

Christian Essential #2

FOUNDATIONS

For Your Christian Life

**Establishing Your Time, Motivation,
& Identity**

Copyright and published by New Life Community Church, 2016.

All parts of this publication may be used in any form. No part of this publication may be sold for profit.

Online versions of the *Christian Essentials* are available at www.newlifecr.com.

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); *New International Reader's Version* (NIrV, Biblica, 2014); *New Century Version* (NCV, Thomas Nelson, 2005).

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); *New International Commentary on the Old Testament (NICOT)*, Robert L. Hubbard editor (Eerdmans).

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.

Christians Essentials #2
FOUNDATIONS

√	Week 1: Your Time	
	2.1: Making the Most of My God Times	Spending time with God is the most important thing you can do. (1 Pet 2:2)
	2.2: Making the Most of My Group Times	You learn and live the truth best by investing time with God's people. (Col 3:16)
	Project 2A: Making the Most of My Time	
	Project 2B: Appendix C: "Barnabas Group Project"	
	Barnabas Group: Day of the week:	Time: Place:
√	Week 2: Essentials of Your Authentic Christian Life I	
	2.3: God's Purpose for You	Christ invites you to an extraordinary life that is full of joy and glorifies God. (John 10:10)
	2.4: God's Power for You	The power to live an extraordinary life for God is being controlled by the Holy Spirit.(Gal 5:16)
	Project 2C: Appendix E: "Testing My Spiritual Power"	
	Barnabas Group	
√	Week 3: Essentials of Your Authentic Christian Life II	
	2.5: God's Process for You	You change your life when you change your mind. (Rom 12:2).
	Project 2D: Appendix G: "The Nine Powers of God, the Spirit, and the Spirit-Controlled Christian"	
	Barnabas Group	
√	Week 4: Your Motivation	
	2.6: Christ's Love Compels Us	How much you love & obey God depends on how much you believe He loves you. (2 Cor 5:14)
	Project 2E: Counting My Blessings	
	2.7: God's Love Through God's People	We experience God's love through God's people. (1 John 4:12)
	Project 2F: Experiencing God's Love through God's People	
	Barnabas Group	
	Week 5: Your Motivation & Identity	
	2.8: God's Glory Purifies Us	The awe you experience from meditating on God's glory purifies your life. (2 Cor 3:18).
	Project 2G: Comparing Christ	

	2.9: Jesus is Your Best Friend	Jesus is your best Friend and understands all of your struggles. (John 15:15)
	2.10: Jesus is Your Real Identity	The real you is in Christ and Christ in you. (2 Cor 5:17).
	Barnabas Group	
√	Week 6: Your Idols I	
	2.11: Your God-given Needs	God created you with great needs. (Psalm 70:5)
	2.12: Loving False Gods Rejects the Real God	If you seek what you need from anything or anyone other than God, you will increase the pain in your life. (Jonah 2:8)
	Barnabas Group	
√	Week 7: Your Idols II	
	2.13: Cursed are Those Who Worship People	Depending on people to meet your deepest needs is the most powerful and painful idol in the world. (Jer 17:5)
	2.14: You are Filled through Christ	Christ gives you everything you need to be happy. (Col 2:10)
	1 Hour God Time: Project 2H: Facing My Idols	
	Barnabas Group	
√	Week 8: Barnabas Group Project	
	Barnabas Group Project: Date	Time Place
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>FOUNDATIONS</i> Study	
E	Testing My Spiritual Power	
F	An Outline of the <i>Christian Essentials</i> & The “Transformation Triangle”	
G	The Nine Powers of God, the Spirit, & the Spirit-Controlled Christian	
H	The Seven Types of Faith in Scripture (optional reading)	
I	The Seven Emotional Needs of Humans	
J	Recommended Resources for Further Study	

Chapter 2.1

Making the Most of My God Times*Spending time with God is the most important thing you can do*

1 Peter 2:2

Week 1

After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:

- What is the most important reason to spend time with God?
- What are suggested elements of biblical meditation?
- What will be some hindrances to consistently having God Times? How can you overcome these?
- What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?

Spending time with God has been the most life changing and enjoyable thing Kurt has ever done. Which is why he has spent a lot of time with God. Kurt became a Christian while serving in the U. S. Army in West Germany. He remembers actually enjoying the long and frequent times under the stars in the middle of nowhere on guard duty. He would pull out his pocket New Testament (NT) and listen to all the new things God was teaching him.

In college Kurt regularly got up early in the morning before classes and walked to a nearby church to spend time with God. Sometimes he even stayed overnight in that church, sleeping on the floor of the sanctuary, just to be with God. It was during those times that God revealed Himself to Kurt through Scripture in life changing ways.

Becoming a Pastor was just another reason to spend time with God. In fact, for many years he spent more time with God than any other person. Kurt knows what the Apostle Peter meant when he wrote:

Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation. (1 Peter 2:2 NASB ¹)

Spending time with God is the most important thing you can do.

Why spend time with God?

A God Time is: a conversation with God by talking to Him in prayer and listening to Him in Scripture. Why should we spend time doing this? The best answer may surprise you. The most important reason to spend time with God is to bless Him! David began his God Time recorded in Psalm 103 with “*Bless the Lord, O my soul*” (v. 1, NASB). We seek God’s blessing in our God Times, but let us first seek to bless God!

Do you know how much your Father in Heaven enjoys spending time *with you*? How much He appreciates you sacrificing some time just to focus on Him? It blesses Him! When you think about all the wicked people and evil things that your Father will see and hear on Earth today, imagine how much joy, glory, and pleasure He experiences when He sees and hears you spending time with Him. Loving God is the ultimate and primary reason you should do anything. And spending time with God is one of the most important ways you can love Him today. In fact, if you do not take some time each day to talk and listen to your Father in Heaven, can you really claim you are loving Him at all? Spend time with God first and foremost to bless, honor, glorify, and love God!

God Times will certainly bless you too. Our text says: “*Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation*” (1 Peter 2:2 NASB). This study assumes you have “*salvation*” and have a personal relationship with Christ through trusting in Christ to pay for your sins by His death on the cross. If you have any doubts that you have this personal relationship with Christ, then we would encourage you to complete *Christian Essentials* study #1: *FORGIVENESS* before proceeding in this study. ²

The purpose of this study #2: *FOUNDATIONS* is to help you “*grow in respect to salvation.*” Among the greatest desires of a Christian is to grow. Grow in your faith in God, relationship with God, enjoyment of God, imitation of God, and obedience to God. In fact, if your greatest desires are not these things, it is doubtful you are a Christian. But many Christians are not willing to do what is necessary to spiritually grow.

Our text tells us one thing you need to grow: “*Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation*” (1 Peter 2:2 NASB). Have you ever seen a newborn craving its mother’s milk? The Greek word here for “*long*” expresses desire in the strongest possible terms because of a great need. The reason why an infant so desperately hungers for their mother’s milk is because that is their greatest need. And so is God’s word for us. Growing as a Christian means growing closer to God. Nothing draws you closer to God than Him speaking to you. And this is what He does through Scripture. Which is why you desperately need “*the pure milk of the word*” to “*grow in respect to salvation.*”

But to spiritually grow you must not only “*long for the pure milk of the word*” but you must consume it. A baby who craves its mother’s milk but does not actually consume it will remain weak and even die. How do you get “*the pure milk of the word*” off the pages of Scripture and into you? Setting aside God Time and having a conversation with Him by listening to Him through Scripture and talking to Him through prayer.

You need spiritual strength and nourishment to live for God each day. Jesus told the devil: *“The Scriptures say, ‘People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’* (Matt 4:4). Just like food nourishes and strengthens you physically, the word of God strengthens you spiritually. Because the Psalmist knew his need to spend time with God, he exclaimed: *“My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?”* (Psalm 42:2 NIV)

Our text says Scripture is *“pure”* (cf. Ps 12:6). Think a moment about all the mental “junk food” you take in every day through people, the internet, television, movies, and just life experiences. Through these your enemy the devil constantly communicates lust, fear, greed, anger, selfishness, and worthlessness in order to destroy your spiritual life. Consuming God’s word protects you from these spiritual diseases.

But spending time with God is not just about listening to God in Scripture. He also gives you the tremendous privilege of worshipping Him through praise and talking to Him through prayer! In Scripture God speaks to you. Through praise and prayer you speak to God. What is more important in your life than these? This is why spending time with God is the most important thing you can do.

Jesus spent much time with His Father because He loved Him and was strengthened by Him. *“Very early in the morning . . . Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed”* (Mark 1:35-36). *“One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God”* (Luke 6:12-13). *“Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed”* (Luke 5:16). And so should you.

In fact, every man or woman who did great things for God, spent a lot of time with God. Moses spent 40 days on a mountain with God and numerous other times in the “Tent of Meeting” (cf. Exod 34:28; 33:7). The Psalms of David are a record of some of his God Times. The Apostle Paul constantly referred to his prayer life (cf. Rom 1:10; Eph 1:16; Phil 1:4; Col 1:9; 2 Thess 1:11; 2 Tim 1:3; Phlm 4). And the Apostle Peter knew from experience that, *“Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation”* (1 Peter 2:2 NASB). These men spent a lot of time with God! Spending time with God is the most important thing you can do.

How to spend time with God? The P.O.W.E.R. plan

We have no desire to be legalistic about how to spend time with God. But the Scriptures and experience tell us there are some helpful elements of a God Time. These elements can be reflected in the acronym P.O.W.E.R. It reminds you that one of the purposes for God Time is receiving spiritual nourishment and strength. And having a plan like P.O.W.E.R. can help you focus on having a conversation with God. Scripture says, *“be earnest and*

disciplined in your prayers" (1 Pet 4:7). One of the most difficult things about spending time with God is staying focused. The P.O.W.E.R plan will help you do that. P.O.W.E.R. stands for:

Praise
Openness
Word
Entreaties
Resolutions

Praise is a good way to begin a conversation with God. "*Enter His gates with thanksgiving; go into His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him and praise His name*" (Ps 100:4). The "*name*" of God represents His character, and beginning your God Time by focusing on who He is will help you have the proper perspective on who you are spending time with! And thanking Him for His blessings will give you the proper perspective on your day and your whole life, no matter what else is happening to you. As we discuss later in this study, there is a tremendous amount of power in praise.

Spending time to worship and thank God at the beginning of your day is another way you love and bless God. God says: "*Giving thanks is a sacrifice that truly honors me*" (Ps 50:23). Remember the ten lepers Jesus healed but only one returned to thank Him?! Jesus asked, "*Where are the other nine? Has no one else returned to praise God?*" (Luke 17:17-18). He seemed hurt by their lack of gratitude. Do not be like the majority of people who take God's blessings for granted. Be like the one who returns to Him every day to thank Him for His goodness.

Openness is being honest with God about your feelings. This is essential to having a real relationship with Him. David illustrates this throughout his Psalms. And so did Jesus. "*While Jesus was here on earth, he offered prayers and pleadings, with a loud cry and tears*" (Heb 5:7). Jesus was honest with His Father about His feelings, and you should be too.

Spending time with God is often referred to as a "quiet time." But this idea can hinder the honest expression of feelings to God. The verse above tells us that Jesus' times with God sometimes included "*loud crying and tears.*" Some of the best God Times are not "quiet times" at all.

In fact, we strongly encourage you to express all your praise and prayer out loud to God during your God Times. One of the greatest difficulties you will have is staying focused on God; your mind will constantly want to wander and think about other things. If you keep your conversation with God merely in your mind, you will be much more likely to think about a lot of other things. Expressing your praise and prayers out loud will greatly help you keep your mind and time focused on God.

Some Christians struggle with expressing sinful feelings like anger and worry to God. But read the Psalms. They are a record of divinely inspired

God Times and there is a lot of emotion expressed in them. Both good feelings like joy and thanksgiving, but also bad feelings like anger, envy, sorrow, disappointment, guilt, and fear. The Bible says, “*Give all your worries and cares to God because He cares about you*” (1 Pet 5:7). You can hardly GIVE your worries to God without EXPRESSING them to Him.

Of course, God already “*knows the secrets of every heart*” (Ps 44:21). But it is important for you to recognize and respond to what is in your heart. “*Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life*” (Prov 4:23). Your whole day, week, and life will be controlled by what is in your “*heart*.” You cannot even begin to “*guard your heart*” against evil beliefs, desires, and emotions until you know what is there. Your feelings reflect what you are really believing. Learn to be open with God about what is in your heart so He can help you change it.

Word refers to the truth of Scripture.³ There are many ways to interact with God through His word. But the worst way is the most common way Christians practice. They just read the Bible like any other book and do not EXPERIENCE it as God talking to them. How can you more consistently experience God in Scripture?

PRAY through Scripture, do not just read it. And we mean pray out loud. Try it and you will experience the difference. It is harder to PRAY rather than merely read through Scripture. You will need a place where no one can hear you. It will take some time to make it a habit. But if you will learn to PRAY out loud through Scripture, having conversations with God about what you are reading, instead of just reading God’s word like any other book, it will be one of the most life changing things you ever do.

How do you PRAY through Scripture? As you read, pause often to talk out loud to the Author about what it says. After all, the goal is to spend time with a *Person*, not just a book. Stop and think about statements that seem important to you. If you read a promise, thank God for it. If you read a command, ask for God’s help to obey it. Make God Times a two-way conversation with God! PRAYING through Scripture will help you get the Word of God off the pages of Scripture and into your heart. Start today!

God told Joshua: “*Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful*” (Josh 1:8-9 NIV). The key to experiencing God’s word instead of just reading it is to “*meditate on it*.” How do you meditate on Scripture? God told Joshua how: “*Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips*.” Speaking Scripture, and verbalizing it, is how you meditate on it. And praying through Scripture is an important way to meditate on it. This is why we highly recommend reading and praying Scripture out loud. God said His Scripture is to be “*on your lips*” not just in your head. Reading and praying Scripture out loud will help you to focus and meditate on it.

But keeping Scripture “*always on your lips*” to “*meditate on it*” probably refers to two additional practices that were prevalent in Old Testament (OT) culture: discussing and memorizing Scripture (cf. Deut 11:18-20). We will discuss the first one in the next chapter.

Memorizing God’s word is a vital practice for the Christian. The Psalmist said: “*I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you*” (Ps 119:11). The original Hebrew word translated “hidden” means to store up, treasure, and protect something. That certainly requires memorizing Scripture. One Scripture memorized is worth a thousand merely read. This is why throughout the *Christian Essential* studies you will be encouraged to memorize the main verse for each chapter. The memory verses for this study are listed in Appendix C. Write the memory verse down so you can look at it often. Speak it out loud “*on your lips*” 10 times and you are close to locking it in your heart. ⁴

To “*meditate on*” God’s word is to think deeply about how it applies to your life. How can you do this? Again, start with your feelings. And ask yourself some vital questions: What are you feeling today? Do you have any bad feelings? Why are you feeling that way? What lie are you believing to make you feel anxious, angry, depressed, etc.? What would God say to you about that false belief? This is how you practically use “*the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God*” (Eph 6:16-17) to confront controlling lies in your life. If you believe, “*the truth will set you free*” (John 8:32).

Notice how the Psalmist does this when he writes: “*Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God!*” (Ps 42:5). Your Openness to God will lead to experiencing God in His word, instead of just reading. Meditating on God’s word and how it applies to what is happening in your heart, will change your day, and your life.

The practice of praying and meditating through Scripture is why we suggest reading shorter sections of Scripture each day. This means that in some God Times you might meditate on only one verse. Maybe a memory verse. Remember, if you really want to consume “*the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,*” the goal is not to just “get through the Bible,” but to get the Bible in you.

We would also suggest you read the NT before, and more often than, the OT. The NT applies more to the Christian’s life. However, you will find the Psalms and Proverbs in the OT very helpful as well. Of course, while you are going through this *Christian Essentials* study, its chapters can be your Scripture reading for the day a few times a week.

