (Zech 14:9). But all of those ruling under Christ will be like Christ as well. “*Look, a righteous king is coming! And honest princes will rule under him*” (Isa 32:1). The Prophet Daniel explains the same:

Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him. (Dan 7:27 NASB)

New and perfect land and homes forever

There will be nations and cities on the New Earth, but you will have your own land and home. When David was looking forward to the Kingdom of God on the New Earth he said to God, “*The land you have given me is a pleasant land. What a wonderful inheritance!*” (Ps 16:6). The original Hebrew here implies “*boundary lines*” (NIV) for portions of land being marked out for people. An “*inheritance*” in the OT, as well as ancient cultures, included land (cf. Num 27:1-11; Josh 14:12-14).

The promise of an eternal allotment of physical land on the New Earth is a repeated and important promise from God to His OT saints (cf. Gen 17:8; Ps 37:9; Ps 105:9-11; Isa 60:21; Ezek 47:13-14). For example, God promised: “*I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed*” (1 Chron 17:9). And because the Church has been united with future Israel in the eternal promises of God, the promise of personal property and land ownership has been given to Christians as well (cf. Eph 2:12-16).

The Angel told Daniel, “*You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance*” (Dan 12:13), and so will you, which in OT language certainly included land to live on.

God will surely be generous in how much land He gives you and as David says, it will be, “*in pleasant places*” providing you “*a delightful inheritance*” (Ps 16:6 NIV).

It is your inheritance of a place on the New Earth that Jesus seems to be speaking of when He promised: *“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places . . . I go to prepare a place for you”* (John 14:2 NASB). By “house” Jesus did not mean a structure of some kind, for God currently lives in the vast spaces of Heaven and will never be confined to a building. Most NT scholars agree that the “Father’s house” simply means all of the eternal New Creation that He and His people will live in.

“*Dwelling places*” is a more accurate translation of the Greek *monai* here than the common rendering of “rooms” (cf. NIV, NLT, ESV). The only other time this word is used in the NT is by the Apostle John just a few verses later in John 14:23 where Jesus says, *“My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home [monai] with each of them.”* Jesus is promising us a “home” on the New Earth, not a room in a house. Therefore, the famous promise earlier in John 14 could be translated, “Where My Father lives, there will be many homes.”

Unfortunately, the common translation of *monai* here as “rooms” has given many the false impression that Jesus is talking about individual rooms or apartments in some large building or city. On the contrary, David told God he was looking forward to *“The land you have given me . . . a pleasant land . . . a wonderful inheritance!”* (Ps 16:6).

And evidently you will have a home on your land. While Jesus is certainly preparing a new world and Earth for you to live in, Scripture indicates one of the things you will do is build a home. God says after, *“creating new heavens and a new earth . . . In those days people will live in the houses they build and eat the fruit of their own vineyards”* (Isa 65:21). It would seem in some sense we will all be pioneers and homesteaders in a new and beautiful land. And the land you inherit on the New Earth will be yours forever. God promises His people: *“I will firmly plant them there in their own land. They will never again be uprooted from the land I have given them”* (Amos 9:15).

A new and perfect capital city forever

It is interesting to note how much Jesus’ description of the Kingdom of God on the New Earth focuses on the New City. John writes: *“And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband”* (Rev 21:2). The Bible says this is *“a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God”* (Heb 11:10).

God and Jesus will not be confined to one city, let alone one building. God said, *“I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people”* (2 Cor 6:16 NIV). God and Jesus will no doubt be present at times in all the nations and cities on the New Earth. But speaking of the New Jerusalem, the Bible says, *“the throne of God and of*

the Lamb will be there" (Rev 22:3). Accordingly, it would seem to be especially a place that people will regularly visit to worship God. And as we have already quoted, Revelation says of the New Jerusalem:

The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the world will enter the city in all their glory. Its gates will never be closed at the end of day because there is no night there. And all the nations will bring their glory and honor into the city. (Rev 21:24-26)

This city will be huge. When John saw it, "*it was a square, as wide as it was long. In fact, its length and width and height were each 1,400 miles*" (Rev 21:16). This city would cover over half of the United States. But perhaps even more amazing is that it will be 1400 miles high! The orbit of the International Space Station is only about 200 miles high.

This city will be beautiful:

The city [was made] of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. . . . The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. . . . The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. (Rev 21:18-21 NIV)

Why does Jesus go into so much detail about how big and beautiful the New Capital City of the New Earth will be? To help us understand that everything on the New Earth will be bigger and more beautiful than cities, buildings, homes, and gardens on this Earth. The description of the New Jerusalem is another illustration that the Kingdom of God on the New Earth will be all of the best things in this life perfected forever, with none of the bad.

Will we live in the New Capital City? Considering the fact that the Scriptures describe other nations, cities, and homes on the New Earth, perhaps not. Perhaps the New Jerusalem will be more of a place we visit God and Jesus on their thrones. However, the Revelation describes God's people as possessing a "*share . . . in the holy city which are described in this book*" (Rev 22:19). So while it would seem that not all people in the Kingdom of God on the New Earth will permanently live in the New Jerusalem, it would seem that all of us possess something there. Perhaps we will have another home in the New Capital City! A place we visit and stay in when we are visiting God the Father and the Son during those festival days in the New Jerusalem!

New and perfect bodies and minds forever

Do you experience pain in your current body? Are there things you do not like about your body? God wants you to know He is going to give you a new and perfect body. This is another example of your life in the Kingdom of God on the New Earth being a mixture of things on this Earth, but all of

it new, perfect, and eternal. Likewise, you will live in a physical body like you do now, and not just float around as some invisible spirit. But your body will be new, perfect, eternal, beautiful, powerful, and glorious!

First, you will have a body. The Bible says, *“The Lord Jesus Christ . . . will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body”* (Phil 3:20; cf. 1 John 3:2). Fortunately, you know something about what your new body will be like based on Christ’s body after His resurrection. When He appeared, the people who knew Him recognized Him. Evidently He looked something like He did when He lived on the Earth. And He was not merely a spirit, but had *“flesh and bones”* that could be seen and touched. And He even ate a piece of fish to prove it (cf. Luke 24:37-42).

But Jesus’ body was different too. So different that His close friend Mary did not immediately recognize Him until He said her name (cf. John 20:14-16). Also, *“When the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them”* (John 20:19). Apparently in your new body, you will be able to walk through walls and appear anywhere at any time, just like Jesus did.

Your new body will be beautiful. When Jesus was fully revealed at His “transfiguration,” *“His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light”* (Matt 17:2). Likewise, the Bible promises, *“The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father”* (Matt 13:41). Elsewhere the Bible says that God’s *“people . . . will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown. How wonderful and beautiful they will be!”* (Zech 9:16-17). Your body will shine with the glory of God.

The Apostle Paul described your new body as *“imperishable”* and possessing *“glory”* and *“power”* in contrast to the dishonorable and weak aspects of your current body (1 Cor 15:42-44). Accordingly, it is unlikely that you will have to sleep or go to the bathroom in your new body.

But even more glorious than the new body you will have, is that you will also be re-created with a new mind. What God desires is that everything sinful, false, and worthless in your current mind will be completely forgotten. Nothing sinful will be allowed to exist where God lives, including sinful thoughts and memories from your past. But God wants every good and God-glorifying thing in your life to be remembered and rewarded. How will He do that?

First, when you die your current mind will decay into dust and so will all of the sinful memories and false beliefs stored there. That is why God promised: *“See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind”* (Isa 65:17). This is because your new body will also have a new mind.

If your old mind decays with your old body, how will you remember the good things in this life? As discussed more fully in the next chapter, all of the good and God-glorifying things about your life are being recorded in

the Book of Your Life Lived for God (cf. Rev 20:12). When Jesus discusses the contents of that Book with you, you will learn only the good things from your former life.

Likewise, your new mind will not have any sinful programming from this sinful World. This is what the Apostle Paul was looking forward to when he described his struggle with sin and asked, “*Who will rescue me from this body of death [sin]?*” and answered, “*Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!*” (Rom 7:23-25). It is because we get a new mind that we will never sin again.

New and perfect relationships

The theologian John Calvin wrote: “To be in Paradise and live with God is not to speak to each other and be heard by each other, but is only to enjoy God.”¹ Sounds spiritual. But fortunately it is not biblical.

For example, what is one of the first things that is going to happen when the Kingdom of God on the New Earth begins? Jesus said: “*I tell you this, that many Gentiles will come from all over the world—from east and west—and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven*” (Matt 8:11). This is probably “*the wedding feast of the Lamb*” (Rev 19:9). So one of the first things that happens in the Kingdom of God on the New Earth is a huge party! OT saints will be meeting NT saints. It might last for many days! And what fun it will be!

This is another example of God bringing His OT and NT people together in His eternal Kingdom. And it illustrates the importance that God places on community. We will not be in the Kingdom to only be with God, but also to be with each other.

God loves relationships between people. What did He do when He created the Garden of Eden and man? He said, “*It is not good for the man to be alone*” (Gen 2:18) and created a companion for him. What was one of the primary things Jesus did when He was on the Earth? He formed close friendships with twelve men to serve God together.

Perhaps one of the clearest pictures of “Heaven on Earth” in Scripture is the description of the early Church: “*All the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. . . They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes . . . and shared their meals with great joy and generosity*” (Acts 2:44, 46). Do you think that kind of thing is going to end when the eternal Kingdom comes? Of course being with God will be our focus, but we will do this together.

In fact, community will be so important, that God is going to reverse the curse of Babel and give us one language: “*I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder*” (Zeph 3:9 NIV). We will be serving God, but serving Him together.

Nevertheless, you will be an individual. Referring to all of those in the coming Kingdom, Jesus said, *“I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it”* (Rev 2:17). Your *“new name”* will no doubt be unique to you and represent something special about you.

Another apparent difference about relationships in the Kingdom of God on the New Earth is that we will not be husbands and wives. Jesus was asked who a person would be married to in the next life if they had multiple spouses in this life. He answered: *“In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven”* (Matt 22:30). Like the Angels, we will have no need to procreate, nor to have sexual relations, nor perhaps to even have different genders. One reason for no marriages in the Kingdom is that we will in some sense be married to Christ (cf. Eph 5:22-33; 2 Cor 11:2-4; Rom 7:1-4; Rev 19:7-9; 21:17).

But the fact that there will not be marriages, does not mean there will not be love. Remember, the Kingdom of God on the New Earth will be all the best things in this life perfected. We can be assured that in some way there is something even better than marriages in the Kingdom. Nothing is going to be something less than what we experience here.

Nevertheless, we will certainly know our Christian spouse, children, and friends in the New World. Your relationships with them will be among those things recorded in the Book of Your Life Lived for God that will be opened and discussed when you meet Christ (cf. Rev 20:12).

New and perfect work

The scientist and science fiction author Isaac Asimov said:

I don't believe in an afterlife, so I don't have to spend my whole life fearing hell, or fearing heaven even more. For whatever the tortures of hell, I think the boredom of heaven would be even worse.”²

Unfortunately, this unbiblical idea is rather common in Christianity. The medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas believed, “Heaven is a place of motionless absorption in an intellectual contemplation of God.”³ Such an idea might tempt one to consider trying Hell as Asimov suggested.

Fortunately, none of this is true.⁴ As the verse above from Zephaniah promised, we will *“serve him shoulder to shoulder”* (Zeph 3:9 NIV). In Revelation we read, *“No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him”* (22:3⁵). Elsewhere, God says of His people in the Kingdom: *“They will plant vineyards and gardens; they will eat their crops and drink their wine”* (Amos 9:14). *“Townpeople and farmers and shepherds alike will live together in peace and happiness”* (Jer 31:24).

Likewise, Jesus said, *“The Kingdom of Heaven will be like . . .”* a “master” telling His servants, *“I will put you in charge of many things”* (Matt 25:1, 21). To other servants the master will reward them by telling them, *“take charge of ten cities”* (Luke 19:17). Our reward in the Kingdom of God on the New Earth will not be retirement but responsibility.

We will be busy because God is busy. Jesus said regarding how hard He worked while on the Earth, *“My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working”* (John 5:16-17). Likewise Jesus said, *“My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work”* (John 4:34). We too will have work to do for God.

The God we will live with is a visionary, who is always planning and accomplishing things (cf. Eph 1:9-11). He is never bored, and neither will we be bored. Work is a godly thing and was a blessing before the curse of the Fall. *“The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it”* (Gen 2:15 NIV). What the curse did was make work on this Earth difficult, unproductive, and frustrating (cf. Gen 3:17-19). But on the New Earth, this curse will be removed (cf. Rev 22:3), and as God promised His people, *“The work they do will be successful . . . for I will bless them”* (Isa 65:23 TEV).

New and perfect peace and prosperity forever

Finally, many descriptions of the Kingdom of God on the New Earth simply describe a great deal of peace and prosperity:

They will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. (Isa 2:4)

Justice will rule in the wilderness and righteousness in the fertile field. And this righteousness will bring peace. Yes, it will bring quietness and confidence forever. My people will live in safety, quietly at home. They will be at rest. . . . the Lord will greatly bless his people. Wherever they plant seed, bountiful crops will spring up. Their cattle and donkeys will graze freely. (Isa 32:16-20)

I will make a covenant of peace with my people and drive away the dangerous animals from the land. Then they will be able to camp safely in the wildest places and sleep in the woods without fear. I will bless my people and their homes around my holy hill. And in the proper season I will send the showers they need. There will be showers of blessing. The orchards and fields of my people will yield bumper crops. (Ezek 34:25-27)

I will rebuild you, my virgin Israel. You will again be happy and dance merrily with your tambourines [Yes, there will be music!].