Entreaties simply mean prayers and requests to God. The Bible says, “*Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus*” (Phil

4:6-7). This summarizes much of what we have said about God Time. Be open with God about your feelings (e.g. “worry”). Praise “*him for all he has done.*” And “*you will experience God’s peace*” and “*guard your hearts*” against worry if you ask why you are feeling that way, recognize the lie you believe, and replace it with God’s truth.

But the focus in your God Time should not always be yourself. With Entreaties you can pray for others. And as will be discussed later in this study, this kind of prayer is how you see the power of God work in your life.

Resolutions simply means commitments and decisions to act. Notice that God did not want Joshua to only pray about, talk about, memorize, and meditate on His word. He told Joshua the reason for these other disciplines was “*so that you may be careful to do everything written in it.*” Again, simply reading about God is not enough to change your life. Many Christians do this because it is easy, but they do not grow. The Bible says, “*Don’t just listen to God’s word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. . . If you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don’t forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it*” (Jas 1:22, 25).

Before you leave your God Time, decide on something you can obey that day. How can you be kind to someone today? How can you represent Christ to someone today? What specifically would you like to do for God today? Decide it, plan it, then do it.

Again, the P.O.W.E.R. plan is not intended to be legalistic. Some people will enjoy and connect with God more through different parts of it. Some will find singing a song during the Praise time very meaningful. Others will enjoy journaling during the Word or Entreaties part. Experiment and feel free to do what helps you the most to be encouraged and in love with God.

Finally, we offer some additional suggestions about your God Times, but again, with no desire to be legalistic. It is usually best to choose a specific place and time for your God Time. Try to find a place where you can pray out loud without being heard by others.

Consider scheduling your daily God Time in the morning. David said: “*Listen to my voice in the morning, Lord. Each morning I bring my requests to you and wait expectantly*” (Ps 5:3). Likewise, we noted above that, “*Very early in the morning . . . Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed*” (Mark 1:35-36).

Is posture important for spending time with God? Maybe more than many think. There is coming a Day when God will finally get what He has always wanted and “*every knee will bow*” before Him (Isa. 45:23). We can kneel now, at the beginning of every day, as a sign of respect to our King. Millions of Muslims kneel before their “god” seven times a day. Most Christians do not kneel before our real God even once a day. There is no need to be legalistic about it, but the Apostle Paul practiced it himself (cf.

Eph. 3:14). An entire God Time need not be spent on your knees, but perhaps your initial Praise time.

How long should a God Time be? Martin Luther said, "I want to spend enough time with Jesus every day that my heart gets glad."⁵ That is how you know you have really spent time with God! Your praise, prayer, openness, and meditation on God's word has replaced your anger, anxiety, and apathy, with love, joy, and peace. Obviously you can and should fellowship with God all day. But ideally you should leave your God Time with the P.O.W.E.R. to love, serve, and glorify God throughout your day.

However, it may be good to set a time goal for your God Time. This will help you "stretch your soul." You might be amazed at how difficult it will be to simply focus on praising God for literally two minutes or to pray for others for just three minutes.

A good goal to work towards is to spend 30 minutes each day going through the P.O.W.E.R. plan. But it is more important to spend time with God every day, even if it will not be very long. Do not underestimate the power of even a 5 minute God Time! But longer times can certainly be more life-changing. This is why you will be encouraged and instructed how to spend a 1 hour time with God in this study.

"Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation" (1 Peter 2:2 NASB). Spending time with God is the most important thing you can do.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Memorize 1 Peter 2:2 in the translation above or another one.
- ▶ Look at the "P.O.W.E.R. Plan for God Times" in Appendix A. Try "stretching your soul" for 30 minutes following the plan. Share your experience in your Barnabas Group this week.
- ▶ Read the next chapter to prepare for your Barnabas Group this week.

¹ "Pure milk of the word" translates Gr. *logikon* from *logos* meaning "word." This translation is supported by the references to Scripture in the preceding vs. (1:23-25).

² The *FORGIVENESS* study on how to become a Christian and know you are a one can be purchased from the New Life Resource Center in the front foyer of the church or obtained free online from the New Life website at www.newlifecr.com.

³ We recommend the *New Living Translation* (NLT). A version with helpful notes can be purchased in the New Life Resource Center in the front foyer of the church. For a thorough study of Bible translations see Pastor Kurt's book at

<http://trainingtimothys.org/books/book-15-bible-translations/>.

A good electronic Bible program for your phone or computer can be found at <https://www.olivetree.com/>. A very effective verse search program is Google.

⁴ There are some helpful and free apps available to help with verse memorization. A good one can be found at <https://scripturetyper.com/>.

⁵ Quoted in *Every Man a Warrior*, Lonnie Berger, Book 1, p. 35.

Chapter 2.2

Making the Most of My Group Times*Invest time with God's people*

Colossians 3:16

Week 1

After reading this chapter, answer the following questions:

- Why should we study God's word with others?
- Are you willing to commit to a weekly Barnabas Group?
- What will make it difficult for you to keep this commitment?
- What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?

Dave had been a Christian for many years. He went to church, gave money, and even served in a ministry. But he was not growing spiritually or becoming the Christian man, husband, and father he wanted to be. In fact, being a Christian felt more like a dull duty than a delight.

Dave decided to do two things. First, he began to regularly spend time meditating on Scripture and praying. Secondly, Dave began meeting weekly with three other Christian men who became friends and who prayed and discussed the Bible with him. Both of these commitments were challenging at first. But they became some of the best times during Dave's week. His life changed and living for Christ became more real and exciting. Dave experienced what God instructs us to do when He says:

Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives.

(Col 3:16)

You learn and live the truth best by investing time with God's people.

Group times will help you grow

Colossians 3:16 reflects the repeated commandment in God's word for Christians to "*encourage each other and build each other up*" (1 Thess 5:11; cf. 1 Thess 4:11; 5:14; Rom 12:8; 2 Cor 13:11; Heb 3:13). To "*encourage*" means to inspire with courage, strengthen in hope, and motivate to live for God. To "*build each other up*" is to help them grow. The Greek word used here refers elsewhere to physically building a house (cf. Matt 7:24, 26). It is used in the NT to mean building a person spiritually. All of these things are necessary and wonderful blessings that you desperately need if your Christian life is going to progress and be fruitful.

Where will your needed encouragement come from? Other Christians. And not just the Pastors, but other Christians in your life. God says you need other Christians to “*teach,*” “*counsel,*” “*encourage,*” and “*build*” you “*up.*” You cannot do these things by yourself. God created you so you would need other people in your life to grow. You need others to encourage change in your life. God knows how to change your life, and He says you cannot do it alone. This is why the Bible says: “*I pray that you will be active in sharing what you believe. Then you will completely understand every good thing we have in Christ*” (Plmn 1:6 NlRV).

Proverbs promises: “*Spend time with the wise and you will become wise, but the friends of fools will suffer*” (Prov 13:20 NCV). Whoever your best friends are, will greatly influence and affect your life. So choose wisely and make time to develop friendships that will help you.

Why does God want you to meet with other Christians to “*teach,*” “*counsel,*” “*encourage,*” and “*build up*” one another? One reason is this: sharing your life and God’s word with others encourages you to be HUMBLE. God says: “*All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time*” (1 Pet 5:5-6 NIV). God’s grace not only forgives sinners, but also gives spiritual blessing and growth to His people (cf. Rom 1:7; 12:6). You need God’s grace to grow, and He only gives it to the humble.

How do you know if you are humble toward God? Look at your humility toward people. Do you see the connection in the verse above between having “*humility toward one another*” and being “*humble . . . under God’s mighty hand*”? A very important measure of your humility toward people is your willingness and commitment to gather with them, love them, be open with them, encourage them, and letting them encourage you.

It is proud people who try to live the Christian life alone. A commitment to humility will enable you to, “*Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives*” (Col 3:16). You learn and live the truth best by investing time with God’s people to meditate on, pray about, and live out the truth together.

This is why the *Christian Essentials* are designed to be used in fellowship with others. Husbands and wives can go through them together. Or a parent with their teen. However, many will study and discuss them in what we call a Barnabas Group.

Barnabas Groups and the *FOUNDATIONS* study

The term “*Barnabas*” refers to the early friend and mentor of the Apostle Paul (cf. Acts 9:26-27). He had a lot of influence in Paul’s life (cf. Acts 11:22-25), partnered with him on his first missionary journey (cf. Act 13:1-2). It was for good reason that “*the apostles called [him] Barnabas*

(which means "son of encouragement")" (Acts 5:5). Having a Barnabas or two will be one of the greatest blessings in your life. And a Barnabas Group will help you get the most out of the *Christian Essentials* studies.

For the purposes of the *FOUNDATIONS* study, you will be asked to make an 8 week commitment to weekly readings, personal projects, Barnabas Group meetings, and a group project. The readings and personal projects will require 1-1.5 hours per week. It will be helpful if you notice the questions at the beginning of the chapters and mark the answers as you read along because these questions will be discussed in your Barnabas Group. The Barnabas Group will typically consist of 2-4 people of the same gender and will meet for about 90 minutes. So the total weekly time commitment will normally be about 2-3 hours per week.

The agenda of the Barnabas Group will follow the same "P.O.W.E.R. Plan that was discussed in the previous chapter for God Times. This agenda will lead you to **P**raise God, be **O**pen about your struggles, discuss God's **W**ord, pray **E**ntreaties for each other, and make **R**esolutions together.

Therefore, a consistent Barnabas Group will help you in many ways. First, there will be people praying for you and that is worth a lot! Also, preparing for and participating in your Barnabas Group discussion will help you really learn and apply what God is wanting to teach you. This is because your Christian friends will help you memorize, meditate on, and apply the Scriptures you are studying.

In addition, you will be asked join together to plan and accomplish a service project. Your Barnabas Group Project can be something that blesses someone in the church, a friend, or strangers. Your friendships will grow by serving together and this will be another way that you obey God's word rather than just talking about it.

The Table of Contents for this study also serves as a checklist so you can track your completion of the readings, groups, and projects.

There is a great deal of commitment needed to have "*the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives*" and to "*Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives*" (Col 3:16). But you must slow down your life to change your life. Merely busy people never change. You learn and live the truth best by investing time with God's people to meditate on, pray about, and live out the truth together. Are you willing to do this?

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Review the "P.O.W.E.R. Plan" in Appendix B for your Barnabas Group.
- ▶ Recite 1 Peter 2:2 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Colossians 3:16 in the translation above or another one.
- ▶ Complete Project 2.A on the next page before Barnabas Group this week.
- ▶ Complete Project 2.B by reading Appendix C.

Project 2A

Making the Most of My Life

The noble make noble plans, and by noble deeds they stand.
(Isa 32:8 NIV)

This week you are being encouraged to make several commitments. Making and keeping these “*noble plans*” will probably be very difficult for you. Life is busy. It is difficult to focus. And we simply will not always feel like doing something even as wonderful as spending time with God or a group of Christians.

And on top of all that, your “*struggle*” to do anything spiritual, “*is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*” (Eph 6:12 NIV). You have a spiritual enemy working in you and around you to stop you from doing anything for God, including God Times and Barnabas Group. So you had better be serious right now about doing these for God no matter how you feel or what happens.

You will do this by making “*noble plans*” and standing on those commitments. Think about many of the most important accomplishments and blessings in your life. Your education, career, marriage, children, ministry, etc. They all depended on making a commitment, a decision that required work and faithfulness. But it was worth it! And so it will be for any “*noble plans*” by which you “*stand*.”

If you are willing to commit to the following, please sign below.

During the next 8 weeks of this study I will do my best to:

- Love God by spending time with Him following the P.O.W.E.R. plan.
- Complete the weekly readings and projects of the study.
- Attend the weekly Barnabas Group times.
- In addition, I will never share personal things shared within the Barnabas Group without the person’s permission.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Now pray and ask God to help you be among “*The noble [who] make noble plans, and by noble deeds they stand*” (Isa 32:8 NIV).

Chapter 2.3

God's Purpose for You*Living for God's Glory & your Joy*

John 10:10

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:
 - How would Christ define an extraordinary life?
 - What is the purpose of the Christian life?
 - What ultimate desire did God create your heart to seek?
 - How do we define joy? How is it obtained?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?

He was a very normal Jew. And he had great weaknesses. One day he was violent enough to cut a man's ear off with a sword. The next day he was a lying coward, afraid to tell even a young slave girl he was a follower of Jesus (cf. John 18:16-17, 26). But God did not leave Simon in his frustration and failure. He became Peter, which in the original Greek means “the Rock,” and the first leader of the largest and most influential religious faith in the world (cf. Matt 16:18). This ordinary man lived an extraordinary life.

Did God intend only some of His people, like Peter, to experience an extraordinary life? Would you describe your Christian life as an extraordinary life? Full of love, joy, peace, and impacting other people for the glory of God? This is what Jesus said He came to give you:

My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life (John 10:10).

Christ invites you to an extraordinary life that is full of joy
and glorifies God.

Christ's invitation to an extraordinary life

Even though eternal life is a wonderful thing, Jesus also came to give you “*a rich and satisfying life*” now. The original Greek word translated “*satisfying*” means, “Extraordinary in experience or amount; remarkable, abundant.”¹ Therefore, you are only living Authentic Christianity if you are experiencing a rich, satisfying, and even extraordinary life.

Why is Authentic Christianity an extraordinary life? Because it is enjoying Christ's promises, experiencing His power, and obeying His

commands. And because Christ's promises, power, and commands are all extraordinary, God expects you to live an extraordinary life!

The following three chapters are devoted to the Essentials of Authentic Christianity and give you a summary of what this extraordinary, biblical Christian life is all about and how it can be yours. In this chapter we study God's definition and purpose for living an extraordinary life. In the next chapter we discuss God's power for living this extraordinary life. Finally we introduce God's process for increasing His power in your life and enabling you to live an extraordinary life that glorifies Him. Christ invites you to an extraordinary life that is full of joy and glorifies God.

Christ's definition of an extraordinary life

Jesus said He came to give you an extraordinary life. How would Christ define such a life? It is obeying His extraordinary commands.

First, it is reflected in God's Greatest Commandment: "*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength*" (Mark 12:30). Imagine actually doing that. Even for one moment. That would be an extraordinary life!

Secondly, an extraordinary life is described in Christ's New Commandment: "*As I have loved you, so you must love one another*" (John 13:34 NIV). In fact, there are over 50 commands in the NT telling Christians to love one another. Living like this would be extraordinary!

Thirdly, the extraordinary life is reflected in Christ's Radical Commandment: "*Love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you*" (Luke 6:27). Imagine actually doing that! That would be extraordinary!

Fourth, the extraordinary life Christ came to bring us would include God's Most Repeated Command: "*Do not fear.*" Imagine never being afraid of anyone or anything ever again! Jesus Christ was never stressed out or anxious and He wants you to have that same extraordinary peace.

Fifth, Christ calls us to an extraordinary family where the husband loves his wife as much as Christ loves the Church, the wife adores and serves her husband as she would Christ Himself, and parents are raising children to experience the love and lordship of Jesus Christ (cf. Eph 5:22-6:4). God wants to help you have an extraordinary family!

Finally, Christ also invites you to an extraordinary life in the Great Commission: "*Go and make disciples of all the nations . . . Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you*" (Matt 28:19-20). THAT is making a difference and impacting the world!

Jesus summed up the extraordinary life, and the ultimate purpose of every Christian's life, when He said: "*My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples*" (John 15:8). THAT is the purpose of the Christian life. Glorifying God because your life

produces “*much fruit*.” In fact, to “*bear much fruit*” is how you “*prove*” you ARE a follower of Jesus Christ. What is this spiritual fruit?

Spiritual fruit is first of all experiencing the powers of the Spirit. The Bible says, “*The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*” (Gal 5:22-23). Living with such supernatural powers would be a fulfilling and extraordinary life! Think about how these powers would affect your life, marriage, parenting, work, and service to God!

The second kind of spiritual fruit that glorifies God is using you to help people become Christians and grow to be more like Christ. You glorify the Father and fulfill your Christian purpose when you are part of the Great Commission to “*Go and make disciples*” of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said He came to give you an extraordinary and overflowing life. A life that not only fills you up, but is so abundant and full that God’s love and blessings overflow through your life to others. Christ invites you to an extraordinary life that is full of joy and glorifies God.

Christ’s reason for an extraordinary life

Christ wants your life overflowing with God-glorifying joy. Joy is unconditional happiness. It is unconditional because it comes from trusting in the sure promises of God and obeying the satisfying commands of Christ, regardless of your circumstances. And there is no better definition of joy than happiness.

Many Christians think a desire to be happy is selfish or worldly. But Jesus wants you to be happy. And He told you how. Jesus said: “*I have told you these things [to obey my commands v. 10] so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!*” (John 15:11). Christ told you how to have joy: Obey His commands. All of Christ’s commands are intended to make you happy and give you the most fulfilling life possible. This is good news because God created your heart with one ultimate controlling desire: to be happy!

Let us repeat that so you can think about it. God created you with one ultimate controlling desire: to be happy. Which is why everything you do, every decision you make, is ultimately motivated to make you happy. The Christian philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal rightly wrote:

All men seek happiness. This is without exception. . . . The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves. ²

How much effort do humans invest in avoiding the opposite of happiness, which is pain? This is why drugs and drinks that relieve pain are a multi-billion dollar business around the world. God has programmed into the center of every human heart the desire and drive to be happy. And this

is what everyone seeks in everything they do. Everything! Including you. And you can have the unconditional happiness of joy from God when you trust His promises and obey His commands no matter what else is happening in your life.

Unfortunately, your desire to be “happy” is the ultimate reason you sin. You become convinced that disobeying God will give you the most pleasure, significance, acceptance, or security. You disobey God to be happy, when in reality, the only way to be happy is to trust and obey Him.

Our desire for happiness is another way we are created in God’s image. God wants to be happy. This is why His ultimate plan for Creation is a New Creation where “*there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain*” (Rev 21:4). Happiness is the ultimate goal of God’s heart!

If you are not experiencing the unconditional happiness of joy, then you are not experiencing God, or the “*extraordinary and overflowing life*” of Christ. There are times to be sad. But if your life is often discouraging and depressing, then God has more for you. He created you to be happy. A committed Christian who is living for God out of grace instead of guilt is probably the most joyous person you know. Obeying God’s extraordinary commands does not hurt your life, but is the most fulfilling and happy way to live. The happiest people in the world are the holiest people in the world.

If you doubt this, simply try to imagine living as sinfully and selfishly as you can. Would you be happy? No! Jesus said, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive*” (Acts 20:35). The original Greek word translated “*blessed*” means “happy.” Jesus said giving makes you happier than giving. Therefore, we are not talking about a happiness from “health and wealth,” but an unconditional and satisfying joy that comes from obeying and trusting God, instead of just getting from God.

God wants His people to be the happiest and most joyful people in the world because this glorifies God. What if a relationship with God made you miserable? What would that say about your God? This is why “*God loves a cheerful giver*” (2 Cor 9:7). Obeying God out of guilt or fear or a sense of duty does not glorify or please God. Obeying with joy, and because of joy, is what God wants. This is why New Life’s definition of Authentic Christianity is “*Joyfully serving Christ with our best friends to glorify God.*”

Accordingly, the Westminster Confession famously states: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” That includes enjoying God now! Your glorification of God is dependent on your happiness, and this is why He has created humans with the desire for happiness and told you how to unconditionally experience it.

Know this right now and do not doubt it. The most pleasurable experience you will have for the rest of your life is obeying the commandments of God. Don’t miss the best life you can have because you

are selfish, independent, worldly, or afraid. Living for the greatest Person, and giving yourself to the greatest cause, is the most satisfying and God-glorifying way to live. And this is why God invites you to live this way. Jesus put it this way: “*My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life*” (John 10:10). Christ invites you to an extraordinary life that is full of joy and glorifies God.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite Colossians 3:16 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize John 10:10 in the translation above or another one.
- ▶ Read the next chapter to prepare for your Barnabas Group this week.

¹ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (BAGD), F. W. Danker ed, 3rd ed. (University Of Chicago Press, 2001).

² Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, 113, (online at www.ccel.org). For more on the psychology of desire and happiness, see chapter 4.1, section C of *Biblical Psychology*, by Pastor Kurt available online at: <http://trainingtims.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/4.1-The-Human-Heart.pdf>.

For a popular and practical study on the place of happiness in the Christian life, and a more in-depth study of the purpose of this chapter, see *The Dangerous Duty of Delight*, John Piper (Multnomah, 2001).

Chapter 2.4

God's Power for You*God's Spirit living in you*

Galatians 5:16

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 is the critical key to successfully living the Christian life?
 - What is your “flesh” or the “sinful nature”?
 - What are the automatic effects of the Holy Spirit controlling you? Why would they be automatic?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?

We noted in the last chapter that the Apostle Peter was a very ordinary man when Jesus met him. But even after being a disciple of Christ for over three years Peter was still violent and fearful (cf. John 18:16-17, 26). But he became one of the most fearless and fruitful Christian leaders in the history of the Church. What made the difference? How did such a weak believer become so powerful? The Holy Spirit indwelled him that day! (cf. Acts 2:1-4). This is why after Christ's resurrection He promised all Christians: “*You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you*” (Acts 1:8).

What made the difference in Peter's life? The indwelling of the Holy Spirit. A gift of supernatural “*power*” given to every Christian. Releasing the “*power*” of the Holy Spirit in your life is the key to living the extraordinary life of Authentic Christianity: *Joyfully serving Christ with our best friends to glorify God*. The Bible says:

Live by the Holy Spirit's power. Then you will not do what your sinful nature wants you to do. (Gal 5:16 NIRV)

The power to live an extraordinary life for God
is being controlled by the Holy Spirit.

The Person inside of you

We discussed in the previous chapter that one of the reasons Jesus came was to give us an extraordinary life. And that extraordinary life is found in living the extraordinary commandments of God. These include the Greatest Commandment to love Him with everything and in everything, the New Commandment to love one another just as much as He loves you, and the Great Commission to produce other obedient followers of Jesus Christ.

Paul summed it up when he wrote: “*Imitate God in everything you do*” (Eph 5:1). Really? Imitate God in everything?

Why would God expect all of His people to obey such challenging commands and live such an extraordinary life? Because God lives in you! If God actually lives in a person, why would you not expect them to love and live like Him? God’s commands are not meant to frustrate you because you cannot do them. They tell you what is possible with the power of God’s Spirit living in and through you. The purpose of the OT Law was to show the spiritually dead how sinful they are. The purpose of the “*law of Christ*” (Gal 6:2) is to show those with the Spirit of God how powerful they are. The Bible says, “*His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life*” (2 Pet 1:3), including God’s Spirit living in us.

The great revealed “*mystery*” of Christianity “*is Christ in you*” (Col 1:27). And the Apostle Paul proclaimed with conviction: “*Christ lives in me*” (Gal 2:20). God challenges and asks all Christians: “*Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?*” (2 Cor 13:5). Jesus told His disciples: “*You will realize that . . . I am in you*” (John 14:20 NIV). Do you realize Christ lives in you? Take a moment and recognize His presence in you right now!

Think about this for a moment. What would it feel like, and look like, to have God living through you? For the perfect Jesus in you to be living, talking, thinking, feeling, and acting through you? Imagine living like Jesus Christ for the rest of the day. And then all week long. Stop reading. We are asking you to really take a moment and think about this.

Here is the amazing truth. You have a perfect Person living inside of you! You do not possess just a part of Jesus. A complete and fully functioning Jesus Christ lives inside of you! What did Paul say? “*Christ lives in me!*” (Gal 2:20). The Bible says: “*Put on the new self, [already] created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness*” (Eph 4:24 NIV). This is why Paul wrote: “*Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him*” (Phil 2:12-13). You will have a “*deep reverence*” for God when you realize, “*God is working in you.*”

It is through the Holy Spirit’s supernatural power that you can love and live like God because God is living in you! This is why, “*His commandments are not burdensome*” (1 John 5:3). In the power of the Spirit, Christ’s “*yoke is easy*” and His “*burden is light*” (Matt 11:30). This is the difference between living for God in His strength or your own strength. If obeying God feels heavy and hard it may be because you do not have the Spirit of God living in you, or He is not controlling you. The Apostle said: “*I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength*” (Phil 4:13), including all of God’s commands. The power to live an extraordinary life for God is being controlled by the Holy Spirit.

No one with only natural human power can obey the commands of God. But you Christian are not a natural human. You have been recreated into a “*new creation*” (2 Cor 5:17) and indwelled with God’s Spirit. Christians have been so radically changed on the inside that they are essentially a different species of human beings. They are the only humans who are indwelled with God.

This is what our Bible text is teaching us: “*Live by the Holy Spirit's power. Then you will not do what your sinful nature wants you to do*” (Gal 5:16 NIV). Notice some very important things here.

First, if the Holy Spirit of God controls you, you will be holy. The vital key to successfully living Authentic Christianity and doing all that God wants is being controlled by the Holy Spirit. You are not only forgiven for all the times you do not obey God’s commands. You are also empowered to fully obey those commands. Jesus did not come to just set you free from the penalty of sin. He also came to free you from the power of sin.

By far the most important key to a happy and fulfilling marriage is two people living in the power of the Holy Spirit. By far the most important thing to being the parent, worker, and church member you need to be, is being controlled by the Holy Spirit. God never created these roles to be successful without the power of the Holy Spirit.

The battle inside of you

But you must recognize there is another power working in you that desires to control you. The Bible calls this the “*flesh*” or “*sinful nature.*” Your sinful nature is just that: a nature, force, or habit of thinking and doing that hates God. It consists of all the sinful lies programmed in your mind by this sinful world. The Bible says, “*The sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God’s laws, and it never will*” (Rom 8:7). The Apostle Paul called it a spiritual disease of: “*sin living in me . . . in my sinful nature*” (Rom 7:17-18).

If the Spirit is the key to being the person you want to be, then the sinful nature is your greatest enemy. It is the work of the Devil in you and through you. Nothing, and we mean nothing, hurts your life, marriage, and children more than your sinful nature. When it is controlling you, you are destroying everything good in your life.

It is understandable that these two powers, Sin and the Spirit, are at war within you. The Bible says:

The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. (Gal 5:17)

Notice something very important: You are always controlled by either the Holy Spirit or your sinful nature. Always. Our text for this chapter says you either “*Live by the Holy Spirit's power*” or you “*do what your sinful nature wants you to do*” (Gal 5:16 NIV). This is because sin or the Spirit are the only two choices for the Christian. One or the other is always ruling us during every conscious minute of every day.

The power within you

Therefore, notice the wonderful promise in our verse: “*Live by the Holy Spirit's power. Then you will not do what your sinful nature wants you to do*” (Gal 5:16 NIV). Why is that so wonderful? Because of all the amazing things you will experience through “*the Holy Spirit's power*” and all the horrible desires of “*your sinful nature*” that you will be free from if you can learn to be controlled by God’s Spirit in you!

One of the greatest mistakes Christians make is failing to recognize throughout the day whether Sin or the Spirit is controlling them. They have lived under the power of anger, worry, lust, frustration, and discouragement for so long they believe these sinful feelings are part of the normal Christian life. No!

You must constantly recognize your sinful nature and rebel against it! You must stop tolerating its control in your life because now God lives in you. Do not merely accept feeling angry, afraid, lonely, or worthless but hate these things because they are sin controlling you. It is time to declare war on your sinful, God-hating, people-hating, destructive nature within you! Violence is commanded of the Christian for only one thing: “*Put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires*” (Col 3:5). God commands you to hate and murder the sinful nature inside of you.

How do you know if you are being controlled by the Holy Spirit? “*The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*” (Gal 5:22-23). Whenever you are not feeling and experiencing those things you are being controlled by your sinful nature. The fruits of the Holy Spirit are the normal Christian life!

Notice that when the Holy Spirit controls you, you will automatically obey God because God is controlling you. If God controls you, then you do not need to struggle or choose to feel “*love, joy, peace.*” You will experience His powers in an effortless and enduring way. They are the automatic power and result of being controlled by the Holy Spirit.

All of this is why the only test you will be given throughout the Christian Essentials is the “Spiritual Power Test” explained below. Unfortunately, Christians evaluate their spiritual growth and maturity on many things that often mean very little. How much biblical theology and doctrine you know

is of little value, if you are consistently getting frustrated and angry with your wife, children, and coworkers. Even if you are dedicated to consistent “quiet times,” and church meetings and ministry, you may be a fairly young and weak Christian because you struggle so much with guilt, worry, fear, anger, pride, and depression.

It is not how much you know, or even how much you do, but what you are experiencing, that truly measures your spiritual growth. How consistently you are experiencing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control in your closest relationships and greatest challenges is the real measure of your spiritual maturity. It is the absence of anger, depression, worry, frustration, selfishness, greed, apathy, lust, and other sins that is the true measure of what kind of Christian you are.

Therefore, you will not be tested on what you know or what you are doing in the *Christian Essentials* discipleship materials. If the Spirit of God is consistently controlling you then it is because you are believing the right things, and then you will be doing the right things.

In the next chapter we will explain how you can more consistently, “*Live by the Holy Spirit's power. Then you will not do what your sinful nature wants you to do*” (Gal 5:16 NIV). But for now, understand and believe this: The power to live an extraordinary life for God is being controlled by the Holy Spirit.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite John 10:10 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Galatians 5:16 in the translation above or another one.
- ▶ Complete Project 2.C by completing Appendix E: “Spiritual Power Test” before your Barnabas Group this week.

Chapter 2.5

God's Process for You*Renewing your mind*

Romans 12:2

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:
 - How do you change your character and life?
 - What makes the difference between a person being controlled by the Holy Spirit or their sinful nature?
 - What is the *Christian Essentials*' process to change your life and why?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?

Mike shares his testimony about the power of God's truth:

“I graduated from seminary and became a Pastor. It was my custom to spend at least an hour a day in Bible study and prayer. I memorized chapters of Scripture. I shared the Gospel with anyone I met. I tried to do everything I had been taught in order to live the successful Christian life.

What was the result of all this? My wife and children didn't respect me because in my zeal to make them be good Christians, I became legalistic, harsh, and unloving. My marriage was a mess and my personal life was a shambles. Finally I came to grips with reality and stopped being a Pastor. In a short time I became an alcoholic.

I began trying everything I knew to stop including: lots of prayer, hours of Bible study and memorization, fasting, evangelism, accountability groups, hundreds of meetings with Christian and secular counselors, Christian and secular treatment centers, Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, reading many books on addiction, had a “baptism of the Spirit session” and two sessions of exorcism, was disciplined by my church, followed a rigid schedule, and made promises to God and my wife. The result? I lost control and was depressed for days and suicidal.

Why didn't any of this work? Because they were all things I was doing in the flesh. Whenever we commit ourselves to a program, rules, or method to perform, we put ourselves under law which gives sin power (1 Cor 15:56). The problem was not the bad behavior but the belief behind the behavior that caused me to act that way.

One day I was listening to a teaching on our death in Christ. Rom 6:6-7 says, “For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.” I thought, “That’s what I need, but how do I make that true in my life?” Then the teacher said, “It is not something you do, it is something that has already been done.”

It was at that moment that I knew the truth. I knew I had died with Christ and the old sin-loving sinner had died and was no more. I had believed the lie that I was a hopeless, helpless alcoholic. But now I knew that I, Mike, was a child of God who had died with Christ. I was free at last, free at last! Praise God I was free at last !!!!!!!!!!!”