Again you will plant your vineyards on the mountains of Samaria and eat from your own gardens there. (Jer 31:4-5)

Everyone will live in peace and prosperity, enjoying their own grapevines and fig trees, for there will be nothing to fear. The Lord of Heaven's Armies has made this promise! (Micah 4:3-4)

David said of your life in the Kingdom of God on the New Earth: *"You will fill me with joy in your presence; with eternal pleasures at your right hand (Psalms 16:11). Your destiny is full joy and eternal pleasures with your Dad.*

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite 1 Corinthians 10:31 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Psalm 16:11 in the translation above or another.

¹ John Calvin, "Psychopannychia", in *Tracts and Treatises of John Calvin*, 3 Vols. (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), Vol. 1, p. 485.

² Isaac Asimov, quoted by Joey Green in *Philosophy on the Go* (2007), 222.

³ Thomas Aquinas, quoted in Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Tyndale, 2004), 319.

⁴ A verse that has been used to support Aquinas' idea of Heaven is Revelation 3:12 which says, *"All who are victorious will become pillars in the Temple of my God, and they will never have to leave it"* (cf. 7:15). Such a statement might imply that we will forever be some sort of fixed feature in a building with God. But of course the wording here should not be taken literally.

We will not be made into stone "pillars," and John says, *"I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple"* (Rev 21:22). What this verse seems to be indicating is that we will have a secure place in our relationship with God. "The 'pillar in the temple' here is metaphorical for the permanent place the believer will have in the final kingdom" (Grant Osborne, *Revelation*, [Baker, 2002], 197).

⁵ The NLT, NET, and ESV translates *latreusousin* in Rev 22:3 as *"his servants will worship him."* The NIV and NASB translate, *"his servants will serve him."* It is used in both ways throughout the NT. NT scholar Grant Osborne explains it "has the double meaning of both 'service' and 'worship'" (*Revelation*, 773). The idea is that one way we worship God is by serving Him (cf. Matt 4:10; Acts 7:7; 27:23; Heb 9:14). Unfortunately, simply translating it in Rev 7:15 and 22:3 as merely "worship" can enforce the false idea that our service to God will be confined to worship in a temple.

Chapter 3.25
Your Dad's Prize
Your Eternal Reward
Matthew 16:27-28

Week 12

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.
- ▶ After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:
 - What is one reason that God allows suffering in your life?
 - What is the most important Day of your life? Why?
 - What is The Book of Your Life Lived for God?
 - What are the kinds of things you will be rewarded for?
 - In one word, what will your reward be? What do you think of this? What might this consist of?
 - Why is it important to make the most of your life for Christ?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?

Because of his efforts to serve God, the Apostle Paul suffered a lot. In an effort to defend his ministry against critics he wrote:

Are they servants of Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served him far more! I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. (2 Cor 11:23)

Paul's story prompts two very important questions. First, why would God allow such a dedicated servant to suffer so much? Secondly, why was Paul so willing to suffer for God? Paul answered both questions earlier in this same letter when he wrote: “*Our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!*” (2 Cor 4:16-18).

God allows temporary suffering in your life so you will have more glory forever. Likewise, Paul believed his suffering was worth it because he would have more glory forever. Of course Paul was also motivated by the love of Christ for him, and the chance to glorify God now (cf. 2 Cor 4:15; 5:14). But he also believed the value of his future and eternal glory would make any suffering for Christ seem “*small*.” Paul believed what Jesus promised:

The Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. (Matt 16:27-28 NIV)

God Almighty is going to reward you generously and eternally for everything you do or suffer for Him.

When will you be rewarded?

The most important day of your life is coming. The Day that you stand before Jesus Christ and meet Him personally for the first time. He will be smiling because the purpose of His appointment with you will be to reward you for everything you ever did for Him. You will be part of the Greatest Awards Ceremony imaginable. This marvelous event is described in Revelation where the Apostle John writes:

And I saw a great white throne and the one [Jesus Christ] sitting on it. The earth and sky fled from his presence, but they found no place to hide. I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books. (Rev 20:11-12)

There are books in Heaven. One of them is the Book of Life that records the name of every person who will be allowed to enter the Kingdom of God on the New Earth. But there are other books in addition to the Book of Life. John says, *"The [risen] dead [which is everyone who has ever lived] were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books."* Evidently, there is a book written in Heaven about every person. There is a Book about you in Heaven. It is The Book of Your Life Lived for God. And it is being added to every day, recording your every good deed.

As pointed out in chapter 3.7 of this study, your sins will not even be mentioned in your Book. God *"canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross"* (Col 2:14). When you stand before Christ you will be *"holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation"* (Col 1:22). The Bible says that when *"the Lord comes . . . each [Christian] will receive their praise from God"* (1 Cor 4:5 NIV), not condemnation (Rom 8:1).

Only your good deeds of faith and devotion to God, and love for people, are recorded in The Book of Your Life Lived for God. This Day is to evaluate what you did in this life, and receive your rewards for the next life. And your Lord and Savior is looking forward to opening your Book and publicly praising and rewarding you for everything in it!

How long will your personal appointment with Christ be? Longer than you think. This will not be just a 15 minute chat with the King of Kings. The description above says at this point in God's plan, *"earth and sky fled from his presence"* and will no longer exist. Not only will Creation have ceased, but time also. Even if the Greatest Awards Ceremony takes 10,000 years it will not matter because eternity will have begun. It will take a long time for Christ to recognize, publicly praise you, and reward you for every good thing you ever did for Him. And He will gladly spend that time with you!

The Prophet Malachi spoke of these “books” that will be “opened” (Rev 20:12) when we stand before Christ:

Then those who feared the Lord spoke with each other, and the Lord listened to what they said. In his presence, a scroll of remembrance was written to record the names of those who feared him and always thought about the honor of his name. (Mal 3:16)

“The Lord” is watching, and even listening, to every moment of your life, and constantly recording in The Book of Your Life Lived for God every public or private thing you do for “the honor of his name.” He is recording these things because what you do for Him is all that will matter about your life. What He records in your Book will be all that you have to show for your life. It will not matter whether you were rich or poor, married or single, born in 2000 B.C. or 2000 A.D., living in America or the Amazon jungle. The only thing that will matter at the Greatest Awards Ceremony is how much you trusted, loved, obeyed, served, suffered for, and glorified your Father and your King with your life.

The most important Day of your life is coming. “The Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. (Matt 16:27-28). God Almighty is going to reward you generously and eternally for everything you do or suffer for Him.

What will you be rewarded for?

What are the kinds of things that the Lord will record in The Book of Your Life Lived for God and reward you for? Jesus said, “If you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of my followers, you will surely be rewarded” (Matt 10:42). Have you ever felt like you are not very important, and what you do is not very important either? Jesus wants you to know that “you will surely be rewarded” for even doing the smallest things for the “least” of His “followers.” If Jesus will be rewarding you for something as small as giving “a cup of cold water” to someone, what other seemingly small things is He recording about your life?!

Things like . . . When you changed your baby’s diaper in the middle of the night for the fifteenth time that day. When you got up in the morning to go to a job you really didn’t like, in order to support your family. When you spent 15 minutes before work, praising Him and listening to Him in His word. When you spent time praying for other people. He heard you, He recorded it, and He will reward you for those prayers. “Your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matt 6:4 NIV).

Every time a Christian parent yelled at their child is already forgiven and will be forgotten. But every time they loved their child has been recorded and will be rewarded forever.

Every time a Christian wife disrespected her husband is already forgiven and will be forgotten. But every time she treated him as more important than herself has been recorded and will be rewarded forever.

Every time a Christian husband did not care about his wife as much as Christ does is already forgiven and will be forgotten. But every time and everything he sacrificed for her has been recorded and will be rewarded forever.

Whatever money you foolishly spent on worldly possessions is already forgiven and will be forgotten. But every cent you gave to your church has been recorded and will be rewarded forever.

Every time you decided not to love or sacrificially serve your Christian brothers and sisters is already forgiven and will be forgotten. But on that Day, *“The King will say, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’*” (Matt 25:40), and it has been recorded and will be rewarded forever.

In a previous chapter we claimed that the most pleasurable thing you will do on this Earth is bless other people through your spiritual gifts. Is it not remarkable that the things you will most enjoy on this Earth, will be the very things you will be rewarded for on the New Earth!? *“God is not unjust. He will not forget how hard you have worked for him and how you have shown your love to him by caring for other believers”* (Heb 6:10).

Still tempted to think the mundane and normal things you do throughout your day will be forgotten and forever meaningless? The Apostle Paul told first century slaves, who were certainly doing all kinds of meaningless work:

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. (Col 3:23-24 NIV)

If slaves will be eternally rewarded for all the menial tasks they perform for their masters, then think about what God will reward you for, if you do it for Him! It is not WHAT you do that really matters, but WHY you do it, HOW you do it, and WHO you do it for. You can earn a lot more than just money at your job. If you dedicate your work to God and do it to glorify Him, you will really be adding to your eternal “retirement fund”!

Jesus said, *“Many who are the greatest now [on this Earth] will be least important then [on the New Earth], and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then”* (Matt 19:30). Many of those who were slaves will have more glory and responsibility and honor in the Kingdom than those who were presidents. Many of those who were mothers will have more treasure in the Kingdom than those who were pastors.

It does not even matter what you actually accomplish on Earth. The earthly results of what you do are rarely up to you. You might dearly love and sacrificially serve your spouse, children, employer, and church, but have little impact on them because they do not appreciate what you have done. But God will. He sees, records, and appreciates even what you merely TRY to do for Him, regardless of what it actually accomplishes. God does not reward you based on a commission or results, but the work you do.

What were you willing to plan, pursue, and even risk in this life for the advancement of God's Kingdom and glory? What did you attempt for God, even though you did not know if it would bear the fruit you wanted? In light of eternity, these are among the most important questions the Christian can ask . . . and hopefully answer.

When your love for people is rejected and your deeds for God "fail," you need to believe what the Prophet Isaiah said: *"I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing at all. Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand, and my reward is with my God"* (Isa 49:4 NIV). *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord"* and regardless of what it is, or the results, *"you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving"* (Col 3:23-24).

All of this adds up to one amazing truth. There are a multitude of things being written in The Book of Your Life Lived for God every day! It is not unreasonable to believe that there is an Angel personally assigned to you for this very purpose: monitoring and recording every good thing you do. And when you actually see The Book of Your Life Lived for God, you are going to be AMAZED at how big that Book is. That's why it will take a lot of time for Christ to talk to you about it, and praise and reward you for everything in it.

But it will not only be the thousands upon thousands of little things you did for God and people that will be recorded and rewarded. There will also be big, hard, and painful things written in The Book of Your Life Lived for God. No child of God goes through this life without experiencing difficult tests of faith and suffering and sacrifices for God. It is the things that cost you the most, and hurt you the most, that you will be the most thankful for on the Day you meet with Christ. Because it will be those things for which you will receive the most praise, highest honor, and greatest reward.

Jesus said, *"Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid."* Think about actually doing that. It would be hard! Why did Jesus tell us to do this? Because *"then your reward from heaven will be very great"* (Luke 6:35). If you want *"very great"* rewards from God, then you must do very great things for God.

Jesus said, *"God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad!"* (Matt 5:11-12). Why?

Public ridicule, rejection, and slander are very painful. Religious persecution may mean your job and house are taken away, or you go to prison for decades of your life, or you are repeatedly beaten, starved, and tortured just because you follow Christ. Even worse, your spouse and children might be publicly ridiculed, imprisoned, and tortured because they follow Christ. Why would Jesus tell us to be “happy” and “very glad” if this happens? Because, “*a great reward awaits you in heaven*” (Matt 5:11-12).

You say, “That would not be worth it. I’ll choose comfort instead of suffering.” But that’s because you do not believe Christ. He promised His reward will be worth it. We often pray for God to protect us from all harm and suffering. Why? If we understood our reward for such things we might think differently. God told His people, “*I promise this very day that I will repay two blessings for each of your troubles*” (Zech 9:12).

Some Christians struggle with being motivated by eternal rewards at all. They are tempted to think that simply serving God out of love and gratitude for what Christ has already done should be enough. They ask, “Why do we need to be motivated to serve God with the promise of rewards?” But people who ask such a question have probably never really suffered for God. People who really have suffered for God can tell you that the promise of eternal rewards for their suffering means a lot to them. It was because the Apostle Paul suffered so much that he spoke of his eternal rewards so much (cf. 2 Cor 4:16-18; 2 Tim 1:12; 4:6-8).

The most important Day of your life is coming. “*The Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.*” (Matt 16:27-28). God Almighty is going to reward you generously and eternally for everything you do or suffer for Him.

What will be your reward?

This is another one of those things that Christ is asking you to trust Him with. The biblical details of what your rewards will actually be is a lot less than we would like. Why is this? Because knowing WHO will be rewarding you is essentially all you need to know. Your Rewarder has unlimited powers, amazing creativity, and is the Universe’s foremost expert on what will make you happy. And He greatly desires to show you His appreciation for everything you do for Him. God does everything with immense generosity and perfect decision-making, including rewarding you. He promised that if you knew your reward for even the most painful things you suffer on Earth, you would believe the suffering was worth the reward.

Remember that the One rewarding you is a very generous and gracious Father, always giving His servants much, much, more than they deserve. The Bible says, “*God raised us up with Christ . . . in order that in the*

coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6-7 NIV). The “kindness” your Father “expressed” in having Christ die for your sins is just the beginning. Throughout “the coming ages” of eternity He wants to “show” you, “the incomparable riches of His grace.” If you fear you will be disappointed with your reward, you do not know your Father. He will amaze you with His grace and generosity.

So what does the Scriptures say about your reward? What will it be like? The Bible sums up the answer to that question with one word: Glory! That’s right. As you learned in a previous chapter, your ultimate purpose in life is to glorify God. Likewise, God’s ultimate goal for you is to glorify you. God wants to be glorified and He wants to glorify you. Paul wrote:

Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. (Rom 8:17-18)

Therefore we do not lose heart. . . For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. (2 Cor 4:16-17 NIV)

Being glorified for all eternity meant a great deal to the Apostle Paul. It must also mean a great deal to God because this is what He is going to reward us with: Glory! And the Apostle Peter believed the same and wrote:

There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. (1 Peter 1:6-7)

What will the “*glory*” that God gives you be like? In a previous chapter we talked about what God’s glory is like and wrote:

Glory is the revelation of someone’s greatness to inspire awe. Their greatness comes from their beauty, power, wealth, wisdom, and character. And the revelation and recognition of who they are results in praise, honor, amazement, adoration, and glory.

And all of this is what God wants to share with you for all eternity. Glory includes the awe, praise, and honor of people. Of course we will all be in awe of God. But people will be in awe of you too.

Because some will be rewarded more than others, they will have more glory than others. This means they will have more praise, honor,

possessions, power, responsibility, and authority than others. And even their appearance will be more glorious than others. Of course, no matter how much glory, praise, honor, authority, and beauty God shares with us, He will always outshine everyone.

What will the source of your eternal glory be? First, your position of authority and power in the Kingdom. The Bible says, *“If we endure, we will also reign with Him”* (2 Tim 2:12). Jesus promised His disciples: *“I assure you that when the world is made new and the Son of Man sits upon his glorious throne, you who have been my followers will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel”* (Matt 19:28).

But ruling will not only be for the Apostles. In Daniel we read, *“The sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. (7:27 NIV)."*

Jesus promised some servants they *“will be governor over five cities”* and others *“will be governor of ten cities as your reward”* (Luke 19:17, 19). In another teaching Jesus promised those who have been faithful to serve Him in this life, *“I will put you in charge of many things”* (Matt 25:21). Having authority and responsibility to rule a part of the Kingdom of God on Earth in a godly and loving way will be part of your glory.

Another aspect may be your appearance. Some will look more glorious than others. Just by looking at them you will be able to tell how much they served and sacrificed for Christ. In one sense, all *“the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father”* (Matt 13:43). But in speaking about the future glory of our body, Paul used the analogy of the *“stars”* and noted that, *“the stars differ from each other in their glory”* (1 Cor 15:41). And so might our new bodies.

In the previous chapter we described the wonderful pleasures of the Kingdom of God on the New Earth. These things will be for everyone. But God is honest with us: some people will have more than others. As someone has put it, everyone’s cup in the Kingdom will be full, but some people’s cups will be bigger than others. Some people will forever have more glory, authority, power, treasure, land, possessions, and joy in the Kingdom of God on the New Earth than others. God is serious about rewarding His people for their choices in this life, in a meaningful way in the next life. Your experience for all eternity will depend on how you live for God in this life.

The Apostle Paul warned us:

On the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person’s work has any value. If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames. (1 Cor 3:13-15)

What does this warning mean? First, remember that in the Day of your evaluation there will be no public condemnation (cf. Rom 8:1) and God Himself will *“present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation”* (Col 1:22 NIV).

Secondly, when will this burning up of worthless things in your life occur? Will you be present to see it? Probably not. The only other biblical reference to such a thing is in 2 Peter which says: *“The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare”* (3:10). Before God creates the New Heaven and Earth, the old one will disappear (cf. Matt 24:35), apparently burned up in fire. In this fire everything worthless about life on this Earth, including your life, will be burned up as well. And this is why the good and valuable things you have done will be recorded and preserved in The Book of Your Life Lived for God.

But do not miss the solemn warning here about your life. Everything you do, or do not do, matters. EVERYTHING. Everything you do is either worthless to God or precious to Him. The worthless will be burned away and the precious will be recorded and rewarded for all eternity. What you do in this life will affect the rest of your life forever. For example Jesus said, *“If you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God’s laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven”* (Matt 5:19).

Jesus was essentially giving the same warning as Paul when He taught, *“Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven”* (Matt 6:19-20).

You cannot lose your salvation because you are saved by God’s grace. But God is warning you that you can *“suffer great loss”* of potential eternal reward because of bad choices you make in this life. While the burning up of your worthless deeds will probably occur with the burning up of Creation itself, this does not mean that you will not know you could have done more for God. Perhaps this is why we are told that when we meet Christ, *“He will wipe every tear from their eyes”* (Rev 21:4). Is it possible that we might suffer some remorse for not taking God and His word more seriously?

However, the Scriptures regarding eternal rewards are not just a warning, but a statement about your significance and the importance of everything you do. And these warnings are an INVITATION. An invitation by God that, *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord . . . since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward”* (Col 3:23-24 NIV).

The Christian author C. S. Lewis wrote:

If you read history you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next world. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this world.¹

Do not make the same mistake. The Apostle put it this way:

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory. (Col 3:1-4)

How do you do that? How do you, “set your sights on the realities of heaven” and “Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth” so that you will make the most of every day? By thanking God for the coming Kingdom of God on the New Earth every day. By thinking about The Book of Your Life Lived for God every day. By putting some verses from this chapter somewhere you will see them every day. Maybe by reading this chapter of the FAITH study every day.

The most important Day of your life is coming. “The Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. (Matt 16:27-28). God Almighty is going to reward you generously and eternally for everything you do or suffer for Him.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite Psalm 16:11 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Matthew 16:27-28 in the translation above or another.
- ▶ With this chapter you have completed *Christian Essentials* study #3: FAITH. For more help in making the most of your life, continue through studies #4 and #5, FREEDOM and FRUIT.
- ▶ Don't forget about completing that second Barnabas Group Project for this FAITH study. Remember, you will be rewarded for it!

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Harper, 2001).

Appendix A

“P.O.W.E.R. Plan” for God Times

Praise for your Dad’s character and blessings (≈2 minutes):

- Consider kneeling for this portion of your God Time.
- What are things about your Dad to worship Him or thank Him for?
- How has your Dad answered your prayers?

Openness to your Dad about any negative emotions (≈2 min.):

- Are there any bad feelings you are struggling with today such as worry, anger, apathy, discouragement? Talk to God about these. Or thank Him that the powers of the Spirit are controlling you today like love, joy, and peace.

Word from your Dad (≈20 min.):

- If you are struggling with bad feelings: Ask why you are feeling that way. Our feelings are always based on what we are believing. Bad feelings not of the Spirit are always based on believing lies. Try to understand the lie that is causing your anger, fear, or discouragement. Then “*take up the shield of faith*” which is believing the truth of God and use “*the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God*” to confront the lie (Eph 6:16-17). If you believe the truth, “*the truth will set you free*” (John 8:32).
- If reading the *Christian Essentials* study: Answer the questions at the beginning of the chapter and follow the instructions at its end.
- If reading the Bible: *Pray* the Bible, thanking God for promises and blessing in the text and asking for help to obey commands. Make God Times a two-way conversation with God!

Entreaties and prayer for yourself and others (≈5 min.):

- What are 2-3 specific things you are asking God to do in your life right now?
- What family and friends can you pray Eph 3:14-19 for?
- What lost people in your life can you pray for?
- What is happening in your life today that you want God’s blessing for?

Resolutions to your Dad (≈3 min.):

- How can you be kind to someone today?
- What commitments do you need to be faithful with?
- What is something that could be better with more planning?

Appendix B

“P.O.W.E.R. Plan” for Barnabas Group≈ 80 minutes

Praise for your Dad’s character and blessings (≈5 minutes):

- What do you want to thank your Dad for this week? How has your Dad answered your prayers?
- Take turns thanking Him for these things now.

Openness about any negative emotions (≈15 min.):

- Are there bad emotions you have been struggling with this week including anger, worry, discouragement, or lust?
- If so, what were you believing that made you feel that way?
- What would be truth from Jesus that would set you free from these feelings?

Word from your Dad (≈45 min.):

- Ask one another how consistent and encouraging your God Times have been this week.
- Take turns answering the questions at the beginning and end of the chapters assigned this week in the *Christians Essentials* study.
- What did you learn from any Projects you were assigned this week?
- Recite your verses for this week. A list can be found in Appendix C.

Entreaties and prayer for yourself and others (≈10 min.):

- What are 2-3 specific things you are asking, seeking, and knocking for God to do in your life right now?
- What family and friends can you pray Eph 3:14-19 for?
- Who do you know that needs Christ in their life and you can pray for?
- Take turns praying for each other.

Resolutions to your Dad (≈5 min.):

- Are there any actions you want to pursue because of your discussion?
- Is there anything you would like your group to hold you accountable to this week?
- How did you do with any commitments last week?

Appendix C

Barnabas Group Project

But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. (Jas 1:22)

It requires a lot more effort, planning, and time to do something rather than just read or talk about it. It is important to read, study, and discuss the truth. But it is also important to practice love. So many Christians evaluate their maturity and spirituality on how many "Bible studies" they have completed instead of how many people they have actually served and blessed. Those Christians "*are only fooling [them]selves*" that they are living Authentic Christianity.

We want the *Christian Essentials* to not only help you learn real Christianity, but to do real Christianity. An important part of that is your Barnabas Group Project.

Your Barnabas Group should start now to discuss and decide what your Barnabas Group Projects will be, and when you will complete them. This FAITH study is 12 weeks and you are encouraged to complete 2 Barnabas Group Projects within that time.

Here are some suggestions:

- Devote a Saturday to your project.
- Talk to one another about a personal project in one of your homes that you can help one another with.
- Think about a friend in the church that you could team up together to help in some way.
- Ask a Pastor in your church if they know of someone who needs help with something.
- Think of a non-Christian friend to serve in some way.

Happy serving!

Appendix D

Memory Verses for FAITH Study

All verses are in *New Living Translation* (NLT) unless otherwise noted.

Reference	Verse
1 Pet 5:8-9	<i>Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith.</i>
Eph 2:12	<i>You lived in this world without God and without hope.</i>
2 Cor 6:18	<i>“I will be your Father, and you will be My sons and daughters,” says the Lord Almighty.</i>
Ps 103:13	<i>The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate.</i>
1 John 4:10	<i>He loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (NIV)</i>
1 John 1:7	<i>The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (NIV)</i>
Rom 5:1-2	<i>Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. (NET)</i>
Gal 5:1	<i>Christ has truly set us free.</i>
1 Cor 4:6	<i>Learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” (NIV)</i>
Gen 2:16-17	<i>You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden— except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.</i>
1 Cor 7:36	<i>If . . . he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. (NIV)</i>
Heb 13:5	<i>God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” (NIV)</i>

1 Cor 10:13	<i>God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. (NIV)</i>
Rom 8:31-32	<i>If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?</i>
Ps 139:13-14	<i>You created the deepest parts of my being. You put me together inside my mother's body. How you made me is amazing and wonderful. (NIRV)</i>
Rom 12:6	<i>In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well.</i>
1 Pet 3:4	<i>You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God.</i>
Gen 1:27	<i>God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.</i>
1 John 5:14-15	<i>This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him. (NIV)</i>
Phil 4:6-7	<i>Do not worry about anything. Instead pray about everything, asking God for what you need. Do this with giving thanks to God. When you make your requests known to God in this way, the peace of God which surpasses understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.</i>
Acts 20:35	<i>It is more blessed to give than to receive.</i>
1 Cor 10:31	<i>Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.</i>
Ps 16:11	<i>You will fill me with joy in your presence; with eternal pleasures at your right hand.</i>
Matt 16:27-28	<i>The Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. (NIV)</i>

Appendix E

The Seven Emotional Needs of Humans

As noted, God’s promises to meet these needs will be covered in more detail in this *Christian Essentials* study #3: *Your FAITH*.