Do you see how lies can control you? Do you see how the truth can set you free? Why did none of those things that Mike tried help him? Because for some reason they did not change his beliefs about God and himself. Mike discovered what the Bible says about truly changing your life.

**Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world,
but let God transform you into a new person
by changing the way you think. (Romans 12:2)**

You change your life when you change your mind.

An invitation to a new life

“*Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world.*” There is a certain set of beliefs, values, and lifestyles practiced and taught by this world. You understand the danger of this when you recognize that “*the whole world is under the control of the evil one*” (1 John 5:19). It is the anti-Christian, selfish, greedy, lustful beliefs of the world that have programmed your demonic sinful nature to desire and act as it does.

Your mind, especially when you were young, was like soft wax. It could be molded and imprinted by all kinds of experiences with no idea of what was true or false, good or bad. You have lived according to how those people and experiences in the world molded your mind.

What does your life look like when it copies “*the behavior and customs of this world*”? The people of this world are sinful, angry, lonely, afraid, depressed, hopeless, and empty. Are any of the values and beliefs of the world living in you? Does the pull of sex, money, “success,” and entertainment seem stronger than the Spirit sometimes? You are following “*the behavior and customs of this world*” and God commands you not to be because it will never make you happy.

Rather, God wants to, “*transform you into a new person*” (Rom 12:2). The original Greek word used here is “*metamorphos*” and means a radical and permanent change in the character of something. A good illustration

of *metamorphosis* is the transformation that occurs when a caterpillar turns into a butterfly. A caterpillar is ugly and crawls on many legs. The butterfly is beautiful and flies with two wings. And notice that a butterfly cannot turn back into a caterpillar. Once changed, always changed. And this is true of the spiritual growth and transformation that the Apostle is talking about.

Christian, you can change anything about your character. There is nothing about your moral weaknesses that cannot be changed, no matter how long you have been that way, or how hard you have tried to change it. God wants to help you change it because He loves you and He wants to be glorified through your life.

The process to a new life

How can such amazing and lasting change occur in your character? How can you be consistently controlled by the Holy Spirit? Our text says: *“Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think”* (Romans 12:2). Why do you change your life when you change your mind? Because the mind is where you believe, and everything you do is controlled by what you believe. The Bible says of all humans: *“For as he thinks within himself, so he is”* (Prov 23:7 NASB). Your thoughts and beliefs determine what you will do and who you will be. This is how God created you.

If you change what you believe, you will change what you desire and feel. And because you act on what you desire and feel, all of this will change your character. And because you can permanently change your beliefs, you can permanently change your character. This is why God says He can, *“transform you into a new person by changing the way you think”* (Rom 12:2).

This truth answers a vital question: How does a person experience the powers of the Holy Spirit? What makes the difference between a person who is being controlled by their sinful nature or the Holy Spirit? How do you obey the NT commands to: *“be led by the Holy Spirit,” “keep in step with the Holy Spirit,”* and *“be filled with the Holy Spirit”* (Gal 5:18, 25; Eph 5:18)? The answer is simple: **Believe the truth**. This is why the Holy Spirit is called *“the Spirit of truth”* (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:6).

Truth is the power of God and the Holy Spirit in your life. Lies are the power of the Devil and the sinful nature. If you are believing the truth, the Holy Spirit will be controlling you. If you believe a lie, the sinful nature will be controlling you. This is one of the most vital and fundamental things to understand about the Christian life.

Think about it for a moment. Everything you feel, desire, and do is based on what you **believe**. Let us take the example of worry. God commands: *“Do not worry about anything”* (Phil 4:6). Therefore, worry is a sin and a power of the sinful nature. And when you are worrying you are

not experiencing peace or joy, which are powers of the Holy Spirit. Remember, you can only be controlled by sin or the Spirit.

What is empowering the sinful nature when you worry? You believe a lie. Worry means you are believing that you need to worry in order to protect yourself from something or someone. And that is a lie.

If God commands you, “*Do not worry about anything*” then it means that truthfully there is nothing for you to worry about. God would not command you to do something that would hurt you. All of His commands are actually designed to help you and protect you from harm, including, “*Do not worry about anything.*” Usually your worry actually hurts you more than whatever you are worried about!

What happens then when you believe the truth that God is always working to protect and provide for you? You turn on the Holy Spirit in you and experience joy and peace! You can worry or worship, but you cannot do both at the same time. The Bible says of God, “*You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!*” (Isa 26:3). This is why the fruits and powers of the Holy Spirit are really the fruits and powers of believing in the power, glory, and love of God. Believing God’s promises about you unleashes the power of God within you.

You do not act your way into feeling right as many claim. It is not true that you “Do right to feel right.” Believe right to feel right is the real truth.

Notice that, “*changing the way you think*” is your responsibility. God has made you able to do it. Many are confused about God’s part and our part in spiritual growth. God’s part is giving you His Spirit and Scriptures. Your part is believing those Scripture so you are controlled by His Spirit.

Through His Spirit, “*God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him*” (Phil 2:13). Through His Scriptures God provides you the truth to grow. Jesus promised His followers: “*You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*” (John 8:32). Free from the destructive lies of the world. Free from the power of your sinful nature. And free to live in the power of the Holy Spirit that indwells you.

God has given you the desire, power, and truth to change your life, but it is your responsibility to use them. This is why the motto of the entire series of *Christian Essentials* studies is “*Train yourself to be godly*” (1 Tim 4:7). Because your life is based on what you believe, you can be changed “*into a new person by changing the way you think*” (Rom 12:2). This means replacing the lies you believe with the truth. It is that simple, but it is not that easy. “*Changing the way you think*” will be a life-long struggle. The *Christian Essentials* studies are designed to help you effectively do it.

The process of the *Christian Essentials*

The key to the extraordinary Christian life then is always believing in the truth of God. This is the fundamental approach the *Christian Essentials*

are based on. The epistles of Ephesians and Romans are also. Why do you think there are no commands for you to do something in the first 3 chapters of Ephesians? These chapters only tell you things God wants you to believe. Things to believe about who He is and who you are. Likewise, there are 315 verses in the first 11 chapters of Romans. Of those 315 verses, why are there only 3 that actually tell you to do something (cf. 6:11-13)?

If you summarized the first 3 chapters of Ephesians and the first 11 chapters of Romans it is clear that they are focused on essentially one thing: God's great love for you. Why did the Apostle write these letters in this way? Because he knew that believing the truth leads to obeying the truth. Knowing God's love leads to loving God.

One of the worst mistakes Christians make is emphasizing the commands of God, over the promises of God. The fundamental reason people do not obey the commands is that they do not believe the promises. The commands tell us how we are supposed to love God. But His promises tell us how He loves us. And your obedience to the commands will only be as great as your belief and trust in His promises.

This is why the *Christian Essentials* are designed to first establish your faith in God's love in every part of your heart and mind. Some of your mind fully believes in God's love and could confidently tell others about it. But your sinful desires, feelings, and actions reveal that other parts of your mind do not fully believe in God's love and lordship.

Study #1 in the *Christian Essentials* is *FORGIVENESS: Discovering 6 Beliefs to Escape the Wrath of God*. This study explains how to become a Christian and know you are one. If you are not sure you are a Christian, then you should start with this study.

You are reading study #2: *FOUNDATIONS for Your Christian Life*. This introduces you to the vital concept of your identity in Christ and how your needs are fulfilled in your relationship with God.

Study #3: *FAITH in Your Father's Love* will teach you vital promises from God about your security and significance from God. The Devil works hard to distort these doctrines and it is vital to ensure that you have a biblical understanding of all God has made you to be and given to you.

Building on the base of the *FOUNDATIONS* and *FAITH* studies, you have your spiritual armor on and are ready to do battle over those "strongholds" (2 Cor 10:4) in your mind that the Devil still controls. This is the purpose of study #4: *FREEDOM to Live in the Spirit's Power*. It will equip you in 4 steps to renew your mind with God's truth by replacing lies which now control you.

In Study #5: *FRUIT in Obeying Christ's Commands*, you are ready to pursue the radical holiness and love that your Lord has called you to. This is because through your increased *FOUNDATIONS*, *FAITH*, and *FREEDOM* you are able to produce more *FRUIT* of the Spirit and fulfill

God's supernatural commands in your life. Study #6: *FAMILIES* provides specific wisdom about marriage and parenting and will help you apply your growing Christian maturity in these relationships.

Understand something very important about the *Christian Essentials* studies and your Christian life. The climax of both is spiritual *FREEDOM*. As discussed in the previous chapter, the one necessary thing to live an obedient, joyful, fruitful, and God-glorifying life is to be controlled by the Holy Spirit. Ridding your life of the anger, depression, and worry of your sinful nature and experiencing the love, joy, and peace of God's Spirit is the ultimate goal of the Christian life. This is because obeying God's commands will rather automatically happen when the Spirit is controlling you.

But the obstacles to doing that are much, much greater than many Christians realize. The Devil has usually worked in their life to create many powerful emotional and spiritual "*strongholds*" (2 Cor 10:4) of controlling lies that block the Spirit from controlling their life. And getting rid of those "*strongholds*" may be the greatest battle of their life and the hardest thing they ever do. For many it will require many hours of difficult work to renew their mind and remove the demonic strongholds in their minds.

But when they do, they will experience the love, joy, peace, and power of the Holy Spirit in ways they never imagined. And loving God and loving people will no longer just be a desire, but a reality because the Spirit now controls them consistently. So you can understand why the Devil might really fight against that happening in your life. He does not even want you to recognize how often his anger, depression, and worry controls you.

This battle over your heart and who will control it, is the climax of the *Christian Essential* studies and your Christian life. Study #4: *FREEDOM* is the ultimate goal of these studies, just as spiritual freedom is the ultimate goal of your Christian life. Studies #2 and #3, *FOUNDATIONS* and *FAITH*, are designed to grow your relationship with God and prepare you to engage in spiritual battle in the *FREEDOM* study. The 4 steps to renewing your mind explained in *FREEDOM* will especially help you renew your mind about events in your past that have imprinted you with lies about yourself or God. The steps are biblical and they really work. But going through these steps may be one of the most difficult things you will ever do.

What do you need to be successful in accomplishing your spiritual freedom? Two things: truth and a friend. The only reason the Devil or your sinful nature controls you is because a part of your mind believes a lie. Therefore, you need to know the truth to set you free. And this is the purpose of the contents in the *FOUNDATIONS* and *FAITH* studies. Providing the truth you will need to confront the Devil's lies.

But you will also need a friend. Many years of experience has demonstrated that most people cannot do the 4 steps of mind renewal by themselves. You will probably need someone willing and able to ask

questions to help guide you through the steps. And this will obviously have to be someone you trust.

This is a primary purpose of your Barnabas Group meetings and the P.O.W.E.R. agenda. To help train you to be open about your feelings and trust some other people. If you cannot do that you will be greatly hindered in being able to destroy the spiritual “strongholds” in your life. The Devil wants you to keep things bottled up inside and left in the dark. And he wants you to keep trying to fight him by yourself. To be victorious in personal spiritual warfare you need to learn how to recognize and monitor your feelings and get help from others.

So again, the *FOUNDATIONS* and *FAITH* studies, projects, and Barnabas Group discussions are all designed to prepare you for the real spiritual battles you will be fighting together in the *FREEDOM* study. And if you remove your sinful strongholds in the *FREEDOM* study, you will have the consistent power of the Spirit to live the biblical commands, principles, and habits in the *FRUIT* and *FAMILIES* studies.

Understand that in the *FOUNDATIONS*, *FAITH*, and *FREEDOM* studies God wants to stir some things up in your heart that may not be easily or immediately resolved. Especially until you complete the reading and exercises in the *FREEDOM* study. Permanently changing your life is a process that requires significant time, effort, skill, and wisdom. But if you believe and follow the biblical truths and principles provided in the *Christian Essentials*, trusting God along the way, Romans 12:2 and John 8:32 will be true for you.

Unfortunately, too many Christians try to live the Christian life without the *FOUNDATIONS*, *FAITH*, and *FREEDOM* they need. This will lead to serving God out of guilt, frustration, and their flesh and eventually to “spiritual burn out.” Many Christians are stuck here. The *Christian Essentials* will help you grow in your Christian *FOUNDATIONS*, *FAITH*, and *FREEDOM* so you can grow in your spiritual *FRUIT*.

“*Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think*” (Romans 12:2). You change your life when you change your mind.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite Galatians 5:16 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Romans 12:2 in the translation above or another one.
- ▶ Review Appendix F for an outline of the *Christian Essential* studies and the “Transformation Triangle.”
- ▶ Complete Project 2D by reading Appendix G: “The Nine Powers of God, the Spirit, & the Spirit-Controlled Christian.” Which of these “powers” do you struggle with the most? Which one do you struggle to believe God has toward you?

Chapter 2.6

Christ's Love Compels Us

How much you love and obey God depends on how much you believe He loves you

2 Corinthians 5:14

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 will enable us to love God more?
 - What are some ways this chapter summarized the whole Christian life?
 - What is the most important question a Christian needs to answer?
 - What is faith based on? How does your faith in God’s love grow?
 - How has God revealed His love to you in difficult times?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?

One day Jesus was having a meal in the home of a religious leader. As they were eating, something happened that greatly surprised many who were there. A well-known prostitute walked into the house during the meal, approached Jesus, and “*knelt behind him at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting perfume on them*” (Luke 7:38). How did Jesus respond to this “immoral woman” (v. 37)? “*Jesus said to the woman, ‘Your sins are forgiven’*” (v. 48).

This is a beautiful story about Jesus. But what lesson did He intend for us to learn from it? Jesus told those who were there: “*I tell you, her sins- and they are many- have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love*” (v. 47).

Why did Jesus say this prostitute loved Him more than others? Because her greater understanding of God’s forgiveness would cause her to be more grateful. Or as our Bible verse states:

Christ’s love compels us (2 Cor 5:14 NIV)

How much you love and obey God
depends on how much you believe He loves you.

You cannot love God more than you believe He loves you

The goal of the Christian life is to love God. But how do you grow in your love for God? By believing more in His love for you. Your grasp of

God's love for you controls how much you will love God. You are made that way. You cannot give what you do not have. You are not able to love God more than you believe He loves you. You are only able to forgive as much as you believe you are forgiven. Jesus said, "*a person who is forgiven little*" or thinks little of their forgiveness, "*shows only little love*" (Luke 7:47). This is why, "*Christ's love compels us*" (2 Cor 5:14). Faith in Christ's sacrificial and unconditional love for you will forcefully drive you to love Him. The power to live for God is the power of His love for us.

God loving you and you loving Him sums up everything in your Christian life. Everything God promises in Scripture is to tell you how much He loves you. Everything God commands in Scripture is to tell you how to love Him. He has promised you: "*I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love*" (Jer 31:3). And He has commanded you: "*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart*" (Matt 22:37).

Think about the following carefully, because it is another way to sum up the Christian life: Who you are and what you have is God's love-gift to you. But who you become and what you do is your love-gift to God. God has made you a son or daughter of the Almighty Ruler of the Universe and has given you His personal pardon, power, and eternal paradise! What will you do with that? How much will you love Him in response? As a Christian, that is the most important question you need to decide for your life. How much will you love, serve, obey, and sacrifice for God in response to how much He has forgiven, loved, blessed, and promised you?

It is the power of God's love for you that enables you to fulfill the supernaturally challenging commands of God. You are a son of God first, and a servant of God second. As noted previously, this is why in Ephesians and Romans Paul focused first and wrote the most about God's love for Christians, rather than about how Christians are to love and obey God. In Romans he reminded them 7 times of God's great and horrible wrath toward sinners just like you (cf. Rom 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5; 4:14; 5:9; 9:22). He devoted at least 9 chapters to explaining God's complete forgiveness of you. And if you ever saw or experienced what the burning, vengeful, wrath of God is really like, you would be more grateful for His mercy toward you.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper [Gr. logikēn rational] worship. (Rom 12:1 NIV)

The Apostle Paul begins his plea to live a sacrificial and holy life for God with a reminder of "*God's mercy.*" The Apostle knew that if you greatly appreciate what God has given you, and who He has made you, then you will be greatly motivated to do much for God and become holy for God.