7 Human Needs	Surface feelings if unmet	Deep feelings when unmet	Chapters in <i>FAITH</i> Your Dad’s:
Hope Being confident of having a deep desire fulfilled	Angry	Hopeless Want to die	Paradise 3.25
Approval Being accepted in a favorable way by others		Rejected Condemned Shame	Pardon 3.5-3.8
Protection Being secure from harm		Unsafe Vulnerable	Protection 3.13 Provision 3.14-3.15
Power Being free and able to do what you want to do	Depressed	Trapped Inadequate Enslaved	Power 3.24-3.26
Importance Being valuable and useful	Worried	Worthless Insignificant	Personality 3.16-3.19 Purpose 3.23
Enjoyment Experiencing pleasure		Pain Boredom Depression	Pleasure 3.22
Relationship Being with another		Lonely Separated	Presence 3.12

Appendix F

Spiritual Power Test

How do you know if you are being controlled by the Spirit or the sinful nature? BY HOW YOU FEEL. If you struggle with any of the things listed under “Common Signs of the Sinful Nature” on a daily or weekly basis, put a ✓ by it. Adding up your “Spiritual Power Quotient” will give you some idea of how much of your life is controlled by the Holy Spirit.

✓	Common Signs of the Sinful Nature <i>I feel . . .</i>	Spirit’s Powers <i>I feel . . .</i>	
	Angry/Frustrated	Love	Compassion through Christ
	Lonely		The presence of Christ
	Jealous of others		Fulfilled in Christ
	Worthless		Valued by Christ
	Rejected		Accepted by Christ
	Defensive		Trusting Christ
	Unattractive		Created by Christ
	Guilt/Shame		Forgiven in Christ
	Suspicious		Sincere in Christ
	Useless/Purposeless		Living for Christ
	Ignored/Left Out		Wanted by Christ
	Complaining	Joy	Grateful for Christ
	Depressed		Joyful for Christ
	Bored		Serving Christ
	Hard/no emotion		Free to feel through Christ
	Worried/Afraid	Peace	Calm in Christ
	Hopeless		Hopeful in Christ
	Directionless		Focused on Christ
	Confused/Stupid		Wisdom from Christ
	Addicted/Tempted	Power	Free in Christ
	Exhausted		Energized by Christ
	Overwhelmed/ Inadequate		Capable through Christ
	Lustful		Pleasure through Christ
	Lazy/Uncaring		Eager to serve Christ
	Trapped/Stuck		Free in Christ

Appendix G

The Four Basic Personality Traits

Identify the degree a statement describes you in the circumstances described under each heading:

0 = Never 1 = Sometimes 2 = Often 3 = Always

Leader	
<i>When a task or people need leading</i>	
People follow me	
I think big	
I enjoy leading	
I take charge when a leader is needed	
I am persistent	
I like to keep busy	
I am confident	
I am very independent	
I like solving problems	
I like achieving big goals	
I like working hard	
I enjoy change	
I am productive	
I am a serious person	
I make decisions easily	
I am not intimidated by others	
I like taking risks	
I have a lot of ideas	
My mind is constantly working on something	
I am not afraid to confront people.	
Emotional people make me uncomfortable	
I have a hard time having deep, intimate relationships	
I hate wasting time	
I hate rules if they block my goals	
I like to start new things	
Total	

Relator	
<i>When I need to meet or speak to people</i>	
I love being around people	
People energize me	
I am optimistic about life	
I like to inspire and encourage people	
I dislike being alone for long	
I am normally joyful	
I seek to have fun	
People say I am friendly	
I make friends easily	
I like talking	
I like telling stories	
It's hard for me if people do not like me	
I like being appreciated	
I dislike keeping track of details	
I easily forgive people	
People really enjoy being around me	
I like to show affection through touching people	
It is easy for me to express my feelings	
I dislike seeing others alone	
I am a generous person	
It is easy for me to sympathize with people	
I enjoy change	
I enjoy public speaking	
I easily mix with others	
I am spontaneous	
Total	

Helper	
<i>When someone needs help</i>	
I really like helping people when I can	
I do not like unexpected changes	
I often see humor in things	
Others say I am reliable	
Others would say I am peaceful	
Being productive is important to me	
I would rather follow than lead	
I would rather listen to people than have to talk	
Confronting people is difficult for me	
I prefer not to be rushed to get something done	
Making decisions is difficult for me	
I would rather be unseen than the center of attention	
I would rather work with people than alone	
My mood is consistent no matter my circumstances	
Doing the right thing is important to me	
I get to meetings on time	
I am prepared for meetings	
I like routine	
I like to be efficient	
I would rather do work myself than delegate it	
I do not like taking risks	
I stay away from “high drama” situations	
Others would say I am a loyal friend	
Others would say I keep my commitments	
I am a patient person	
Total	

Thinker	
<i>When something needs to be figured out</i>	
I think deeply about things	
Accuracy in my work is very important to me	
I enjoy making something better	
I am very committed to what interests me	
Having to talk to people a lot wears me out	
I want to know the reasons for things	
I enjoy being alone	
I am good with details	
Chaos makes me uncomfortable	
I am a very neat person	
Others would say I am smart	
I enjoy music and/or art	
I struggle with being moody	
I like work that requires a high level of precision	
I like work that requires a high level of excellence	
I enjoy creating things	
I am very concerned that Scripture is interpreted accurately	
I do not need supervision to get my work done	
I do not like to be the center of attention	
I am really good at focusing on a task	
Others would call me reliable	
My friends would say I am loyal	
I enjoy researching things	
I like to follow rules	
My life is scheduled	
Total	

Understanding your score

Your highest score on the survey above indicates your primary personality trait. Your second highest score indicates your secondary trait. A few people may have a dominant trait with two equally prevalent secondary traits. Most will have some points in all the personality traits. This is often due to spiritual gifts that may “balance” your personality profile. Nonetheless, most will have a primary and secondary trait that together make up about 80% of your personality. There is no real significance in the scores except to compare them to your other scores.

Remember The Four Basic Personality Traits are four ingredients of personality in their pure form. This is why you will more accurately understand yourself by considering your blend of the primary and secondary attributes. The 12 basic combinations will be:

Leader/Relater	Relater/Leader	Helper/Leader	Thinker/Leader
Leader/Helper	Relater/Helper	Helper/Relater	Thinker/Relater
Leader/Thinker	Relater/Thinker	Helper/Thinker	Thinker/Helper

Understanding your personality ¹

The best way for a Christian to identify their personality is to focus on their strengths. This is why we have limited the descriptions of The Four Basic Personality Traits in this Appendix to their positive aspects. You will be tempted to think about others when reading these descriptions. But for now, focus on understanding yourself.

After identifying your more specific combination of personality traits do the following. First, read the basic description for both your primary and secondary traits. Then read the blend that reflects your dominant and secondary personality traits.

Take some time to think through the descriptions and rejoice in who God has made you. They describe the best of who you are especially when controlled by the Spirit. And they are who the people around you need you to be and how you uniquely display the personality of your Dad.

Leader personality

Leader

When God wants something done on this Earth He uses Leaders like Joshua, David, and the Apostle Paul to initiate, guide, protect, and accomplish those tasks. The saying is true: “Leaders are born, not made” and God created some people to be those natural born Leaders.

Leaders are not afraid of leadership and readily accept it when it is placed on them. If it isn't, they often volunteer for it. They are typically known as "take-charge" persons, especially able to give practical direction to others in a variety of circumstances. People are happy to follow Leaders when the Spirit of God controls them. And that is perhaps the best way to know if someone is a Leader: there are people happily following them.

The Leader is quick to recognize opportunities and equally as quick at diagnosing the best way to make use of them. They have a strong, well-organized mind, though details usually bore them.

A Leader is a natural motivator of other people. They readily earn the confidence of others and just seem authoritative to others. They are very focused and goal-oriented, and can inspire others to embrace and pursue their goals. Therefore, those around a Leader will find their own lives to be more productive and fruitful as they serve the Leader's vision.

Like Relaters, Leaders are usually good communicators and make good preachers. However, Relaters will speak with more emotion, humor, and stories for the purpose of encouraging their audience. Leaders speak very strong, with more clarity, about more serious topics, in order to permanently change people and the way they will live.

Leaders thrive on change. In fact, if things around them are not changing enough they will do something to cause more change. Change is good in the mind of a Leader.

Leaders are naturally good delegators, unless they have a second personality trait like a Thinker who is not.

Strong

Leaders are a strong personality. They will be noticed. They are not quiet. Their desire is to impact people and situations wherever they go.

Because leadership is God's purpose for weaving this personality trait into them, He uniquely equips them to be Leaders. Therefore they usually have strong wills, are self-disciplined, and very independent. Because leaders must often stand alone or ahead of others, they often experience loneliness. But God has enabled the Leader personality to be content with that. This is one reason He did not make Leaders very emotional or relational.

A Leader's strength to lead also comes from a natural confidence in their abilities. Their confidence is usually justified by the many abilities that God gives them. Their confidence, body language, and tone of voice communicate authority to others. They look people in the eye when speaking with them and greet people with a firm handshake.

Leaders do not care much about what people think of them. This is because God often wants them to lead people where they do not want to go, or where no one else is going. This can be a great weakness in an arrogant

leader, but a necessary ability for good leadership. Instead of following and pleasing people, God has called Leaders to confront and speak against those who are doing wrong and hurting people. Leaders are not afraid to challenge authority if they feel it will help people. Leaders can be hard on other Leaders and it requires very respected Leaders to effectively lead other Leaders. You will always know where you stand with a Leader. They are not afraid to tell you, nor are they interested in hiding it from you.

Because God wants Leaders to lead people through obstacles and difficulties, He has given them a unique strength against such things. In fact, the harder difficulties become, the stronger the Leader becomes. While obstacles to goals weaken some of the other personalities, they actually energize the Leader. Obstacles are just one more thing to overcome and the Leader is confident they will be. The Leader believes God will make them stronger than the obstacle or difficulty.

Leaders get much of their strength to overcome obstacles and remain positive in hard situations from the fact that God has not made them very emotional. They do not struggle with fear or discouragement as much as the other personalities. This makes them strong for the role God wants them to fulfill.

Driven

Because God normally gives Leaders a lot of important, beneficial things to accomplish they have the unique ability to work long and hard. Leaders thrive on activity and action, and are rarely idle. God has made Leaders serious-minded people because they have the responsibility of helping people accomplish serious tasks.

Leaders are very productive. Others marvel at how much they get done. This is because they are driven to accomplish goals, able to focus on one thing, and are rarely perfectionists. They would rather get a lot of things done to a sufficient level, than much fewer things done to perfection.

Leaders measure their progress in life by their achievements and successes, and need to feel like they are making progress as a person and in their tasks. Leaders often succeed where others fail. Not because their plans are better than others, but because they are still “pushing ahead” after others have become discouraged and quit.

The God-given drive to accomplish tasks in a Leader gives them a very simple and practical view of life. Some tasks that God wants completed demand a high level of commitment, time, and energy, and Leaders are built to give this.

Daring

Leaders are not afraid to try things. They formulate ideas and are venturesome enough to launch out in new directions. Most entrepreneurs are Leaders. The Leader's outlook on life is based on a natural self-confidence that makes them optimistic. They are adventuresome to the point that they often leave a secure position for the challenge of the unknown. They have a natural pioneering spirit. When appraising a new situation, they rarely see the pitfalls or potential problems but merely keep their eyes on the goal. Somehow they have an unshakable confidence that no matter what difficulties arise, they will be able to solve them. And even if problems or emergencies do arrive, they are quick and bold in their response to them.

Leaders are not afraid of this world. They do not think harm will befall them. They have a very strong sense of security from which they take risks that no one else would. This is why Helpers and Thinkers can think Leaders are a little crazy.

Decisive

Many hard decisions need to be made in life for the benefit of people. God made Leaders for this purpose. They are able to make decisions for themselves and others rather easily and quickly. Because of their decision-making responsibility, God has given them a mind that is more logical and less emotional. They are not afraid to make hard decisions because they believe doing so benefits people.

Leaders are often criticized for all the above traits. They can seem bull-headed, too serious, and even foolish because of the risks they take. But what business, church, or even country was started, or a war won, without a bull-headed, dead serious, Leader who was not afraid to take risks? If there were not Leaders, the best and most important things in life would never get started. They require too much risk and persistence for the other personalities. In a world so desperately needing change, and people themselves needing change, we can be thankful that God put the foremost change-agents of Leaders in this world.

Leader personality in the Trinity

Leaders seem to be uniquely designed by God to reflect the Father. God the Father is the initiating, decision-making member of the Trinity (cf. Eph 1:3-12). The Father sent the Son to accomplish a task (cf. John 3:16). And eventually, everything will be placed under the Father's leadership (cf. 1 Cor 15:28). God the Father is the ultimate Leader in the Universe. Everything starts and ends with Him.

Leader personalities in the Bible

Nehemiah: He saw a task that needed done, developed a strategy to accomplish it, obtained the resources and people necessary, was undeterred by enemies, defended the work against them, kept the workers focused, did not tolerate sin, and built a wall around the entire city of Jerusalem in 52 days. That is a Leader. And an example of why God put them on this Earth.

The Apostle Paul: He was clearly a Leader as reflected in what he wrote in the Bible passages suggested in the “Comparison Table of The Four Basic Personality Traits” provided at the end of this appendix. Even before Paul was saved, he was a foremost and dedicated leader in the Jewish crusade against the Church. And after coming to Christ, he was equally fanatic about accomplishing the most he could in the mission God gave Him.

Talk about being a little fanatical, we read: *“Then some Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowds to their side. They stoned Paul and dragged him out of town, thinking he was dead. But as the believers gathered around him, he got up and went back into the town”* (Acts 14:19-20). That is a Leader.

How a Leader relates to God

Leaders are not naturally relational and will have a harder time connecting in a personal way with God, and certainly struggle to connect emotionally. It is not the grace and love of God that attracts them to Him as much as He gives them a Purpose. The fact that Jesus has given them important things to do makes them feel very loved.

And because they want to get on with doing those things they will struggle with prayer, and even spending time with God at all. They struggle more than anyone with understanding how much they need God. Therefore, asking for His help is not natural for them.

Leaders will appreciate most the Resolutions part of the P.O.W.E.R. plan for both God Times and Barnabas Groups. But will struggle with the Praise part because they are not natural celebrators. Once one thing is accomplished they are on to the next. Likewise, they will struggle to express feelings to God or others in the Openness part of a God Time or Barnabas Group. Finally, they will enjoy the Word part of the P.O.W.E.R. plan, but will especially appreciate the commands of Scripture more than the doctrines.

Relater Personality

Friendly

What does our Dad want more in this world than love? It is the most valuable thing on this Earth. And Relaters were created by God to provide love more than any other personality. Loving people is natural, energizing, and easy for Relaters, and having a positive impact on people is what makes them the happiest.

Relaters are people-people. Their whole life and happiness revolves around interacting with people. They are the most friendly personality you will ever meet. Their favorite thing in life is making a new friend. Leaders initiate projects. Relaters initiate relationships. They are confident and outgoing individuals who value contact with other people and the development of positive relationships.

Relating to others is what a Relater does best. They are open to others and confident in their own social abilities, allowing them to interact positively in almost any situation. Their strong and evident confidence, coupled with their genuine interest in the ideas and especially feelings of other people, are often found charming by those around them.

Relaters tend to have low expectations of others, making it easier for them to be attracted to anyone. They are very outgoing and initiate talking with people. In fact they really like talking. And sometimes they talk before thinking. But because they are usually saying something positive, kind, or funny, people like it. They are the life of any party.

But they get the most happiness from bringing people together to enjoy one another. Relaters are God's networkers and gatherers. They are looking for that 1 lost sheep who has separated themselves from the 99. They seek them, love them, and bring them back to the flock so they can experience the blessings of fellowship too. This is why they are so valuable to the local church.

In person they are warm and easy to like. They often express affection through physical contact. And it is easy for them to express their feelings. Because relationships are so important to them, and they have a naturally positive attitude toward life and people, they forgive people much easier than any of the other personalities. Very rarely, if ever, will you find a Relater holding a grudge against someone, or even speaking badly about other people.

Relaters do not like to be alone. Ever. The more people around them, the happier and more energized they are. It is solitude that exhausts them. And they hate to see others who are alone and will work hard at including them in whatever they are doing with other people.

Relaters need to feel accepted by those around them, and react badly if they perceive themselves to be rejected or disliked. Praise and approval

make a strong impression on them, and they will sometimes go to great lengths to achieve this kind of reaction from other people.

Because of their genuine interest in people, they have the ability to make them feel valuable. They make a person feel like the center of their attention, and they are!

Another reason Relaters have so many friends is that they are usually very generous with everything they have. If they can bless you by giving something to you, they will. And they will love doing it, because your happiness makes them happy!

Relaters have more friends than all the other personalities combined. People know the Relater loves them. But their relationships will usually not be as deep as with Helpers. Relaters want to spread the love around. There is a whole world that needs love, and it is difficult for them to confine themselves to a few people. That is why it is more accurate to call Relaters friendly rather than a best friend.

Still, Relaters have a tender and compassionate heart. No one responds more genuinely to the emotional needs of others. They are able to sympathize with others and find it easy to obey the biblical command, *“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep”* (Rom 12: 15).

Optimistic

Like Thinkers, Relaters are on the emotional side of The Four Basic Personality Traits. But unlike Thinkers, their emotions are naturally positive. Optimism is a primary characteristic of Relaters. Part of the reason is that they live in, and for, the present. The past and future hardly exist for them. Therefore, they easily forget the past and their minds are rarely influenced by the memory of heartaches or disappointments. Likewise, they are not fearful of the future because they do not think much about it. They live in and for the now.

Like Leaders, Relaters thrive on change, handle it easily, and are the most effective personality in helping others embrace change. This is because they are so positive about change and make it look so easy! Relaters are enthusiastic about everything they do. Even tasks if there are people involved! They are also very creative and usually have a lot of ideas.

Inspiring

All of their optimism, enthusiasm, creativity, and natural ability to influence people gives Relaters a very strong ability to inspire people, influencing them to share their positive attitude. No one can encourage people like Relaters. In public, Relaters enjoy speaking in front of people to encourage and entertain them. And the bigger the audience the better. They

are naturally gifted communicators. In person they are the best cheerleaders in life.

Obviously one of the Relaters most distinct abilities is in communication. They have the assertiveness to drive home a point of view, but also the intuitive qualities to understand others' perspectives and adapt to meet new situations.

Fun

No one enjoys life more than Relaters! These people never seem to lose their childlike curiosity for the things that surround them. Their emotions are so receptive to their environment that the unpleasant things of life can be forgotten by a change of environment. Often they are early risers and usually wake in a lively mood. Then they whistle or sing their way through life because they usually can maintain happy thoughts.

Boredom is not a part of their makeup because they can quickly turn to something that engages them. Relaters have the capacity to be fascinated by little things as well as big things. They tend to like bright colors and lots of jewelry.

Relaters are spontaneous because that is more fun. They do not like planning things. The unexpected is more exciting, even though it may be more nerve-racking for their spouse, children, and workmates.

Relaters are thrilling storytellers because their warm, emotional nature almost makes them relive the experience while they are telling it. And people have fun hearing it!

In a world with so much doom and gloom we can be thankful that God put a personality in this world that is so cheerful, and so capable of helping others experience joy and love. For all of these reasons, the Relater is probably the most envied personality type. Everyone likes them!

Relater personality in the Trinity

God put Relaters in the world to particularly reflect God the Holy Spirit. The encouragement, comfort, love, and joy especially displayed by Relaters is a reflection of Him. And the Spirit is the One who binds us all together.

Relater personalities in the Bible

David: While probably not primarily a Relater, David demonstrated their partying characteristic in the following: *“So David went there and brought the Ark of God . . . And David was leaping and dancing before the Lord with all his might [in front of a lot of people]”* (2 Sam 6:12, 14).

The Apostle Peter: Every time he appears in the Gospels he is talking. In fact, he is recorded as talking more than all the other disciples put

together. He was the one who stood up at Pentecost and first proclaimed the Gospel to the crowd, bringing so much happiness to the 3000 converts.

Peter was especially excited at the Transfiguration of Jesus, wanting to hang out with those who appeared. *“Peter exclaimed, “Rabbi, it’s wonderful for us to be here! Let’s make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He said this because he didn’t really know what else to say”* (Mark 9:5-6). As a Relater he had to say something!

Like Peter, a Relater might struggle to be loyal to someone when it isn’t fun anymore. But like Peter, they will easily repent “with tears.” Unfortunately, while Peter was certainly a Relater, most of what we know of his personality is described in the Gospels before he possessed the Holy Spirit. But growing the kingdom of God on Earth is about bringing people together as much as anything else. And that is why God made a Relater the Rock on which the Church would be initiated and expand (cf. Matt 16:18). And it was Peter the Relater who God used to bring the believing Jews and Christians together (cf. Acts 10:1-11:18)

You can study the life of Barnabas in Scripture and see another clear and wonderful example of a Relater.

How a Relater relates to God

Relaters naturally enjoy spending time with God. He is another Person isn’t He? A Relater will love God the most because He has made Him happy. And not just a fake happiness that depends on trying to suck life out of worldly entertainment, but a real joy experienced in God’s many blessings now, and a real hope in a happy eternal paradise.

The Relater will most enjoy the Praise and Open aspects of the P.O.W.E.R. plan for God Times and Barnabas Groups. They will definitely enjoy the discussion of the Word time in their Barnabas Group as well. In fact, they will just plain enjoy Barnabas Groups more than anybody else!

Relaters most enjoy and are affected by the stories in Scripture. Especially the OT, but the parables of Jesus as well. They will be fairly disinterested in studying and understanding the deeper doctrines of Scripture.

Helper personality

Helpful

People in this world definitely need help. Help with everything. And this is why God put some element of the Helper personality in 40% of the human race. The Helper is a very rich personality. They are both people and task oriented and are the perfect balance and helper to all the other

personalities. And their strengths are suited to this very thing- helping others. They will do the dirty work. They take care of the behind-the-scenes tasks; the unseen chores that others tend not to do. They are the backbone of the human race, the supporting pillars of everything that gets built and done.

Reliable

Dependable is the best one word to describe the Helper. They reflect the faithful nature of their Creator like no other personality. They rarely initiate tasks and ideas like Leaders and Relaters, but they are the ones who make the ideas actually happen. Helpers do not have their own agendas but are team players working to accomplish the desires of others. They would rather see the team succeed over their individual efforts.

Helpers are, in fact, the perfect God-made counterpart and complement to Leaders, possessing many of the strengths Leaders do not have. They are the ones following behind the Leaders, cleaning up their messes and making up for their weaknesses so that the plans of the Leaders are accomplished. As someone has said of Helpers, "In their quiet way, they have proven to be fulfillers of the dreams of others."

Helpers are very reliable and consistent even in their personality and mood. They do not change with their environment or circumstances. This is the one personality trait that is consistent every time you see a Helper. And what you see is what you get. Helpers are very sincere and they value sincerity in others. There is no guile or false motives in a Helper. They are simple folk. You always know what you have in them and they do not change. Again, they are reliable.

Helpers are extremely dependable with tasks. Employers and business owners know that their whole company relies on Helpers. They are always reliable in their obligations. They always do what is expected of them or "the right thing."

Helpers usually arrive at meetings on time and are usually well-prepared for them. When they learn or develop a working system for doing something, they do not change it. They are masters at anything that requires meticulous patience and daily routine. They are not perfectionists like Thinkers, but they desire work of high quality. This is one reason it is difficult for them to delegate and they usually do the work themselves.

As in tasks, Helpers rarely initiate friendships like the Relaters. But they are the ones you hope are following behind the Relaters to form deeper friendships. Helpers are fiercely loyal and if you attack or hurt one of their friends they will take it personally. They will always be the best friend you have no matter what your personality.

As we said, this personality trait is the backbone of any country, business, church, or family. The number of Helpers initiating divorces is

almost non-existent. They do not leave churches on a whim. They are the ones who will commit their entire career to one company.

Helpers are often criticized by Leaders and Relaters for not being more flexible. But God purposely made them not to be. You do not want the backbones of the world to be flexible. Helpers resist change at every turn. And thank God they do. When the Leaders and Relaters have already left the scene to conceive and start their next project or relationship, Helpers stay. They do not move until previous commitments have been fulfilled.

Helpers help us all be more faithful. This is why it is difficult for them to continually add things to their life. They are already giving themselves to fulfill their current responsibilities. Their resistance to change is not a character flaw, but a reflection of their faithfulness. And it is not that they are indifferent to new needs that Leaders might see, it is just they are committed to meeting vital needs already. Thank God for reliable Helpers.

Peaceful

The consistency of Helpers is demonstrated in their desire to maintain and pursue peace in both their tasks and relationships.

Helpers work very well under pressure and rarely get flustered by even an agitating Leader or Relater. In fact, they often do their very best work when under pressure. However, not only do they usually respond to chaotic, “high drama” situations with calm, they avoid them to maintain peace in their life. Again, Helpers can be accused of lacking concern about needs around them. They do not make quick decisions like Leaders and Relaters will. But their calm, cool, cheerful, easy-going way of life brings and maintains peace for us all. And their ability to remain objective in emotional situations can be a great help to others for advice and support.

They bring that same peace to their relationships. Helpers are extremely patient and it takes a lot to make them angry. If they do get angry it is because someone has done something extremely hurtful or immoral. If you make a Helper mad, you better find out what you did because it is probably your fault.

The Helper’s gentle manner makes it easy for them to listen. In fact, unlike the Relater, Helpers would much rather listen than talk. Which again is a great blessing because this world, our businesses, our governments, churches, friends, spouses, and children all need a lot more listening instead of talking. And they do not simply act like they are listening but they readily retain what you say. Because of all the abilities of Helpers, they make excellent counselors. But will only offer this regularly to their friends. Again, they love peace, and getting involved in a bunch of people’s problems is not their thing.

While they may not be drawn to helping strangers with their personal problems, they desire to be a peacemaker among their friends. They hate

conflict. They are sensitive to dysfunctional relationships and will work to bring unity and peace among those they know. As much as Helpers love helping people, they hate correcting, offending, and confronting people about their needs. This is one of the reasons we like to be around them. And they are often taken advantage of because of this. Their peacemaker mentality may also make it difficult for Helpers to discipline their children.

For all of these reasons, most elementary school teachers are Helpers. Who else could handle the constant needs, chaos, and conflict among 30-40 six year olds all day long with a smile on their face? Only Helpers. Which is why they are often drawn to education, and especially love children in general.

Productive

Because God made Helpers to be the working backbone of the world, they are extremely practical, efficient, and organized people. Their workplaces are usually kept clean and neat because this makes them more productive. Even as children, Helpers like neatness and order.