It is because of God's great mercy, that Paul writes, "*I urge you, brothers and sisters . . . to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.*" He wants you to make a logical conclusion: If God gave

you so much, then it is only “*proper*” for you to give Him a lot. God could not have given you more: He gave His one and only Son to suffer a cruel death on a cross to pay for all the sinful things you have done. And God could not ask you for more: He asks for your body as a living sacrifice. He sent His Son to die for you. Now He is asking you to live for Him. The Bible says elsewhere: “*He died for everyone so that those who receive his new life will no longer live for themselves. Instead, they will live for Christ, who died and was raised for them*” (2 Cor 5:15). Will you?

This complete commitment to God is obviously right and reasonable when you consider all that God has done for you. In light of the past, present, and future blessings of God on your life, only insanity, ingratitude, or ignorance would cause you to continue to live for yourself. Believing in “*Christ’s love compels us*” (2 Cor 5:14 NIV).

The Apostle is encouraging you to serve God out of gratitude not guilt. To obey God because of love, not legalism. A guilty or legalistic person does not serve God out of love for Him. They obey God because they believe His acceptance of them depends on what they do or do not do. This leads to serving God out of guilt rather than grace and gratitude.

Your Father who is in Heaven never ever wants you to do anything because you feel guilty or must earn His love. He wants you to serve Him because of how much you know He has already completely forgiven you and loves you unconditionally. God your Father could never love you more, no matter what you do or do not do. This is what grace is! You are completely and constantly treated with unconditional, constant, never changing, over-powering love from God no matter what you do!

“*Christ’s love compels us*” (2 Cor 5:14 NIV). Imagine the power of God’s love for you working in your life. How much easier and joyful would it be to obey Him? Why is it hard to do things for God? Why is it a struggle to pray, have God Times, be committed to a Barnabas Group, and give and serve sacrificially? Why is unconditionally and sacrificially loving your spouse and children so hard? Why do people and circumstances make you mad, hurt, afraid, or discouraged? Because you are not experiencing the compelling and driving force of God’s love for you. When you or others are struggling with your obedience and commitment to God the real reason is that you are struggling with believing the love God has for you.

This is something vital for parents and Pastors to understand. Perhaps they have children or church members that seem to lack spiritual commitment and maturity. What do many of them do to help them? They try to convince them more about the commands of God instead of the love of God. Often they put more pressure on people to obey instead of helping them have more power to obey.

Both parents and Pastors could learn from Paul. He understood that greater obedience to God comes from greater belief in God. Therefore, he

not only taught and wrote a lot about God's love, but prayed for this very thing. He wrote to the Ephesians:

May you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. (Eph 3:18-19)

What does Paul say will make us “*complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God*”? It is to “*understand*” and “*experience*” God's love. Praying that people would “*understand*” and “*experience*” God's love more is one of the most powerful things you can do for them. Many parents and Pastors could preach fewer commands and pray more love. This is because: “*Christ's love compels us*” (2 Cor 5:14 NIV). How much you love and obey God depends on how much you believe He loves you.

Growing in your faith

If you want to love, obey, and glorify God more, you simply need a deeper and stronger faith in God's love for you. But it is not God's love for you alone that changes and blesses your life. You must have faith and trust in it. Therefore, it is important to understand what biblical faith is.

First, the foundation of faith in God is a reliable revelation from God. Biblical faith is not based on a feeling, impulse, wish, or an imagined “sign.” Faith in God is based on something you know for certain God has said or done. This is why Scripture is your only sure guide for your faith.

Secondly, the strength of your faith is always based on evidence and experience. God has never expected His people to believe anything without proof. You can fake faith in something you do not have proof of. But God did not make you that way. You were created to base the strength of your belief and faith on evidence. Which is why the literal translation of Hebrews 11:1 from the original Greek is: “*Faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*”

For example, why do you believe God created the Universe? First, you have a reliable revelation from God in Scripture that He did (cf. Gen 1:1). However, you did not personally see Him do it. This is why it is an object of faith. But the massive size and complex design of Creation gives you undeniable proof that He did. This is why faith is “*the evidence of things not seen*” (Heb 11:1). God always gives you a reliable revelation and abundant evidence for whatever He wants you to put your faith in. Faith without a revelation from God is fantasy. Faith without evidence from God is foolishness. In the biblical Christian life there is no such thing as a “leap of faith” without proof, reason, or wisdom.

Even Jesus knew your faith in God depends on evidence and experience. This is why He encouraged faith in God's provision by telling you to "*Look at the birds*" and how "*your heavenly Father feeds them*" and to conclude you are, "*far more valuable to him than they are*" (Matt 6:26). Christ expected your faith in the invisible God and His desire to care for you to be based on evidence you could see in nature.

What about faith in God's love? First, you have abundant revelation from Scripture that God loves you. You will study many of these promises in the following chapters. But Scripture does not just tell you God loves you. It also tells you historical events that prove His love for you. The Bible says: "*God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners*" (Rom 5:8). The greatest proof that God loves you is the sacrificial and unconditional love He gave you in sacrificing His Son for your sins on a painful, bloody cross.

Unfortunately, many people constantly want God to keep proving His love for them. If He does not grant their prayers, protect their health, or provide their wealth, they doubt His love. They forget that the precious blood of God's Son to pay for all their sins is more valuable and convincing than anything else God could do. Since the cross of Christ, it is no longer God's love for you that is on trial. What is being tested now is your love for God. God has already proven His love for you for all time. The real question is how will you prove your love for Him?

However, a very important thing to understand is that your faith in God's love does not come from the mere understanding of Scripture, but even more from the experience of life. This is why you will notice that older, more mature Christians have a stronger faith and greater trust in God. They have experienced His love, blessing, protection, and provision more.

Likewise, it is important for you to recognize and remember the many more recent proofs of God's love for you than the cross. For example, you know He has indwelt you with His Spirit and changed your life. And when you think about your life you see many, many ways that God has provided for, protected, and blessed you. The Bible says, "*Whatever is good and perfect comes down to us from God our Father*" (Jas 1:17). Every good thing you have is proof of God's love for you.

The life of David shows you how your faith in God grows through experience. Why did David have such certain faith that he would kill Goliath? King Saul said to him: "*There's no way you can fight this Philistine and possibly win! You're only a boy, and he's been a man of war since his youth.*" (1 Sam 17:33). David replied:

"I have been taking care of my father's sheep and goats. When a lion or a bear comes to steal a lamb from the flock, I go after it with a club and rescue the lamb from its mouth. If the animal turns on me, I catch it by the jaw and club it to death. I have done this to both lions

and bears, and I'll do it to this pagan Philistine too . . . The LORD who rescued me from the claws of the lion and the bear will rescue me from this Philistine!" (1 Sam 17:34-37)

Do you see how God grew David's faith through the evidence of difficult and scary experiences like lions and bears!? Do you see how important it was for David to remember what God had done for him so he was ready to tackle the next test of faith God brought into his life? ¹

Forgetting reduces your faith

Do not make the same mistake as: "*The warriors of Ephraim [who were] armed with bows*" but "*turned their backs and fled on the day of battle.*" Why? Because "*They forgot what he had done-the great wonders he had shown them*" (Ps 78:9-11).

Never forget all of the good things God has done for you and given to you! This is especially important because bad things also happen. Things that imply God does not care about you. He lets you get hurt. He lets people you love die. He sometimes does not grant your prayers. And these painful experiences are a powerful attack on your faith in God's love.

But you need to understand God's purposes for evil and pain. We discuss these things elsewhere in *Christian Essentials* study #3: *FAITH*. But one thing can be said here. God always allows painful events to actually reveal more of His love to you. Many who have been through the "deserts" of life with God are very thankful for them because they experienced God's love in extraordinary ways. The Psalmist said: "*It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees*" (Ps 119:71).

God wants you to grow in your faith in Him because: "*Christ's love compels us*" (2 Cor 5:14 NIV) to live the life God wants. How much you love and obey God depends on how much you believe He loves you.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite Romans 12:2 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize 2 Corinthians 5:14 in the translation above or another one.
- ▶ Hopefully you have been using the "P.O.W.E.R. Plan" for God Times in Appendix A. You will notice the first step is to "Praise" and thank God for how He has revealed His love for you. Praising Him strengthens and protects your faith in Him.
- ▶ Complete Project 2E on the next page: "Counting My Blessings."

¹ The topic of faith in Scripture is rather complex because it is used in so many different ways. For a better understanding of biblical faith see the optional reading in Appendix H: "The Seven Types of Faith in Scripture."

Project 2E

Counting My Blessings

You have learned that your faith in God grows not just through Scripture or teachings but real life experience. The more you have experienced God’s love, the more you are convinced of it.

In the table below, list the “Top 10” events, experiences, and blessings in your life that are examples of God personally loving you. Share these with your Barnabas Group this week.

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	

Chapter 2.7

God's Love Through God's People*Experiencing God through God's People*

1 John 4:12

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:
- ▶ How can we experience God's love through people?
- ▶ What are “The Five Love Languages” and why are they important?
- ▶ What is your love language(s)?

Kayla had a pretty rough childhood. Her father was an alcoholic and her mother a drug addict. She was taken from her parents at a young age and lived in foster homes. But she was treated badly there too. And she had boyfriends who said they loved her but after using her had left her. In essence, Kayla had never experienced what love really was. Until she became a Christian.

Of course she appreciated understanding how much God loved her. But the acceptance, kindness, and respect she was treated with in her church was life changing. The girls her age were not competing with her for attention. The boys in the church treated her like a real sister instead of a possible “date.” And there was an older couple in the church who adopted her like she was their own daughter. For the first time in Kayla's life she was experiencing real love and what a church is supposed to be like. She could say “Amen” to what the Apostle John wrote:

No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.

(1 John 4:12)

We experience God's love through God's people.

Experiencing the love of God through the people of God

The Apostle John stated that no human “*has ever seen God.*” But there is a way that people even now can “see” and experience God. “*If we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.*” You can experience God and His love through the love of another Christian!

In the previous chapter we noted that you do not learn God's love only from reading about it in Scripture. Even more so, you become convinced of God's love by experiencing it. And one of the most life changing ways you

come in contact with the amazing love of God is through the amazing love of other Christians.

How then do you experience the unconditional love of God? When a Christian simply chooses to befriend you without knowing anything about you. How do you experience His grace and patience? When you sin against a Christian and they immediately and completely forgive you. How do you experience the kindness of God? When a Christian simply serves you and helps you without expecting anything in return. How do you experience the generosity of God? When a Christian sacrificially gives to you with joy.

Of course there are Christians and churches that do not demonstrate the love of God very well. Many of them are actually fake Christians and they hurt God's people instead of help them. But God wants you to have friendships and a marriage with real Christians who let God's love live through them.

You will learn in some of the following chapters of this study that God never intended another human being to fulfill your deepest needs for love. God created you to only be fully satisfied with Him, and not mere people. However, experiencing God's love through God's people is a tremendous blessing that God wants you to enjoy.

The power of love (or lack of love) through people is demonstrated by how much you are affected by your parents. In the next study you will be reminded of how much you interpret love from God by how you were loved by your parents. The love of good parents has a very good effect on your whole life. The lack of love from your parents has a very bad effect on your life. This is because of the power of love (or lack of it) through people.

"No one has ever seen God" nor touched Him. But when a Christian loves you, you are seeing the very face of God and being touched by Him. *"No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us"* (1 John 4:12). We experience God's love through God's people.

Experiencing God's love through your love language

Love is love, right? Not exactly. Experience and research have determined that people communicate and receive love differently. This has become widely known as "The 5 Love Languages."¹ These are how you most like to experience love from others and express love to others. The 5 Love Languages are:

Words of Affirmation: Experiencing and expressing love through spoken affection, praise, or appreciation. Examples include someone saying "I love you," or praising you for your appearance, an accomplishment, or something about you, or receiving a loving note, text, or email for no special reason.

Acts of Service: Experiencing and expressing love through helpful actions rather than words. Examples include someone doing practical, even unexpected things for you, especially when you are tired, taking care of something you are responsible for but you do not have the time to do, or doing something practical for you, even though they don't really enjoy it.

Receiving Gifts: Experiencing and expressing love through receiving and giving thoughtful gifts. This includes surprise gifts and simple gifts that just say someone was thinking about you, and gifts that require a lot of thought and effort.

Quality Time: Experiencing and expressing love through sincere and focused attention. This includes spending time alone talking, having uninterrupted leisure time together, just "hanging out," laughing together, someone taking the time to really listen and understand your feelings, and someone showing sincere interest in something you care about.

Physical Touch: Experiencing and expressing love through physical contact or intimacy. This includes sitting close, holding hands, hugging, kissing, and being physically intimate.

Most people can rather easily identify their primary and secondary love language by just reading the descriptions above. It is not surprising that for men they are usually Physical Touch and Words of Affirmation and for women they are Quality Time and Receiving Gifts. However, any one of "The Five Love Languages" can be the primary love language of a man or the primary love language of a woman.

If you are married, it is of course most helpful to think about how you like your spouse to love you. If you are single, it will probably be most helpful to think about how you most like (or liked) your parents to love you.

If you are having difficulty identifying a love language that is significantly stronger than others, there are some questions that can be asked. First, what does your spouse (or parent) do or fail to do that hurts you most deeply? The opposite of what hurts you most is probably your love language. Secondly, what have you most often requested from your spouse (or parent)? The thing you have most often requested is likely the thing that would make you feel most loved. Thirdly, in what way do you most like to show love to your spouse (or parent)? Your favorite way of expressing love to others, is probably what would also make you feel the most love.

It is important to know your love language(s). For example, your spouse may constantly serve you in your home thinking they are communicating love to you. But if you experience love more through someone sitting with you and talking with you, then you will not feel loved. If you only speak English and someone says to you, "Wǒ ài nǐ," what do you feel? Probably confused and certainly not loved. But if your language is Chinese, you hear

(and feel) “I love you.” Therefore, it is important to know your love language and the love language of those you want to love.

Spend some time considering the above and determine your love language(s). We would encourage you to share this with your spouse if you are married, or perhaps your parents and friends if you are not married. You can also use the above to determine the love language of others so you can love them more effectively. However, this will be discussed more in *Christian Essentials* studies #5 & #6: *FRUIT* and *FAMILIES*.

The focus here is how you experience God’s love through others. Encouraging those close to you to love you in the way you best experience love will help you do that.

Before leaving this topic, it is worth noting how your love language(s) may affect how you experience and express love in your relationship with God. If your love language is Words of Affirmation, you may be especially encouraged by the promises in Scripture that are discussed in *Christian Essentials* study #3: *FAITH*. And you may especially enjoy praising and worshipping God, expressing appreciation to Him.

If your love language is Acts of Service, you may be especially touched when you experience God working in and around your life, particularly in answer to your prayers. Likewise, you will probably enjoy loving God the most by serving Him in practical ways.

If your love language is Receiving Gifts, you may especially appreciate the gifts from God discussed *Christian Essentials* study #3: *FAITH*. These include your unique personality and spiritual gifting. Likewise, you might especially enjoy giving your resources to God.

If your love language is Quality Time, you may be especially fulfilled by spending time alone with God. Likewise, this will probably be one of your favorite ways of loving God.

The love language of Physical Touch is the one that cannot be experienced in your relationship with God on this Earth. But perhaps we will experience His physical embrace when we live with Him in eternity.

“No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us” (1 John 4:12). We experience God’s love through God’s people.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite 2 Cor 5:14 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize 1 John 4:12 in the translation above or another.
- ▶ Complete Project 2F on the next page.