Helpers normally think about something before they do it in order to figure out the most efficient way to accomplish the task. And for all these reasons, Helpers are known for getting a lot of work done.

Most Helpers have excellent mechanical aptitude and make good mechanics, craftsmen, and tradesmen. And because they like working behind the scenes and doing the mundane necessary tasks of the world, they are excellent homemakers.

And they make the best team leaders as well. If a Leader has already established the goals of the group, and is willing to handle any unruly people, the Helper is a wise choice to get people to work together and accomplish a task. First of all, they will set an example by being the hardest worker on the team. Secondly, because they are diplomatic and gentle, they work well with people. When given positions of leadership, they seem to bring order out of chaos and produce a working harmony conducive to increased productivity.

Humorous

Would you believe that most stand-up comedians are Helpers? This personality has a unique God-given ability to see the humor in things. They help to balance the seriousness of Leaders. But they are not like Relaters who might tell a string of jokes or funny stories. Instead, they just say funny things. They are not only able to see humor where others would miss it, but their timing in pointing it out is remarkable. Helpers can have a crowd “in stitches” and never crack a smile. And sometimes they recognize humor in the other personalities. They might enjoy poking a little fun at the

seriousness of the Leader, the aimlessness of the Relater, or the moodiness of the Thinker. And because they are a Helper, people are rarely offended.

Helper personality in the Trinity

Helpers accomplish the tasks assigned by Leaders. Even when they are very difficult. And they do not do it for themselves simply to get the satisfaction of accomplishment like Leaders. Helpers complete their tasks because of their commitment to people. Their commitment and loyalty to a Leader, and their love for those being benefited by accomplishing the task.

Can you think of member of the Trinity who has acted in the same way? Jesus said, *“For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will”* (John 6:38). He was the one who got the work done. He was the one willing to do what no one else would. He was the one who has brought us together and made peace. God put the Helper personality in humanity to reflect the sacrificial, committed, and faithful character of God the Son.

Helper personality in the Bible

Jonathan: When you think of loyal friends in the Bible, Jonathan is the foremost example. He simply loved David and would have committed his entire life to serving him. *“Jonathan made a solemn pact with David, because he loved him as he loved himself”* (1 Sam 18:3). In words that only someone with the personality of a Helper could say, *“Jonathan said to David, “Whatever you want me to do, I’ll do for you”* (1 Sam 20:4).

When Saul began to be jealous of David, Jonathan tried to be a peacemaker and reconcile them (cf. 1 Sam 19:4-7). But when Saul persisted in wanting to harm David, Jonathan’s normal, cheerful, easy-going style (remember, he was the one who ate the honey; 1 Sam 14:24-30), erupted *“in fierce anger because he was grieved at his father’s shameful treatment of David”* (1 Sam 20:34). When you attack a friend of a Helper, they take it personally.

Jonathan did not want to be the leader. Not because he was a coward (1 Sam 14:1ff), but because God made him to be a Helper, a perfect counterpart, counselor, and supporter to a Leader like David. Like a true Helper, Jonathan wanted companionship rather than leadership and said to David, *“Don’t be afraid. . . You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you”* (1 Sam 23:17).

One of the most tragic things in all of Scripture was Jonathan’s untimely death. If David and Jonathan would have had the opportunity to lead Israel together, the world would have witnessed the most remarkable leadership and friendship in all the history of humanity.

If you have a Jonathan kind of Helper in your life be very thankful for them and loyal to them because David lost his Helper and never had another. And it cost him dearly the rest of his life.

Ruth: She is another example of a Helper demonstrated in her famous statement to Naomi: *“Don’t ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!”* (Ruth 1:16-17). That’s a Helper!

How a Helper relates to God

Helpers are relational and often experience a deep relationship with God. They certainly enjoy serving Him, but also knowing Him. Because they are doers instead of talkers and thinkers, they appreciate the more practical aspects of Scripture about family and ministry life. Therefore, they will probably most enjoy the Resolutions part of the P.O.W.E.R. plan for God Times and Barnabas Groups. But as they get to know God and a group better, they will also be good at the Openness part.

Thinker personality

Thinking People

When God told the first humans that He wanted them to “*subdue the Earth*” (Gen 1:28) He was not talking about just ruling over the animals. Nor did He have military conquests in mind. To “*subdue the Earth*” meant to make it a better place for humans to live. God put Thinkers on this Earth to take all the physical, biological, mathematical, and even musical elements He has provided in raw form, and understand them, rearrange them, harness them, and use them to create marvelous things to bless humanity. Make no mistake about it. That is God’s work. He did not intend for those made in His image to stay in their fig leaves and caves forever. And subduing the Earth requires a lot of hard and careful thinking.

The world of a Thinker exists in their mind. While Leaders are doing something, and Relaters are enjoying someone, and Helpers are helping someone, Thinkers are thinking something. And probably not about some one, but some thing. And they think to evaluate things, constantly asking questions like, “What is wrong with this?” or, “How can I create something even better?” Thinkers usually have rather complex minds and therefore are the most complex personality of all Four Basic Personality Traits.

Because God made them to think deeply about things, they usually have high IQ’s. Most of the world’s geniuses are Thinkers and therefore most of the World’s greatest scientists and philosophers, and the Church’s

theologians, have been Thinkers. They could just as accurately be considered God's researchers.

Most people do not realize how much thinking is required to accomplish very important things. Of course gifted leadership and hard physical work is necessary. But think about how much powerful thinking goes into designing sky scrapers, rockets, computers, and everything else that has any complexity in our lives. When you think about all the thinking required to produce and maintain our modern civilization, it is amazing that the Thinker trait is found in only about 14% of the human population.

Of course with such powerful minds, those with a high dose of the Thinker trait must be especially careful about what they think about! God gave them a sensitive nature and the ability to see what is wrong with things. If they are not careful, their thinking will make them discouraged, moody, aloof, and unkind. Thinkers more than anyone else must obey the biblical encouragement to, *"Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise"* (Phil 4:8).

Leaders must be careful to point their strong will in the right direction so their accomplishments end up pleasing God and benefiting others. Likewise, Thinkers must be careful to point their powerful minds in the right direction so their thoughts produce what is pleasing to God and beneficial to others.

Precise

God has put into the heart of every Thinker a desire for perfection. Their desire for perfection is not necessarily bad. God has the same desire. Thinkers will never achieve absolute perfection in anything on this Earth. But they still work and strive very hard for it. Many criticize Thinkers for this, calling it a word that sounds like sin: "perfectionism." The reason that most other personalities are frustrated with this drive for perfection is that it takes so long to get anything done! Leaders, Relaters, and even the practical Helpers hate all those details because they seem to hinder progress . . . until they see the finished product! Thinkers have been wowing our world with what they can create since the beginning of humanity. But you have to give them time.

Nothing on this Earth needs to be absolutely perfect, but a lot of things have to be real close or they do not work at all, and even put people in danger. One authority on Thinkers writes: "The depressive takes life too seriously. He has a narrow range of interests, develops a meticulous devotion to duty, and is preoccupied with the smallest, most insignificant details." ² Nobody likes a perfectionist.

Until one is doing brain surgery on your daughter. Or designing and building the airplanes you fly in, or even just fixing your car. We want

things to work, and they will not work or even be created, unless a Thinker has “a narrow range of interests, develops a meticulous devotion to duty, and is preoccupied with the smallest, most insignificant details.” On some things, details that others might think are insignificant are actually critical and only Thinkers will know and appreciate the difference.

Thinkers do not like chaos and are excellent organizers of tasks, their workplaces, and their home. They tend to be good at establishing guidelines and policies and desire to follow them.

It is the Thinker’s pursuit of excellence that gives them a remarkable ability to take almost anything someone else has created (except perhaps another Thinker), and make it better. If you are enjoying the blessing of any technological advances today, you have a Thinker to thank. And as Thinkers, they are natural at quality control so we can thank them for that as well.

A Christian Thinker pursues excellence in everything they do for the glory of God. Even if others do not see it, He does. If you can do slave labor for God, then you can do engineering, accounting, and computer programming for God (cf. Col 3:22-24). Of course, as with Leaders, some Thinkers have used their powers for evil purposes. But every medical, scientific, and technological advancement on this Earth has begun in the powerful mind of a Thinker.

Thinkers need precision to fulfill their role on Earth. Therefore God gave them minds with powerful analyzing abilities. Again, Leaders and Relaters can be annoyed by this because Thinkers see the problems and imperfections in almost anything, including their ideas. But by working together, these personalities can come up with wonderful plans and create marvelous things.

Thinkers are also very valuable to the Church. Teachers are commanded: “*Watch your life and doctrine closely*” (1 Tim 4:16) and “*Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth*” (2 Tim 2:15). The Scriptures are the raw materials God has provided to communicate to us. Those words must be deeply and carefully analyzed to correctly understand God’s one intended meaning, meticulously reconciling it with the rest of Scripture. And then it must be precisely communicated in order to accomplish God’s purposes for it (cf. Ezra 7:10). And Thinkers do all of this best.

For those who think precision does not matter, it matters to God when it comes to accurately representing what He has said. Those who think accurately interpreting Scripture does not demand a great deal of careful, precise, analytical thinking, are the very ones who are often misinterpreting God. Some Leaders, Relaters, and Helpers suggest it is more expedient, friendly, or humble to leave some Scripture uninterpreted, or we should

simply share several opinions instead of being dogmatic. That perspective does not honor the commands above. And uninterpreted Scripture is not practically Scripture at all because it is not accessible to God's people. Misinterpreted Scripture is even worse (cf. Neh 8:8).

God put Thinkers in the Church to get the Word of God to the people of God in its purest form. Other personalities should consult them before giving their equally valuable and practical applications of Scripture.

Those with a high amount of the Thinker trait will be reserved and rarely volunteer the knowledge and insight they possess. They need to be asked, and when they are, people are glad they did because the Thinker has usually thought through the issue deeply and has something very valuable to contribute. And when they do, the precision of their thinking is reflected in the precision of their speaking. They do not waste words and are able to say exactly what they mean.

Creative

Because Thinkers are the creators of the things in our world, they not only need to think precisely, but very creatively. We need to be thankful for those times that God gives them a particular burst of mental energy and they create their masterpieces. Again, Thinkers are the foremost inventors of humanity. Virtually all of the most beneficial and influential inventions, and scientific and medical discoveries were produced by God's Thinkers.

Because of the creative minds God gives Thinkers, they are by far the most musical and artistic of all the personalities. All of the great musicians, composers, and painters possessed heavy doses of the Thinker trait.

Committed

Creating and fixing the things of the world for the benefit of humanity requires a great deal of hard work and commitment. So God has given this to Thinkers as well. They often choose a very sacrificial vocation and are frequently driven by a desire to give themselves to benefitting humanity. Because of the Thinker's high intelligence, precision, and desire to live sacrificially for others, most doctors have a high dose of the Thinker trait. This may not help their "bedside manner" but they are usually the only ones that can handle the learning, precision, and commitment the profession requires. In fact, Thinkers are very capable and talented people but they tend to put limitations on their potential by underestimating themselves and exaggerating obstacles. They are usually hard on themselves.

Thinkers can always be depended upon to finish a job in the prescribed time or carry their end of the load. They are perhaps the most dependable of all the personalities because their desire for excellence will not allow them to let others down. Those blessed with the Thinker trait do not need

to strive to be faithful; with them it is a natural impulse. So is focusing on a task. Precision and creativity require the ability to focus and God has given Thinkers this ability like no other personality. Thinkers work well alone and they stay on task without supervision because they are self-motivated to do quality work.

Thinkers rarely seek to be in the limelight but prefer to do the behind-the-scenes tasks of life. While Thinkers are very hard workers, they have the wonderful capacity of knowing their limitations and rarely take on more than they can do.

The Thinker's commitment to tasks carries over to their relationships. Their friendships will normally be based on mutual interests or common aims, rather than emotional considerations. While they usually do not attract a large number of friends, they will be faithful to the friends they have, and would literally lay down their life for them.

The Thinker's natural shyness to put himself forward does not mean they do not like people. They not only like others, but also have a strong desire to be loved by others. However, since disappointing experiences with others will make them reluctant to readily trust people, they are prone to be suspicious when others seek them out or shower them with attention.

In fact, Thinkers are often surprisingly ambitious and have lofty goals, but their innate lack of assertiveness and unwillingness to become involved in confrontational situations makes it difficult for them to achieve these goals directly. Instead, they will tend to use existing structures and rules to accomplish their aims. For example, where a more Leader type might simply demand that others follow their instructions, a Thinker will appeal to rules, existing authorities, and logical argument to influence the actions of others.

There is one factor that has a more significant effect on a Thinker's motivation than any other: Certainty. They will be very committed, but they need to feel completely sure of their position, and of others' expectations of them, before they are able to proceed. Because of this, they have a very strong aversion to risk, and will rarely take any action unless they can feel absolutely sure about its consequences.