¹ “The Five Love Languages” are better described in the book, *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts* (Moody, 2015). If you have access to the Internet you can take an online test for “The Five Love Languages” at <http://www.5lovelanguages.com/>.

Project 2F

Experiencing God's Love Through God's People

You have been reminded that one of the most powerful ways you experience God's love is through other Christians. If you grew up in a Christian family you will probably have many examples of this. If you did not grow up in a Christian family and are a new Christian, you will probably have fewer examples of experiencing God's love through God's people. Regardless, think about who has demonstrated God's love to you and how. Try to record at least 10 of these experiences and thank God for them. And share some of them with your Barnabas Group this week.

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	

Chapter 2.8

God's Glory Purifies Us

Your awe of God purifies your life
2 Corinthians 3:18

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 do we claim will decrease the pull of sinful pleasure in your life?
 - What attributes are revealed about God in visions of Him in Scripture?
 - If we keep in mind who God is, how will this help us when tempted?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?

John struggled a great deal with temptations to look at pornography on his smart phone. The pleasure he experienced from looking at those women was a powerful pull on his heart, especially when he felt bored or lonely. John was encouraged to think more about the beauty and attributes of God. And then to compare God to those women. And even take a moment to picture God next to those women. This became a powerful protection against the pull of pornography. John learned that the pleasure he received from thinking about and visualizing the beauty and glory of God made even the most seductive women on a screen look ugly and dirty. John learned:

We all, who . . . contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory.
(2 Cor 3:18 NIV)

The awe you experience from meditating on God's glory purifies your life.

In the last chapter, we said that experiencing God's GRACE produces love for Him. In this chapter you will learn that experiencing God's GLORY does the same. The dictionary defines glory as praise, honor, and fame. God's Glory means the revelation of His greatness. Our text says, “*We all, who . . . contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory*” (2 Cor 3:18 NIV). The awe you experience from meditating on God's glory purifies your life.

The more we “*contemplate the Lord's glory*” the more we will be “*transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory*” to be like the Lord. Focusing on His power, character, and beauty purifies our life. This is because when any of the sinful, pleasurable, attractive, things of this world are placed next to God's glory, their true worthlessness is revealed.

God is more beautiful, pleasurable, and awesome than anything the devil or the world can offer.

The glory of God's Power

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 and wealthiest 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, and galaxies shows us 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. So let us contemplate Him for a moment in His Creation.

First of all, what God created is BIG. You could fit 1 million Earths inside our sun. Another sun was discovered that is big enough to swallow up approximately 2 billion Earths. Our sun is the closest star to Earth but is 93 million miles away. The next closest star is 25 trillion miles away. And our sun is only one out of an estimated trillion billion suns. Travelling at the speed of light (about 670 million mph.) it would take about 20 billion years to reach the edge of the Universe we can see with our best telescopes. No one knows what is beyond that except your Creator God. ¹

Secondly, God's creation is POWERFUL. The center of our sun burns at over 500 million degrees. The sun expends more power in one second, than all the energy ever consumed in the whole history of humanity's cities, homes, and cars. ² That is the power and size of just our sun. And again, there are an estimated 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 other suns in the Universe! One star is 4 million times brighter than our sun. ³

We know of no reason the stars beyond our sun exist except to be "*declaring the glory of God . . . night after night*" (Ps 19:1-2). Think about the last time you looked at the stars and how massive, powerful, and far away they are. And your God made them all with just a word. Do you get the feeling that when He made them He was showing off a little?

The Holy One says, "To whom will you compare Me? Or who is My equal?" Look up into the heavens. Who created all the stars? . . . Because of His great power and mighty strength, not a single one is missing. (Isa 40:25-26)

Make a habit of recognizing the beauty of nature, and the greatness of the Universe, and remembering the beautiful and powerful God Who made them. It will change you. It will make the glittery things of Earth seem dull.

“We all, who . . . contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory” (2 Cor 3:18 NIV). The awe you experience from meditating on God’s glory purifies your life.

The glory of God’s Person

God has revealed His glory not only in Creation but also in Scripture. Of course God’s character, holiness, and perfection are described and demonstrated throughout the Bible. But here we will focus on some actual pictures God has given us of Himself, and more specifically of the exalted Christ. Through these biblical portraits we can “see” God and be awed at who He is and even what He looks like.

For example, the Apostle John tells us, *“Isaiah . . . saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about Him”* (John 12:41), and Isaiah wrote of his experience:

In the year King Uzziah died I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. Attending him were mighty seraphim [Angels of Fire 4] . . . They were calling out to each other, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Heaven’s Armies! The whole earth is filled with his glory!” (Isa 6:1-3)

Imagine sinning against THAT Person right after seeing Him. Imagine thinking that anything or anyone on Earth is as beautiful and marvelous as the God you just saw. In the days of kings, the height of a man’s throne, the material and length of his robe, and the magnificence of his palace were all a measure of his power, respect, and glory. Certainly the Lord, and everything about Him, is more beautiful, majestic, and awesome than anything ever seen!

And what are the Angels of Fire constantly singing? *“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord.”* Holiness reflects the fact that God is morally perfect and pure. So pure that even the sinless Angels of Fire have to cover their eyes in His presence. And why is *“The whole earth filled with his glory”*? Because even though few recognize it, everything and everyone possessing any goodness or glory are merely reflecting the goodness and glory of God.

The sight of the Lord’s glory led Isaiah to exclaim, *“I am a sinful man.”* But once again, grace was revealed through an Angel who told him *“your guilt is removed, and your sins are forgiven”* (vs. 5-7). But God’s love alone is not sufficient to bind your heart to Him. You can be convinced of His grace and still lack a power against sin that the sight of His glory can give you. This is why He reveals both His grace and glory to you. It is not just what God does for you that compels you to love Him. Just as important is WHO HE IS. It was not just God’s forgiveness, but His awesomeness that led Isaiah to cry out, *“Here I am. Send me!”* (v.8). Isaiah knew that God is not only merciful, but magnificent and worthy of all your adoration.

And Isaiah needed to know this because his mission from God was to: *“Harden the hearts of these people. . . . Until their towns are empty, their houses are deserted, and the whole country is a wasteland”* (Isa 6:10-11). Only the image of the awesome beauty and glory of God could sustain a man on a mission like that. Which is why you must keep the same beauty and glory of God in mind in order to maintain your full devotion to Him no matter what else happens to you in this life.

You will probably not be given a vision of God like Isaiah. But God also gave us more pictures of Himself in Scripture that can guide your imagination to see God. You use your imagination to sin. Why not use it to put yourself before the very throne of God and worship Him?

Isaiah was changed by his experience of God’s glory. *“We all, who . . . contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory”* (2 Cor 3:18 NIV). The awe you experience from meditating on God’s glory purifies your life.

It is very difficult for humans to express the majesty, power, beauty, and glory of God. So what would God say if He described Himself? We have just such a statement in Isaiah 40. But before we look at it, let us note why God described Himself to the Israelites. It was because of their idolatry. They were attracted to the beauty of mere statues made of gold and wood. They were enamored with the wisdom of learned men and the glory of powerful and popular people. They were tempted by the sinful pleasures of the world. All of which is why God reminded them of His beauty, majesty, power, and wisdom which make all the idols of this world look like trash.

And as we take a moment to simply think about what He says, we experience a pleasure that nothing on Earth can give us. Especially when you remember this is your God, the same God who adores you. Your God challenges you to worship only Him when He says:

Who else has held the oceans in his hand? Who has measured off the heavens with his fingers? Who else knows the weight of the earth or has weighed the mountains and hills on a scale? . . .

All the nations of the world are but a drop in the bucket. They are nothing more than dust on the scales. He picks up the whole earth as though it were a grain of sand. . . . The nations of the world are worth nothing to him. In his eyes they count for less than nothing—mere emptiness and froth.

To whom can you compare God? What image can you find to resemble him? Can he be compared to an idol formed in a mold, overlaid with gold, and decorated with silver chains? . . .

Haven't you heard? Don't you understand? Are you deaf to the words of God—the words he gave before the world began? Are you so ignorant? God sits above the circle of the earth. The people below

seem like grasshoppers to him! He spreads out the heavens like a curtain and makes his tent from them. . . .

"To whom will you compare me? Who is my equal?" asks the Holy One. (Isa 40:23-25)

So why would you worship anyone or anything else? And before you snicker at the Israelites for how foolish they were to bow down and trust mere statues made of wood, ponder for a moment the worthless things you honor, adore, serve, and crave more than God. Pictures of naked girls on a computer screen. The praise and popularity of people. Money. Food. Cars. Houses. Football players. Movie stars. Politicians. Humans seek all of these things for pleasure, significance, security, and a sense of awe. But put any of them next to the pictures of God in Scripture and how do they look now? Worthy of your worship or rather worthless?

The following are two more visions of your Lord:

And on this throne high above was a figure whose appearance resembled a man. From what appeared to be his waist up, he looked like gleaming amber, flickering like a fire. And from his waist down, he looked like a burning flame, shining with splendor. All around him was a glowing halo, like a rainbow shining in the clouds on a rainy day. This is what the glory of the Lord looked like to me. (Ezek 1:26-28)

And standing in the middle of the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man. He was wearing a long robe with a gold sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow. And his eyes were like flames of fire. His feet were like polished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice thundered like mighty ocean waves. . . . And his face was like the sun in all its brilliance. (Rev 1:13-16)

And this one is actually a vision of God the Father:

I watched as thrones were put in place and the Ancient One sat down to judge. His clothing was as white as snow, his hair like purest wool. He sat on a fiery throne with wheels of blazing fire, and a river of fire was pouring out, flowing from his presence. Millions of angels ministered to him; many millions stood to attend him. (Dan 7:9-10)

The above biblical portraits are the real God and He is infinitely more beautiful, enjoyable, attractive, majestic, magnificent, glorious, and awe-inspiring than anything else you could desire. The most beautiful thing or person you have ever seen is only a shadow of God, and all their beauty ultimately comes from Him.

You cannot see God right now. But others can. And their response to what they are seeing is another way you can begin to grasp the glory of God. In Revelation we are given a description of several sets of worshipers.

Regarding the four living creatures we read: *“Day and night they never stop saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come’ (4:8).*

Regarding the twenty-four elders we read: *“They lay their crowns before the throne and say: ‘You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being’” (4:10-11)*

Regarding *“the voices of thousands and millions of angels around the throne and of the living beings and the elders . . . [who] sang in a mighty chorus: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered—to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.”*

Regarding *“every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea . . . [who] sang: “Blessing and honor and glory and power belong to the one sitting on the throne and to the Lamb forever and ever.” And the four living beings said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped the Lamb” (5:11-14).* And maybe you should take a moment today and do the same!

This is why David said: *“The one thing I ask of the Lord—the thing I seek most—is to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, delighting in the Lord’s perfections and meditating in his Temple” (Ps 27:4).* David had probably seen a vision of the Lord (cf. Ps 63:2). But these were probably not frequent. However, what was constantly in the temple was the Bible of that time, including the five books of Moses. And in them the glory and power of God was clearly revealed. And it was in Scripture that David sought to meditate on the *“perfections”* of the Lord because doing so was so delightful (cf. Ps 119). As the Psalmist simply said: *“God [is] the source of all my joy” (Ps 43:3-4).*

If you saw God with your eyes, His sheer glory would consume your life and all else would fade from your vision. Likewise, seeing Him with your mind, meditating on His divine attributes, burns away a lot of worthless things you think about and purifies your desires. Place the picture of God that is revealed in the passages above next to anything or anyone else you want to worship, serve, or seek and your idols will melt away.

It is amazing and endearing that Someone as awesome as God has cared so much for you. Who would you rather have love and like you? A guy? A girl? A spouse or child? A boss? They may not love or like you but God Almighty does. And His love makes the love of anyone else relatively unimportant. Nothing will be able to compare to the glory of God if you constantly keep it in mind.

“We all, who . . . contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory” (2 Cor 3:18 NIV). The awe you experience from meditating on God’s glory purifies your life.⁵

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite 1 John 4:12 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize 2 Corinthians 3:18 in the translation above or another one.
- ▶ Complete Project 2G: “Comparing Christ” on the next pages.

¹ Numbers regarding the size of the Universe are taken from Erwin Lutzer, *Seven Reasons Why You Can Trust the Bible* (Moody, 1998), 147. For a video portrayal of the size of stars compared to Earth see online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4M6wlBjU38>.

² Richard Swenson, *More Than Meets the Eye*, (NavPress, 2000), 148.

³ See online at <http://starchild.gsfc.nasa.gov/docs/StarChild/questions/question21.html>.

⁴ “Angels of Fire” translates the Hebrew word *serāpîm* meaning “fire beings” (John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, Eerdmans, 1991).

⁵ For additional study on the attributes of God, we would suggest the following books: *Knowing God*, J.I. Packer; *The Attributes of God*, A.W. Pink; *Pleasures Evermore*, Sam Storms.

Chapter 2.9

Jesus is Your Best Friend*Because He understands you the best*

John 15:15

Week 5

- ▶ For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.

In high school Jennifer’s best friend was Lucy. They did everything together. And told each other everything too. They promised each other they would be friends for life. But Jennifer and Lucy were not considered one of the popular kids in school. And Lucy wanted to be one. She started spending time with those kids. She changed. And to earn their favor Lucy told the other kids the private things Jennifer had shared with her. Including bad stuff about her parents, boys she liked, and what she didn’t like about herself. Soon, Jennifer was being made fun of and rejected by others. Jennifer’s “best friend” caused her to have no friends.

Jennifer became a Christian and she was overjoyed one day when she read that Jesus told His followers:

Now you are my friends. (John 15:15)

Jesus is your best Friend and understands all of your struggles.

The Lord Jesus Christ is your friend

Do not miss the power and wonder of those few words. God the Son, the Lord of Heaven and Earth, and your Almighty King, called these men His friends. Three times in Scripture God called Abraham His friend (cf. 2 Chron 20:7; Isa 41:8; James 2:23). And He calls you His friend too.

Christ’s full statement was: “*Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me*” (John 15:15). Jesus did not reveal these amazing truths to just anybody. When the disciples asked Him why He taught the people in rather obscure parables without explanation, Jesus told them: “*Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them*” (Matt 13:11).

Like a friend, Jesus told them things He did not tell others. But He has told you. You too know “*the secrets of the kingdom of heaven*” that Jesus taught because they are in Scripture. And while they are available to all, most do not have the ability to understand or appreciate them like you do.

“*The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God . . . and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit*” (1 Cor 2:14). Because Jesus gave you the

Spirit and Scripture, *“the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you”* and you too are Jesus’ friend.

Do you still doubt that Jesus Christ considers you His friend? Telling you *“the secrets of the kingdom of heaven”* is not the only thing Jesus has done for you because you are His friend. Just a few verses earlier He told His friends and you: *“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”* (John 15:13). That is what He did for them. That is what He did for you. Because you, like those men, are His friends.

Scripture says, *“Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame”* (Heb 12:2). What *“joy”* was Jesus so looking forward to, that He believed the shame of the cross was worth it? Having you as His friend for eternity! Of course there were other things as well. But make no mistake about it. Having a relationship with you forever was one of those things that gave Jesus joy even as He suffered on the cross.

Maybe one of the things He was thinking of is when you will have a great feast with Him and all of His friends. *“Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb”* (Rev 19:9). He is looking forward to that (cf. Matt 26:29). Are you?

The Bible says: *“There are ‘friends’ who destroy each other, but a real friend sticks closer than a brother”* (Prov 18:24). Like Jennifer maybe you have had friends, girlfriends or boyfriends, or an ex-spouse who rejected you, embarrassed you, and really hurt you. You let them get close because you thought they were your friend. And you got burned.