Quiet

Thinkers are the least verbal people among us. They will be the real quiet ones. They often have helpful and insightful things to say, but they would rather think, observe, and listen, rather than talk. And they do not like drawing attention to themselves. While Thinkers may have the most helpful things to say, it is uncomfortable and exhausting to publicly express them. And the bigger the audience the harder it is. This is why most Thinkers express their thoughts in writing. They enjoy the privacy and precision of communicating in this way. However, if a Thinker also has

Leader or Relater traits, then they not only may have a lot to say, but can publicly and verbally communicate it effectively.

Thinker personality in the Trinity

Scripture tells us that all three Persons of the Trinity worked together to create the Universe and humanity (cf. Gen 1:1-2; Col 1:15-17). “*God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us*” (Gen 1:26). The creating personality of the Thinker comes from, and is a reflection of, all three Persons of the Trinity.

Thinker personality in the Bible

Ezra: It says of him: “*Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel*” (Ezra 7:10 NIV). As a devoted studier of Scripture, Ezra was most likely a Thinker. Likewise, it would seem he taught like one as he was among those who “*read from the Book of the Law of God and clearly explained the meaning of what was being read, helping the people understand each passage*” (Neh 8:8). Clarity of thought and speaking is the mark of a Thinker.

Luke: He was a constant companion of Paul in the Book of Acts, but he is never recorded as doing any public speaking. Apparently he was a more private personality. His Thinker personality is clearly reflected when he begins his Gospel with: “*Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also decided to write a careful account for you*” (Luke 1:3-4). He produced Acts in the same way. This is the careful researcher of the Thinker. And Christians for centuries have been blessed by his careful work. Finally, he was a doctor, and most doctors are Thinkers.

Blends of the Four Basic Personality Traits

Remember, most people have a primary and secondary personality trait that provide some balance to the more pure forms of the traits. Therefore it is helpful to consider the blend of personality that reflects your primary and secondary traits.

Leader/Relater

This is a highly assertive and direct person. They are capable of action or charm depending on the need of the situation. The happy charisma of the Relater makes this person a people-oriented, enthusiastic sales type. But the Leader nature will provide the resolution and character traits necessary to make a person more organized and productive than the pure

Relater. In combination, these factors describe a person with clear goals in life with the determination and optimism to achieve them. Socially, they like to feel that they are respected and genuinely liked.

The Relater/Leader is characterized by strong social skills and a persuasive communication style. They are capable of great charm, but will sometimes adopt a more demanding, overbearing style of behavior, especially if they feel themselves to be under pressure. The outgoing and quickly-paced approach of this kind of person can be difficult to deal with for less assertive or direct types, especially as they have no fear of confrontation and will address issues directly rather than evade them.

Challenge is a keyword for this type of person. They thrive in situations that others would find impossibly stressful and difficult to deal with. Their need for achievement means that they are willing to undertake almost any task to achieve success or recognition, and this driving, motivated approach lends them an urgency and energy rarely seen in other personality types.

Leader/Relaters are almost completely given over to activity. They face every new venture with fearless and boundless energy. Their spouses often comment, "They have only two speeds: wide open and stop."

Leader/Relaters are the people who never go anywhere unnoticed and attract friends with no effort. As Pastors they combine both practical Bible teaching and church administration. As teachers, they make excellent communicators, particularly in the social sciences; rarely are they drawn to math, science, or the abstract. Whatever their professional occupations, their brains are always in motion. It is difficult for them to concentrate on just one thing at a time, which is why they often enlist others to finish what they start.

Leader/Helper

This personality is relatively rare because the Leader and Helper traits are so opposite. Generally the environment will dictate which side of this person operates. Leader/Helpers will show a more "take charge" personality in new situations, and a friendlier side if they feel that they can trust the people around them.

Leader/Helpers possess a single-minded and practical style, who will follow a line of action through to the end, using concentration and determination to achieve their goals. They will try to complete tasks within realistic timescales, but they also value careful planning.

The Leader/Helper is motivated by being in control with a need for time and the avoidance of change. They prefer a situation in which they can exercise whatever authority they have to preserve the status quo and avoid sudden change.

The Leader/Helper is not as apt to rush into things as quickly as the other more pure extrovert personalities, but are more deliberate and

subdued. Though they may not impress you that way at first, they are extremely capable in the long run. They are well-organized people who combine careful planning and hard work.

People usually enjoy working with and for a Leader/Helper because they know where they are going and have charted their course, usually in writing. But they are not unduly severe with people.

Leader/Helpers have the ability to help others make the best use of their skills and rarely offend people or make them feel used. They often get more accomplished than any other temperament because they have no inclination to do it all themselves and invariably think in terms of enlisting others in their work.

Male Leader/Helpers are usually good husbands and fathers as well as excellent administrators in almost any field. Titus, the spiritual son of Paul and leader of the hundred or so churches on the Isle of Crete, may well have been a Leader/Helper. When filled with the Spirit, he was the kind of man on whom Paul could depend on to faithfully teach the Word and administrate the churches capably. The letter Paul wrote to him makes ideal reading for any teacher, particularly a Leader/Helper.

Leader/Thinker

Leaders/Thinkers are extremely industrious and capable. The optimism and practicality of the Leader overcomes the natural moodiness of the Thinker, making the Leader/Thinker both goal-oriented and detailed.

This personality is reflected in a highly formal and structured individual with a forceful style. This type of person believes in getting things right, and is rarely afraid to state their mind robustly and directly. Of all the personalities, the Leader/Thinker is probably the least forthcoming in personal or emotional matters. They tend to be remote and somewhat isolated, not liking to rely on others. In essence, Leader/Thinkers are the hardest personality to get along with, especially for other Leaders. Not only are they highly opinionated, but they are very confident in their opinions and have a desire of persuading others to agree.

Therefore, relating to others on a personal level is not a high priority for Leader/Thinkers. When communication with others is essential, it tends to be brief and succinct, focusing on practical matters. They tend to be distrustful of others, and will prefer to keep facts to themselves unless absolutely necessary.

Leaders/Thinkers are motivated by achievement and efficiency. In this case, however, this is balanced by the presence of the Thinker trait which also gives them an interest in detail and precision. Therefore, they are prone to correct others when they make errors, even to the point of highlighting mistakes that others might regard as trivial or unimportant.

Nonetheless, this combination of efficiency and precision can be an effective one, and their assertive style helps them to achieve difficult tasks by sheer force of character.

Leaders/Thinkers are complex in terms of motivation. In common with all Leaders they have a desire for personal achievement and success. But they also like to feel that they are completing assignments or projects accurately and efficiently.

A Leader/Thinker usually does well in school, possesses a quick, analytical mind, and yet is decisive. They develop into a capable leader, the kind you can always count on to do an extraordinary job. This person is the type of lawyer you would most want as a defense attorney. The Leader/Thinker makes an excellent debater and can remember most details with precision.

Leader/Thinkers are extremely competitive and forceful. They are usually successful, no matter what kind of business they pursue. This personality probably makes the best natural leader. General George S. Patton, the great commander of the U.S. Third Army in World War II, was probably a Leader/Thinker. They are natural-born crusaders whose work habits are irregular and long.

There is little doubt that the Apostle Paul, whom we described earlier as a Leader, was more specifically a Leader/Thinker. Before his conversion he was hostile and cruel, persecuting and jailing Christians. Even after his conversion, his strong-willed determination was evident. His writings and ministry demonstrate the practical, analytical, reasoning, self-sacrificing traits of the Thinker, but the extremely driven nature of a Leader. Paul is a good example of God's transforming power in the life of a Leader/Thinker completely dedicated to God's will.

Relater/Leader

Vocationally, Relater/Leaders often start out in sales or promotion and end up as corporate sales managers. This type of occupation typifies the characteristics of this style, the ability to think and react quickly, adapt to challenging situations and use powers of both assertiveness and persuasion to motivate others to accept their own proposals. Almost any people-oriented field is open to them. But to sustain their interest, a job must offer variety, activity, and excitement. Male Relater/Leaders are invariably sports enthusiasts. Ordinarily such individuals are financially successful if properly trained and motivated and loved by their families, and not controlled by their weaknesses.

See Leader/Relater above for other attributes.

Relater/Helper

This person is confident, warm and friendly, but is also sympathetic toward others and ready to help them with problems when possible. This personality is often called the “Counselor.” Of all personalities, the Relater/Helper is overall the most effective at relating to other people. They are able to socialize easily and their gregarious natures allow them to feel at ease with people they do not know. They are often persuasive and charming. But the Helper trait means they are also able to adopt a more open, relaxed approach when a situation demands it.

The strengths of the Relater give them abilities in the areas of communication and understanding. The Helper traits also enable them to fulfill supportive roles well, being understanding and sympathetic. But their more outgoing side means that they are also able to operate effectively in a social or persuasive sense. However, the Relater/Helper will not place as much value on being practical as a pure Helper will.

Antagonism, rejection, and confrontation are all situations that the Relater/Helper will try to avoid. To use their considerable communicative powers, they will need to feel that they are operating in a favorable environment, and that those around them are sympathetic and approving.

The Relater/Helper is the easiest person to like. The overpowering tendencies of a pure Relater are offset by the gracious, easygoing traits of a Helper. Relater/Helpers are happy-go-lucky people whose carefree spirit and good humor make them lighthearted entertainers. Helping people is their regular business, along with various forms of sales. Being the least extrovert of the Relaters, they often react to their environment and circumstances rather than being proactive and self-motivated.

Relater/Helpers are usually good to their families, lavishing their spouses and children with lots of love. They rarely get upset and tend to find the bright side of everything. They have an endless supply of jokes and delight in making others laugh.

Relater/Thinker

This relatively common personality includes two traits that appear contradictory. On one hand, the Relater is known for excitement, enjoyment, and extrovert impulsiveness. On the other hand, a Thinker is known for precision, detail, and carefully following rules. In most cases, this person will show Relater traits more than their Thinker trait. Therefore, confident, talkative behavior will be more commonly seen than their quiet and cautious side.

However, their environment can affect this. The Relater traits will appear in relaxed, open, and favorable situations. But in more formal or structured circumstances, the Thinker traits will take over. Within a close

circle of friends, this person is capable of confident and extrovert behavior. In a more formal work environment, or atmosphere of pressure, such as a job interview, their confidence will often seem to evaporate, and they will act more like a Thinker.

This person's motivations are more complex than most, because of the opposing natures of their two main personalities. Their Relater personality means that they are interested in the attention and approval of others. But because they are also a Thinker, they will not show this clearly and will be more subtle and discreet.

Thinkers want certainty, and this type of person will look for a clear idea of their position and the expectations of those around them. Again, however, their Relater part will make them far less likely than a pure Thinker to directly ask for clear instructions.

Relater/Thinkers are highly emotional people who fluctuate drastically. They can laugh hysterically one minute and burst into tears the next. It is almost impossible for them to hear a sad tale, observe the tragic plight of another person, or listen to sad music without weeping profusely. They genuinely feel the griefs of others.

Relater/Thinkers usually make fantastic teachers and will usually be the most popular teachers or professors around. Relater/Thinkers should always work with people. Being appreciated by others is so important to them that it tends to drive them to a consistent level of performance.

Relater/Thinkers have a great ability to commune with God. King David seems to be an example of this personality. He was a very likable man who attracted both men and women with his charisma, and he was colorful, dramatic, and emotional. He was a musician and poet, and he made many decisions on impulse.

Helper/Leader

This personality is easy to get along with and makes very good small group leaders. Helper/Leaders are excellent listeners and are genuinely interested in people. Therefore, they can be good counselors when motivated to do so, because they are also patient and gentle, but as a Leader, want to see people make progress.

For further description see Leader/Helper above.

Helper/Relater

This is the easiest person to get along with in the long run. They are generally happy, cooperative, people-oriented, diplomatic, dependable, fun-loving, and humorous. They are never harsh and are usually a favorite wherever they go with both adults and children.

They are usually good family members who enjoy a more quiet life and love their spouse and children. As committed Christians they usually take an active role in their local church.

For further description see Relater/Helper above.

Helper/Thinker

These are the most gracious, gentle, and quiet of all personalities. Helper/Thinkers are rarely angry or hostile and hardly ever say anything they have to apologize for later. This is mainly because they don't really say much at all. Helper/Thinkers tend to strongly respond to the needs of others when exposed to them. They always do the proper thing, dress simply, and are dependable and exact.

Helper/Thinkers are neat and organized in their work habits and especially gifted for jobs requiring a high level of patience and detail. Therefore, they are well suited to accounting, computer programming, or engineering. This is because their personality combines accuracy and precision, with the patience to work at a problem until it has been solved. They are interested in producing quality work, and will often go to great lengths to ensure that the results of their efforts are the best they can possibly achieve.

Helper/Thinkers are calm and rational and often have a better understanding of personal or emotional issues than might be suggested by their relatively unemotional personality. They are not assertive in style, and will rarely offer input in a group situation, or act in an independent manner.

A Helper/Thinker often finds it difficult to relate to other people, especially in unfamiliar settings, because they need to know exactly where they stand before they feel able to act. While they value friendships and strong relations with others, this is often disguised by an apparently aloof and reserved style. In order to interact effectively with others, this type will look to more direct and outgoing styles to initiate relationships.

The Helper/Thinker is especially skilled at complex systems and procedures. Their Helper trait lends them patience and a degree of persistence, while their Thinker trait makes them interested in order and precision. In combination, these factors reflect an individual with strong potential in broadly technical work. Because of their interest in quality and productivity, it is not unusual to find people of this kind who possess special skills or knowledge, especially in technical areas.

A consequence of the patient, precise style of the Helper/Thinker is a need for time to plan and execute their work to a standard with which they can feel satisfied. They will wish to work steadily at a project, and dislike interruptions or distractions from the task in hand. They will also seek certainty, and need to be sure that the work that they are doing conforms to the expectations of their colleagues and managers.

A more subtle aspect to the personality of the Helper/Thinker is their enjoyment of positive relations with others. As we mentioned above, this fact is unlikely to be clear from their somewhat reserved and quiet personality, but they like to feel accepted by other people, and can be surprisingly open in style in a favorable environment of this kind.

Thinker/Leader

In this personality, the natural mood swings of the Thinker are somewhat stabilized by the Leader's strong will and determination. There is almost nothing vocationally that these people cannot do, and do well. They are both perfectionists and drivers. They are particularly skilled in fields that demand research and accuracy. They make excellent attorneys, and because they prepare twice as hard for a case as anyone else, they seldom lose. As doctors, they know the latest research on medical advances.

For more description see Leader/Thinker above.

Thinker/Relater

Thinker/Relaters are probably the best of all teachers, particularly for high-school and college students. Their Thinker personality will discover little-known facts and be exacting in the use of detail, while their Relater traits will communicate well with students. They usually major in the social sciences, theology, philosophy, literature, or the humanities.

Sometimes Thinker/Relaters will go into low pressure sales that calls for the presentation of many facts and details. They make good lawyers and medical professionals. Although extremely capable, they usually work for someone else and rarely are venturesome enough to launch their own business or be the founder of an organization.

They are often loyal husbands or wives and are devoted parents, if they learn to accept people and children as they are and refuse to be too critical.

Thinker/Relaters are usually artistically gifted people. Many great entertainers, actors, and music stars have this personality. And if they are Pastors, they will usually be easily loved by their congregations.

Thinker/Relaters show an interesting combination of mood swings. Be sure of this: They will be emotional creatures. When circumstances are pleasing to them, they can reflect a fantastically happy mood. But if things work out badly, or they feel rejected, insulted, or injured, they can drown in a sea of self-pity. Like any predominant Thinker, they must guard their thinking process!

Many of the prophets were Thinker/Relaters like John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, and others. They had a tremendous capacity to commune with God, were self-sacrificing people helpers who had enough charisma to attract a following, tended to be legalistic in their teachings and calls to

repentance, exhibited a flair for the dramatic, and willingly died for their principles. But they also had times of self-doubt and bouts with depression.

For more description, see Relater/Thinker above.

Thinker/Helper

The greatest scholars the world has ever known are Thinker/Helpers. They combine their intellectual drive for excellence with the organized efficiency of the Helper. They get along with people, but flourish in more private settings where they can spend time on their study and research. However, their Helper traits help them be concerned about the needs of others.

Thinker/Helpers are usually good spellers and good at math. Most of the world's major inventions and medical discoveries have been made by Thinker/Helpers. When controlled by the Spirit, they have the admiration of their family and friends as very disciplined and dedicated people.

For further description see Helper/Thinker above.

See the table: "The Four Basic Personality Traits" on the following page.

The Four Basic Personality Traits

Attributes	Leader	Relater	Helper	Thinker
% of People	18%	28%	40%	14%
Goal in Life	Completing the mission	Enjoying people	Serving people	Being right
Strengths	Strong Driven Daring Decisive	Friendly Optimistic Inspiring Fun	Reliable Peaceful Productive Humorous	Precise Creative Committed Quiet
Likes & Energized By	Action Achievement Challenge People	Appreciation Talking Entertainment People	Helping Listening Predictability Privacy	Accuracy Asking why Details Privacy
Dislikes & Exhausted By	Failure Rules Wasting time	Rejection Details Pessimism	Change Conflict Being rushed	Errors Chaos Public Speaking
Change	Likes	Likes	Dislikes	Dislikes
People vs. Tasks	Tasks	People	People & Tasks	Tasks
Relationships	Initiator	Initiator	Responder	Responder
Emotion	Unemotional	Emotional	Unemotional	Emotional
Natural Weaknesses	Non-relational Non-emotional Overlooks details	Forgetful Disorganized Very emotional	Slow Indecisive Indifferent	Very private Very serious Workaholic
Sinful Weaknesses	Harsh Impatient Independent	Undisciplined Need approval High ego	Lazy Stubborn Antagonistic	Selfish Negative Moody
Good Careers	Entrepreneur CEO	Sales Public speaker	Teacher Support roles	Accountant Doctor
Spiritual Gifts	Pastor	Giver Encourager Comforter Evangelist	Servant	Teacher
Good Ministries	Leader	Church planter Counselor Greeter	Small group leader Deacon(ess)	Teacher
Small groups	Encourages action/service	Grows them numerically	Leads them best	Grows them with the Word
Demonstrated in God	John 3:16-17 John 4:34 Mark 3:13-14	Zeph 3:17 Luke 8:4 1 Tim 6:17	John 4:34 John 6:38 John 19:30	Gen 1:1-2 Gen 1:26 Col 1:15-17
Bible Characters	Nehemiah Paul	David Peter	Jonathan Barnabas	Ezra Luke
Encouraging Bible verses	Matt 28:18-19 Acts 20:24 1 Cor 4:3-4 1 Cor 15:10	John 10:10 Eph 4:32 1 Thess 5:16-18 1 Peter 4:9	1 Cor 4:2 Col 4:17 James 1:19 Matt 5:9	Ezra 7:10 Luke 1:3-4 Eph 4:29 1 Tim 4:16

¹ The Four Basic Personality Traits are essentially derived from the traditional four human temperaments, but are also reflected in the popular D.I.S.C. system. The descriptions here were adapted from *The Spirit-controlled Temperament*, Tim Lahaye, (Tyndale, 1994), *What Makes People Click*, Randall Rittenberry (Libra, 2010), and the Discus website at <http://www.axiomsoftware.com/default.php>.

² Lahaye, 177.

Appendix H

Recognizing My Sensitivity

Are you a Highly Sensitive Person (HSP)?

It is estimated that God made 15-20% of the population to be highly sensitive. This is not so much a personality trait, as a biological and genetic trait. Essentially, it makes a person's nervous system more sensitive than others. It is misleading to consider HSP's as merely shy. Studies show that 30% of them have an extroverted personality. Nonetheless, the HSP trait greatly affects a person's personality.

Therefore, it is very important to understand this biological trait if you have it or have a spouse or child who does. Unfortunately, high sensitivity in people is rarely recognized or understood. Especially if you are not one of them. And those who are highly sensitive struggle to believe this can be a beneficial and God-glorifying trait when controlled by the Spirit.

Highly sensitive people have the following characteristics:

- Are you easily overwhelmed by such things as bright lights, strong smells, coarse fabrics, or sirens nearby?
- Do you get rattled when you have a lot to do in a short amount of time?
- Do you make a point of avoiding violent movies and TV shows?
- Do you need to withdraw during busy days to a place where you can have privacy and relief from the situation?
- Do you make it a high priority to arrange your life to avoid upsetting or overwhelming situations?
- Do you enjoy delicate or fine scents, tastes, sounds, or works of art?
- When you were a child, did people see you as sensitive or shy?

More specifically, you are encouraged to take the Highly Sensitive Person test at <http://hsperson.com/test/highly-sensitive-test/>. Please record your score at the end of chapter 3.16.

If you score 14 or higher you probably have a high sensitivity trait. It is important that you understand this better. The same is true if you have a family member with this trait. For further resources we highly recommend the website where you took the test.

Appendix I

The Christian Essentials

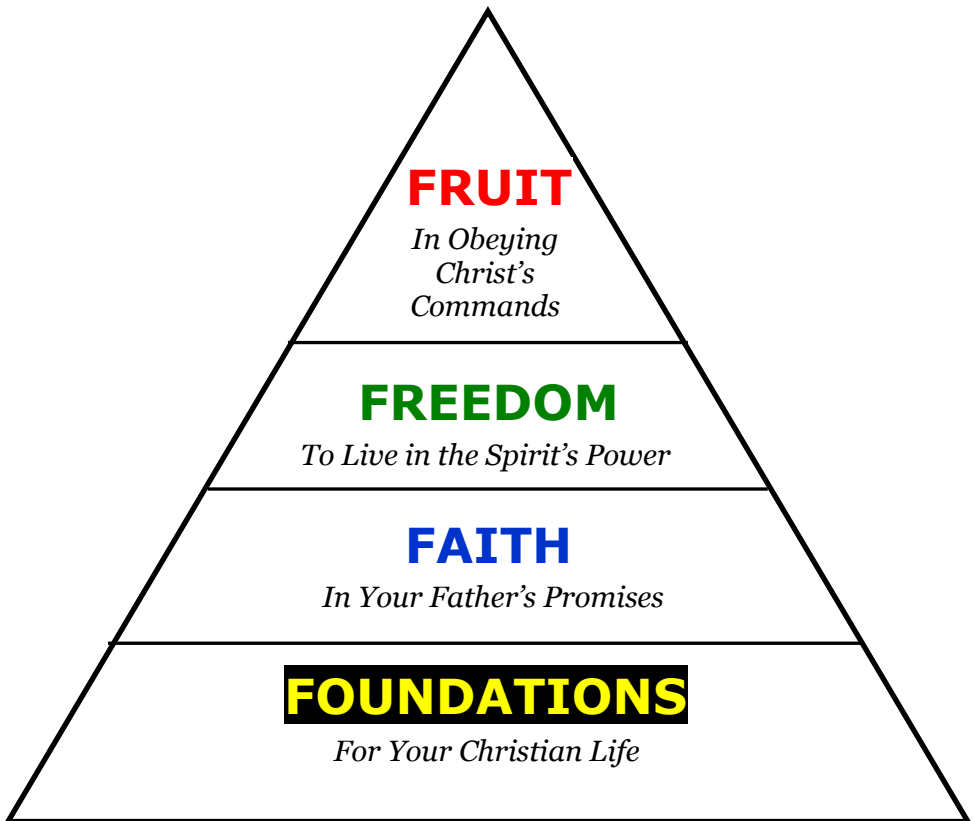
“Train Yourself to be Godly” (1 Tim 4:7)

Study #1	FORGIVENESS Forever from God	4 Weeks
Discovering 6 Beliefs to Escape the Wrath of God		
Study #2	FOUNDATIONS For Your Christian Life	8 Weeks
Establishing Your Time, Motivation, & Identity		
Study #3	FAITH In Your Father’s Love	12 Weeks
Grasping 12 Promises about Your Security, Significance & Satisfaction		
Your Dad’s Parenting Your Dad’s Pardon Your Dad’s Precepts Your Dad’s Presence	Your Dad’s Protection Your Dad’s Provision Your Dad’s Personality Your Dad’s Power	Your Dad’s Pleasure Your Dad’s Purpose Your Dad’s Paradise Your Dad’s Prize
Study #4	FREEDOM To Live in the Spirit’s Power	10 Weeks
Experiencing Freedom from Strongholds through 4 Steps in the F.E.L.T. process of Mind Renewal		
1) Recognize sinful Feelings 2) Revisit hurtful Events 3) Reveal controlling Lies 4) Realize freeing Truth		
Study #5	FRUIT In Obeying Christ’s Commands	12 Weeks
Pursuing 7 Commitments to Follow Christ		
Loving God Loving People Gifted Serving	Generous Giving Wise Living	Reaching Others Teaching Others
Study #6	FAMILIES Living for Christ	10 Weeks
Gaining Christian Perspectives on Marriage & Parenting		

Appendix F

“The Transformation Triangle”

The “Transformation Triangle” illustrates some of the parts and the process of the *Christian Essentials* and the Christian life itself. The FOUNDATIONS and FAITH studies help you establish some basic convictions and practices for a fruitful Christian life. As your faith in these convictions grow, your FREEDOM from sinful habits and thinking grows, releasing the power of the Spirit in your life. As a result, the spiritual FRUIT of your life grows because of your greater ability to obey Christ’s commandments.



Appendix I

Recommended Resources for Further Study

Decision Making and the Will of God, Gary Freisen and John Maxon, revised and updated edition, (Multnomah, 2009). A practical, biblical study and promotion of the biblical wisdom model of decision making containing important and biblical arguments against the mystical view.

Found: God's Will, John MacArthur (Chariot Victor, 1997). A very short but helpful support to the biblical wisdom view of decision making.

Mega Mysticism: Does God Speak to Us Apart from Scripture?, Kurt Jurgensmeier, available online at www.trainingtimothys.org. An in-depth theological Bible study regarding how God communicates to us and a biblical critique of the popular view.

The Enneagram Institute at www.enneagraminstitute.com. Many people have found this approach to human personality to be helpful and provide more detail about their personality.

What's the Difference? Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible, John Piper (Crossway, 2008). A helpful study of the subject.

Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism, Wayne Grudem and John Piper editors, (Crossway, 2006). A more in-depth biblical study of the biblical issues and controversy surrounding this subject.

Heaven, Randy Alcorn (Tyndale, 2011). The best book available on the subject. In places the author's imagination may go a little too far. But his arguments for the physical continuity of things on Earth is helpful and important.