Jesus will never ever hurt you. He is always working around you to do you good. He is a true friend that you can trust with everything. He is everything you ever wanted in a friend. Jesus says, *“Now you are my friend”* and Jesus is your best Friend and understands all of your struggles.

The Lord Jesus Christ understands

Jesus is your best friend because He understands you like no one else. He understands your fears and struggles and cares deeply about you. The Bible says: *“This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin”* (Heb 4:15). Your Friend has suffered many of the difficulties, struggles, and hurts you do.

That is why He so fully and deeply understands you and empathizes with you. This is one reason your Lord has so much compassion for you. He has *“been there and done that.”*

Have you ever suffered intense grief? Jesus was, *“a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. . . it was our sorrows that weighed him down”* (Isa 53:4). Your best Friend knows how it feels to be really sad.

Have you ever experienced overwhelming physical pain? Jesus was, *“pierced . . . crushed . . . beaten . . . whipped . . . He was led like a lamb to*

the slaughter” (Isa 53:5, 7). Your best Friend knows how painful it can be to live in a human body.

Have you ever suffered intense emotional anguish? Jesus, *“was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood”* (Luke 22:44). Your best Friend knows how it feels to experience deep emotional pain.

Have you ever felt ugly? *“There was nothing beautiful or majestic about [Jesus’] appearance, nothing to attract us to him”* (Isa 55:2). Your best Friend knows what it feels like to not be one of the beautiful ones.

Have you ever experienced intense temptation from Satan? *“Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil”* (Matt 4:1). Your best Friend had to endure the devil’s best shots, and He never gave in.

Have you ever been publicly slandered? People saying wicked things about you that were not true? And it even resulted in you being judged and condemned by the authorities? Jesus knows how that feels. *“Many false witnesses spoke against him”* (Mark 14:56). And He was considered a heretic and condemned to death because of it. Your best Friend knows what it feels like to be unjustly slandered in public and condemned for it.

Has your desire to serve God ever been so misunderstood by your parents and siblings that they thought you were crazy? When Jesus began to do ministry, *“his family heard what was happening [and] they tried to take him away. “He’s out of his mind,” they said”* (Mark 3:21). His own mother and brothers said that. Just because He was living for God. Your best Friend knows what it feels like when people do not understand or appreciate what you are doing for God.

Have you ever tried repeatedly to explain to someone a huge burden and struggle in your life and they just didn’t get it. And because they didn’t understand you, they couldn’t help you. We read:

Taking the twelve disciples aside, Jesus said, “Listen, we’re going up to Jerusalem, where all the predictions of the prophets concerning the Son of Man will come true. He will be handed over to the Romans, and he will be mocked, treated shamefully, and spit upon. They will flog him with a whip and kill him, but on the third day he will rise again.”

But they didn’t understand any of this. The significance of his words was hidden from them, and they failed to grasp what he was talking about.” (Luke 18:31-34)

Your best Friend has felt alone among humans, not having anyone who understands him or will help him except His Dad.

Have you ever pleaded with someone not to make a decision that would harm them and they did anyway? Have you ever wanted to help someone and they would not let you? Jesus said, *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her*

chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn't let me" (Matt 23:37). Your best Friend knows how it feels to see people you love experience unnecessary pain because they will not yield to God.

Have you ever felt like God was asking you to do something that would be too painful? Make a sacrifice that was going to cost too much? Before going to the cross, Jesus, *"fell with His face to the ground and prayed, 'My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me'"* (Matt 26:39). And He asked that three times. Your best Friend knows what it feels like to do really hard things for God.

Have you ever suffered because of the sins of others? Has their selfishness, lust, greed, or anger caused you pain? Even when you did nothing wrong or deserved it? *"Christ suffered for you" and "Christ also suffered once for our sin, the righteous suffering for the unrighteous"* (1 Pet 2:21; 3:18):

It was our weaknesses he carried . . . He was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. . . The Lord laid on him the sins of us all. . . . Unjustly condemned, he was led away. . . he was struck down for the rebellion of my people . . . He had done no wrong and had never deceived anyone. But he was buried like a criminal.
(Isa 53:4-5, 8-9)

Your best Friend knows how it feels to unjustly suffer for the sins, selfishness, wickedness, and even mistakes of others.

Have you ever felt like God or people have been unfair to you? You have served God faithfully but He allows pain into your life. You have tried to be good to people and deserved their gratitude and respect but they judged you or treated you badly. Jesus never did anything wrong and everything He did was to serve God and help people, but: *"Some of the governor's soldiers took Jesus into their headquarters . . . They stripped him . . . They wove thorn branches into a crown and put it on his head . . . And they spit on him and . . . struck him on the head . . . When they were finally tired of mocking him they . . . led him away to be crucified"* (Matt 27:27-31). Your best Friend knows what it feels like to be treated unfairly.

Have people ever really hated and despised you? Jesus, *"was despised and rejected . . . He was despised, and we did not care . . . He was oppressed and treated harshly . . . No one cared that he died without descendants, that his life was cut short"* (Isa 53:2-3, 7-8). Your best Friend knows what it feels like to be around people who hate you.

Have you ever been rejected and forsaken by your father? Jesus was too. This is why on the cross He cried out, *"My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"* (Matt 27:46). The eternal bond the Son had with His Father was broken when *"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us"*

(2 Cor 5:21 NIV). Your best Friend knows what it feels like to be rejected and abandoned by your dad.

Have you ever been betrayed or deserted by a friend? How about all of your friends? Jesus was. Judas lived, walked, ministered, and ate with Him for over three years. And then He told Jesus' enemies where and how they could capture Him. And then Judas helped them do it.

At the very moment Jesus needed His friends the most, when soldiers came to arrest Him, "*all the disciples deserted him and fled*" (Matt 26:56). Just a few hours earlier, "*Peter declared, 'Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.' And all the other disciples said the same*" (Matt 26:35). But they did disown and reject Him.

Peter publicly disowned Him three times. When Peter refused to be identified as a friend of Christ the third time, Luke records: "*Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: 'Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times'*" (Luke 22:60-61 NIV). What was Jesus feeling when He "*turned and looked straight at Peter,*" a man who had just declared a few hours earlier, "*Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you*"? It broke His heart. And then He went and laid down His life for these "friends." Your best Friend knows what it feels like to be betrayed, rejected, and abandoned by your friends. And then forgive them and love them anyway.

Have you ever been tired of being on this wicked Earth and longing to go home? One day, "*A man in the crowd called out to him, 'Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, my only child. An evil spirit keeps seizing him, making him scream. It throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It batters him and hardly ever leaves him alone. I begged your disciples to cast out the spirit, but they couldn't do it'*" (Luke 9:38-40). Seeing such evil, suffering, and powerlessness, Jesus exclaimed, "*You faithless and corrupt people! How long must I be with you and put up with you?*" (v. 41). Your best Friend knows what it feels like to long for Heaven and be tired of all the suffering that sin causes on the Earth.

And your Lord knows what it feels like to just be really tired. One day, "*Suddenly, a fierce storm struck the lake, with waves breaking into the boat. But Jesus was sleeping*" (Matt 8:24). Your best Friend knows what it feels like to be completely exhausted!

How blessed you are that Jesus said, "*Now you are my friends*" (John 15:15). Jesus is your best Friend and understands all of your struggles.

- What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter?
- ▶ Recite 2 Corinthians 3:18 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize John 15:15 in the translation above or another one.

Chapter 2.10

Jesus is Your Real Identity*The Real You is in Christ and Christ in You*

2 Corinthians 5:17

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 does it mean to be “*in Christ*”?
 - In what ways are you a “*new creation*”?
 - What is your new relationship with sin? How are you “*dead*” to it?
 - How would you describe who you really are?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?

Raji was born into a Hindu family in India. The Hindu religion categorizes people into “castes” or levels of value. Raji’s family belonged to the lowest caste, the “untouchables.” In his village his family was assigned the lowliest, dirtiest, hardest, and most dangerous jobs. Raji and his own children would never be allowed to be anything else.

When Raji became a Christian, it was initially hard for him to believe that Jesus Christ had made him equal with all other Christians. And his true identity and worth had nothing to do with what family he was born into, or what any humans thought of him at all. Through faith in Christ, Raji had been made a son of Almighty God with the Spirit of God living in him. Raji rejoiced in the truth of his new identity because:

Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person.

The old life is gone; a new life has begun! (2 Cor 5:17)

The real you is in Christ and Christ in you.

Your new identity is in Christ

Who are you? . . . Really, WHO ARE YOU!? The answer to that question is your identity. Most people define who they are by their relationships and possessions on Earth. What is their occupation? Are they married? Do they have children? Are they poor or rich? What have you accomplished? What have people done to you? What have people said about you?

Your answers to these things can define the value of your life and who you are to others, the world, and often yourself. Because if you have a lowly job, are single or divorced, do not have children, are financially poor, feel like you have not accomplished much, have been treated badly by people,

or been told by influential people you are not valuable, then you will be tempted to think you are less valuable than others.

But “*Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*” (2 Cor 5:17). The NT usually describes belonging to Christ as being “*in Christ*.” Do not underestimate the meaning of those two words. The Apostle Paul refers to who you are or what you have “*in Christ*” about 170 times! This is because everything good and valuable and true about your identity comes through your relationship with Christ.

Apart from being “*in Christ*” you are little more than a wicked worthless worm deserving and destined for the fires of Hell. Apologies if that sounds harsh, but it is true. Jesus said, “*Apart from me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5), meaning nothing truly good. Paul said, “*I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature*” (Rom 7:18). But with Christ you are . . . Explaining that will require the *FOUNDATIONS* and *FAITH* studies in the *Christian Essentials* and more!

To be “*in Christ*” is to be given His righteousness. To be “*in Christ*” is to be valued by God as much as Christ. To be “*in Christ*” is to be given His purpose to serve God. To be “*in Christ*” is to have your future tied to Christ. Christ’s holy standing before the Father, Christ’s infinite value as His Son, Christ’s great purpose as God’s servant, and Christ’s eternal destiny to live with the Father have all been given to you because you are “*in Christ*.”

This wicked World has a value system by which people determine their identity. But when you became a Christian you entered the Kingdom of God and “*You died with Christ to the fundamental principles of this world*” (Col 2:20) and how it identified and evaluated you. “*You died*” in the sense that who you were, or what you did, before belonging to God has nothing to do with your true identity and value anymore. “*You died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God*” (Col 3:3). Everything valuable and meaningful about you is now tied to Christ. Your true identity is not in your marital status, gender, occupation, or bank account. It is “*in Christ*.”

Your Christian identity is who you are and what you have because God is your Dad. Who you are “*in Christ*” is a chosen child of God. What you have “*in Christ*” . . . well again, it is a lot! “*Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*” (2 Cor 5:17). The real you is in Christ and Christ in you.

Your new creation is a new “heart”

Many Christians do not understand what happened to them when they were born again (cf. John 3:3) and made spiritually alive (cf. Eph 2:2, 5) by the indwelling of Christ through the Holy Spirit.

First, your “*old life is gone*” (2 Cor 5:17). Or as Paul repeatedly says elsewhere, YOU DIED (cf. Gal 2:20; Col 2:20; 3:3; 2 Tim 2:11). The old you does not exist anymore. When you were “*born of the Spirit*” (John 3:5) you

became “*a new creation*,” (2 Cor 5:17 NIV), a new kind of human being. This radical change in a person’s identity was one of the reasons that early Christians commonly adopted a new name at baptism.

What is so radically different about a Christian that they can be called “*a new creation*” the very instant they are born again? Why would we say you are a radically different species of human compared to unbelievers? Because the Scriptures teach, and your experience confirms, God gave you a new “heart.” What God promised in the OT has happened to you:

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)

To get a “*new heart*” and have “*a new spirit in you*” is to “*become a new creation*” (2 Cor 5:17 NIV) such that your “*old life is gone; a new life has begun!*” (2 Cor 5:17). What practical difference does this make? Your “*heart*” is the source of all your desires. That is why “*your heart . . . determines the course of your life*” (Prov 4:23). The desires, direction, and decisions of your life come from your “heart.” This is why Scripture refers to the human “*heart*” as the center of your life over 1000 times.

When God gave you a “*new heart*” He gave you new desires. Your old “*stubborn heart*” hated God and desired sin. But your new “*responsive heart*” desires to “*follow [God’s] decrees and be careful to obey [His] regulations.*” Before being born again, you had one nature, “*the sinful nature, [which] is always hostile to God. . . never did obey God’s laws, and it never will*” (Rom 8:7). And because this was your only nature, you were a “*slave to sin*” (Rom 6:6). But now you have the Spirit of God indwelling your “*heart*” giving you new desires that oppose your sinful nature. Sin no longer automatically controls your life. You have a new Lord living in you!

In fact, your “*new heart*” is the heart of Jesus Christ, and your “*new spirit*” is the Spirit of God in you. This is why Jesus said all born again Christians are “*pure in heart*” (Matt 5:8 NIV) because your “*new heart*” is Jesus Christ in you. Do you believe that Christian? You have a pure heart.

If all of this is true, why do you still sin? Because even though you have a “*new heart*” with holy desires, you have your old mind with sinful programming. This is where your sinful nature is now. Before being indwelt by Christ your sinful nature was your “heart,” your true self. Now your sinful nature only exists as a ghost in the programming of your mind.

The false beliefs in your mind about what will make you happy, trick you into acting against your true and holy desires from your new heart. But because your sinful nature resides in the old programming of your mind, you can “*transform . . . into a new person by changing the way you think*” (Rom 12:2). By replacing the lies that parts of your mind believe, your mind

can be changed to be more united with the desires of your “heart,” which will drastically reduce your internal struggle between sin and the Spirit.

“Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” (2 Cor 5:17). A “new person” that hates sin and has a desire to please God. THAT is a radically different kind of human being! The real you is in Christ and Christ in you.

Your new relationship with sin

Your “new heart” and “new spirit in you” gives you a new relationship to sin. This is what the legalists refuse to understand. They struggle to preach and believe the Christian’s complete forgiveness of all sin and removal of all guilt. This is because they think if a person truly understands how forgiven they are, they will want to take advantage of it and sin more. Legalists fear that more grace will actually result in more sin!

This is the false teaching that Paul was confronting in Romans 6-7. He had just spent chapters 3-5 describing our complete forgiveness of all sin. He concludes chapter 5 by saying:

God’s [OT] law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were. But as people sinned more and more, God’s wonderful grace became more abundant [in the New Covenant]. . . now God’s wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God (Rom 5:20-21)

Paul knew that legalists would claim that such abundant grace and complete forgiveness might tempt some to sin more. He responded:

Well then [if we are this forgiven], should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it? . . . We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. For when we died with Christ we were set free from the [automatic] power of sin. (Rom 6:1-2, 6-7)

Through Christ’s sacrifice you have received complete forgiveness for every sin. But what the legalists don’t understand is that through the re-creation of the Spirit you have a “new heart” that hates sin and desires holiness. You have the freedom to sin. But you no longer want to sin. And it is your new love for God and hatred for sin that motivates you not to sin. You do not need the fear of condemnation for sin that the legalists want to use to motivate you to be holy.

How can Paul say that “*We have died to sin*” (Rom 6:2) when we still sin? Because it is no longer your true nature to sin. “*Our old sinful selves*” that only had a sinful nature and only had sinful desires was “*crucified with Christ*” (Rom 6:6). You can still give sin power because of the lies in your

mind. But “*we were set free from the [automatic] power of sin*” (Rom 6:7) because sin is no longer your true desire. This is why even though you sin, the NT never refers to Christians as sinners, but as saints.

Still not convinced of your new, holy identity? Paul says something even more radical twice in Romans 7 to make sure you get this:

I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. SO I AM NOT THE ONE DOING WRONG; IT IS SIN LIVING IN ME THAT DOES IT.

And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don't want to do, I AM NOT REALLY THE ONE DOING WRONG; IT IS SIN LIVING IN ME THAT DOES IT.

I love God's law with all my heart [the real me]. But there is another power within me [our deceived sinful nature] that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me.

Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord [when He gives us a new sinless mind and body]. So you see how it is: In my mind [i.e. new heart] I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature [parts of mind with sinful programming] I am a slave to sin. (Rom 7:15-25, all caps added)

First, Paul says, “*I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature*” (v. 18). Recognize a hard but vital truth here. There was nothing truly good about you before Christ came to live in you. What Paul could boast about before Christ, he now called “*garbage*” (Phil 3:8). Likewise now, there is nothing truly good about you except Christ living in you. It is only Jesus living through you that has any value at all. Which is why everything about you apart from Christ is going to rot in the grave and be left behind for eternity. Might as well let them go now.

Secondly, there is a struggle inside of you between two opposing forces: *The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.* (Gal 5:17)

Your spiritual battle is in your mind between your “*sinful nature*” and the “*Spirit*.” Paul referred to the sinful nature when he wrote: “*I know that*

nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature" (Rom 7:18). The "sinful nature" is the World's demonic programming in your mind and is completely evil. But this is not the real you. Paul distinguished the real you from your sinful nature when he wrote, "*I love God's law with all my heart [the real me].*" (v. 22).

And the Apostle makes our point even clearer when he writes twice: "*I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it . . . I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it*" (Rom 7:17, 20). An Apostle is saying (twice), "The real me does not sin anymore." And he is saying that anyone "in Christ" can say the same thing.

You might reject what Paul is saying because it seems that he is denying personal responsibility for his sin. However, surely the Apostle would be willing to do that. But Paul wants to tell you that there is something even more important than accepting your responsibility for sin. And that more important thing is recognizing your sinless identity even when you do sin. Your sin does not define who you really are.

You do not always live up to who you really are. But when you sin, you are not acting like your true self. Like Paul, you "*love God's law with all [your] heart*" (Rom 7:22). Your real self delights in obeying God and hates sin. Therefore, the real you does not sin. Your real self now, is your eternal self who will live sinlessly forever on the New Earth. But you will have a new mind and body, freeing you to do what you really want to do, which is never to sin again.

Sin is like a disease programmed in your mind by the World. But you are not your disease. A person with cancer is not cancer. Their disease may physically limit them in ways they hate. But their true desire and real self is to be free from cancer. So it is with your sin. It is a disease that limits you spiritually in ways you hate. But your true desire and real self wants to be free from sin. If you were free to never sin again, you would not. You are no longer a sinner, but a saint who lives in a sinful world and body.

All of this is another reason why you are "*holy and without fault in his eyes*" (Eph 1:4). Holy is not just how God chooses to see you as He denies reality. Holy is who you really are. Some think God is just fooling Himself. He knows you are a sinner, but just chooses to ignore and overlook who you really are. The idea is that God simply chooses to view you through some distorted filter that does not reflect reality. But is it possible that God knows your true identity better than you do? Is it possible that the reason God sees you as "*holy and without fault*" is because that is who you really are?

One of the hardest but most important things the Christian must do is admit their sin. This is because we already feel guilty and shameful about it. But when we understand that our real identity is a saint, and sin is just a disease we have, then we are much freer to admit, face, and even resolve the lies that make us sin.

Your real self is pure, holy, blameless, and sinless. Not just because God chooses to overlook and ignore your sin. But you are no longer a sinner in reality because *“Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”* (2 Cor 5:17). The real you is in Christ and Christ in you.

Your new identity is Christ in you

Not only are you no longer a sinner, but your real identity is Jesus Christ. Your *“new heart”* and *“new spirit in you”* is Jesus Christ in you. This is what Paul meant when he said: *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me”* (Gal 2:20). Paul said: *“To me, to live is Christ”* (Phil 1:21 NIV). Paul said, *“Put on your new nature, created [already!] to be like God—truly righteous and holy”* (Eph 4:24).

You already have a perfect Person living in you! There is a God-like, holy, loving Person living in you and it is the real you. Notice that your *“new self”* is ALREADY *“created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.”* You already have a completely mature Jesus Christ living inside of you!

Many Christians define spiritual growth as becoming more like Christ or learning how to be more loving and holy. But this perspective ignores the fact that your *“new self”* is ALREADY *“created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.”* You already have a complete Christ in you. When the Holy Spirit is controlling you, then Christ lives through you.

At any moment in your life, either all of Jesus controls you or none of Jesus controls you. When God’s Spirit controls you all of Christ controls you and people will not see a partial Jesus because all of Jesus lives in you. Spiritual growth is not gradually having more of Christ in you. It is letting the complete Christ in you more consistently control you.

When Christ controls you, you are being the real you. That *“new self, [already!] created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness”* (Eph 4:24) is who you really are. When you do not act like Christ you are not acting like your real self. Paul said *“My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”* (Gal 2:20) and *“To me, to live is Christ”* (Phil 1:21). Your old self has died. You are a new creation that not only has Jesus Christ living in you, but is Jesus Christ living in you. Anything you do that is not Christ, is not your life, nor matters in this life, nor will be remembered and rewarded in the next life.

“Anyone who is in Christ has become a new creation. Their old self is gone and their new self has begun!” (2 Cor 5:17). The real you is in Christ and Christ in you.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite 2 Cor 3:18 and John 15:15 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize 2 Cor 5:17 in the translation above or another.

Chapter 2.11

Your God-given Needs*Security & Significance*

Psalm 70:5

Week 6

- For a God Time use the “P.O.W.E.R. Plan” in Appendix A.

David was fleeing for his life from Jerusalem into the desert. His own son Absalom had rebelled against him and desired to kill him (cf. 2 Sam 16:9-14; 17:1-4). It was at this time that he wrote Psalm 63: “*A psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah.*” He was facing “*Those who want to kill me*” (v.9) and “*the mouths of liars*” (v. 11) who were slandering him. He had lost his throne, abandoned his home, and left his friends. His life, and those with him, were in great danger.

As David travelled through the desert after losing so many things, he wrote this prayer to God: “*My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water*” (v. 1). David’s experience of losing everything, and having to live in the desert, helped him to remember something he had written elsewhere in Psalms:

But as for me I am poor and needy. (Psalms 70:5)

God created you with great needs.

You need God

Have you ever seen how desperately dependent a new born baby is out of the womb? They are gasping for their first breath. A short time later they are sucking their first food. During the first few minutes of birth we are so close to death because we are so needy and dependent. In many ways a baby is just a bundle of needs. And so are you.

Unfortunately, as you grow stronger and older you forget how desperately dependent you still are. Now breathing seems normal, you feed yourself, and provide for all of your needs. You can easily become convinced that you are self-sufficient, and do not even need God.

The truth is, apart from God you are nothing but a bundle of needs. When Jesus said, “*Apart from me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5) He meant it. You cannot be saved apart from faith in Christ. You cannot do anything spiritual, loving, holy, or God-glorifying apart from the power of Christ. You cannot even live today without Christ helping you (cf. Col 1:17). But we still want to believe we are independent and self-sufficient.

One of the hardest, but most important things you could ever learn is how to rely on God. The Devil, your sinful nature, and the culture all work to convince you that you do not need God. In fact, the essence of all sin is INDEPENDENCE from God. Before Adam and Eve sinned they enjoyed a complete, constant, and conscious dependence on God. When they sinned they lost this and for the first time experienced a separation from God. And a primary goal of the Christian life is to regain what Adam and Eve lost: a complete, constant, and conscious dependence on God.

Our sinful nature hates to depend on others, including God. But the truly strongest people you will ever know are those who have learned to depend on God the most. But that strength of relying on God does not come easily. The Apostle Paul writes of his own painful lesson in relying on God: *We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God.* (2 Cor 1:8-9)

After over twenty years of following Christ, the Apostle Paul was still learning how “*to rely only on God.*” And like anyone else, this can only happen when you experience great loss, difficulty, and pain. Because only then do you realize the truth of how much you need God.

You were created with needs

God created you with needs. You have a physical need for oxygen, water, and food. If you do not have these you will be gasping for air, or thirsty for water, or craving food and eventually die. Humans easily recognize they have these physical needs. But many do not recognize their great emotional needs. We need to feel secure, significant, and accepted. These God-given emotional needs can be summed up in the God-given desire to be happy. You read in chapter 2.3:

God created your heart with one ultimate controlling desire: to be happy! Which is why everything you do, every decision you make, is ultimately motivated to make you happy. . .

God has programmed into the center of every human heart the desire and drive to be happy. And this is what everyone seeks in everything they do. Everything! Including you. . .

Unfortunately, your desire to be “happy” is the ultimate reason you sin. You become convinced that disobeying God will give you the most pleasure, significance, acceptance, or security. You disobey God to be happy, when in reality, the only way to be happy is to trust and obey Him.

Your God-given emotional needs can be summed up in the acronym H.A.P.P.I.E.R.:

Hope
Approval
Protection
Power
Importance
Enjoyment
Relationship

God created you to desperately need these emotional blessings. You need them as much as your physical needs. It is easy to recognize that if you do not have food, water, and air you will die. But you also need to recognize that if you do not have your emotional needs satisfied, you will want to die, or even kill yourself.

For example, consider the first emotional need: **H**ope. It is being confident of having a deep desire fulfilled. If you become convinced that your greatest needs and desires will never be met, life may not seem worth living. This is why having no hope leads people to suicide. Therefore the opposites of hope are feeling hopeless and even wanting to die.

Approval is a deep and fundamental emotional need in humans. It is being accepted in a favorable way by others. The opposites of approval are rejection, condemnation, and shame. Our God-given need for approval is demonstrated by all the things humans do to feel accepted and approved. And by how painful it is to be rejected, condemned, or exposed in a shameful way. Approval is a great human emotional need.

Protection is the God-given need of being secure from harm. Its opposites are feeling vulnerable, in danger, and unsafe. Again, how many things do people do every day just to feel safe? We need to feel protected.

Power is the God-given need of being free and able to do what you want to do. Its opposites are feeling trapped, stuck, overwhelmed, enslaved, inadequate, and powerless.

Importance is one of the most fundamental emotional needs in humans. It is the God-given need of being valuable and useful and having a purpose. While all humans deeply desire this, men experience importance more through being respected and women through being cherished. The opposites of feeling important are feeling worthless, insignificant, and not needed by anyone. It is possible that almost everything you do is an attempt to feel like you matter, and for others to think so too.

Enjoyment is the God-given need of experiencing pleasure. Some may think this is a sinful desire. But God created you with the need for enjoyment. And your need for it is again demonstrated by how many things

you seek to experience pleasure. And how much you do to avoid its opposites of pain, boredom, and depression.

Relationship is the God-given need of being with another person. Its opposites are feeling lonely and separated. And again, your need for this is evident by how much you crave relationships and how painful it is to lose them. Because of our God-given need for relationship, isolation is devastating to humans. This is why solitary confinement is considered the cruelest of punishments.

These H.A.P.P.I.E.R. needs can be summed up in your need for security, significance and satisfaction. The acronym H.A.P.P.I.E.R. reminds us of a very simple but fundamental truth. Happiness is having your needs fulfilled. When you have reason to hope, have the approval of others, feel protected from harm, have the freedom and ability to do what you want, feel important and useful, enjoy your life, and are experiencing relationships, then you will be happy!

This is why joy is the unconditional happiness that comes from having your needs met by God. This will be the subject of the next several chapters. Previously in chapter 2.7 we noted that the love of people can certainly be a blessing to us. But both Scripture and experience teaches us that no human can fully satisfy our emotional needs for love. God created you with these emotional needs and He created you to only have them completely satisfied in your relationship with Him. When you try to get your H.A.P.P.I.E.R. needs satisfied by possessions or people you experience the disappointment and pain of idolatry. One of the most difficult but vital convictions of a mature Christian is that: None of my God-given emotional needs can be satisfied by people, but my deepest needs can only be satisfied by faith in the promises and experience of God.

But for now, the important thing is to simply recognize, like David did, *“But as for me I am poor and needy”* (Psalms 70:5), and that God created you with great needs. Many Christians have a very difficult time admitting this, even to God. Some have thought that possessions or people were the only way to get their needs for **H**ope, **A**pproval, **P**rotection, **P**ower, **I**mportance, **E**njoyment, and **R**elationship satisfied. Others have grown up in families where some or all of these needs were completely absent. And because of all the disappointment and pain they have experienced, it has become less painful to simply believe they do not need these things.

But you do. God created you with these needs so you would need Him. He does not want you to deny you have these needs but to grow in your faith in Him so they are fully satisfied in Him.

One of the ways you recognize these needs in your life is monitoring how often you feel their opposites. Feeling angry, worried, and depressed are usually the result of not having your H.A.P.P.I.E.R. needs met.

Recognition of your needs, and need for God, is one of the reasons He allows the difficult deserts of your life. As we noted above, Psalm 63 was written by David in the desert, while he was losing his kingship and home. It was in such a desert that he recognized his need and wrote: “*My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water*” (v. 1). David was reminded in the desert “*But as for me I am poor and needy*” (Psalms 70:5), and that God created you with great needs.

But because of his faith in God, David wrote in the same Psalm: “*Your unfailing love is better than life itself; how I praise you! I will praise you as long as I live, lifting up my hands to you in prayer. You satisfy me more than the richest feast*” (Ps 63:3-5). David not only knew “*But as for me I am poor and needy,*” but he knew God was the only one who really could meet his H.A.P.P.I.E.R. needs, and that God would. And we pray you too can learn this in the chapters and projects that follow.

- What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?
- ▶ Recite 2 Corinthians 5:17 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Psalm 70:5 in the translation above or another one.
- ▶ Look at Appendix I: “The Seven Emotional Needs of Humans.” Do you have difficulty admitting your need for any of them? Which ones feel especially unfulfilled right now? Discuss these things with your Barnabas Group this week.

Chapter 2.12

Loving False Gods Rejects the Real God*The deception and danger of idols*

Jonah 2:8

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:
 - What is idolatry? Why do people commit this sin?
 - How do you know if you have an idol in your life?
 - What are some common false gods in our world?
 - What protects you from the false god of Money? Why is this?
 - What are the consequences of having false gods in your life?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?

She was probably a very pretty woman. She had been married five times and was now living with another man. In spite of all the pain and rejection she had experienced from all those men, she was trying another man. One more sad story of someone looking for love in all the wrong places. We simply know her as “*the woman at the well*” (cf. John 4:6-7).

Jesus knew her life, and He knew that love was what she was really thirsty for. Having compassion on her He said: “*Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life*” (John 4:13-14). Like this woman, Jesus offers you a relationship to satisfy your every need. But many Christians reject God’s offer and ignore His warning:

**Those who cling to worthless idols
turn away from God's love for them.** (Jonah 2:8 NIV)

If you seek what you need from anything or anyone other than God,
you will increase the pain in your life.

In the previous chapters we discussed the fact that you were created with many needs. The need for **Hope**, **Approval**, **Protection**, **Power**, **Importance**, **Enjoyment**, and **Relationship** (H.A.P.P.I.E.R.) This is important to understand, because: YOUR GOD IS WHOEVER OR WHATEVER YOU DEPEND ON TO MEET YOUR NEEDS. Your god is what is most important to you, what you will sacrifice for, because your god is what makes you happy.

There are two sources that people seek to find fulfillment: the real God and “false gods.” Jonah warned that “*idols*” are a “*worthless*” false god that deceives you into thinking it can make you happy, but actually hurts you. Because you love an idol, and depend on it to satisfy you, you “*turn away from God's love for*” you and do not experience the love He has for you.

SIN IS SIMPLY AND ALWAYS AN ATTEMPT TO SATISFY YOUR GOD-GIVEN NEEDS IN A DESTRUCTIVE WAY. The needs are not bad. God created you with them. But when you satisfy your needs for security, acceptance, significance, or pleasure apart from God’s ways, you hurt yourself. Almost all of your trouble and pain and sin will come from trying to find love somewhere or in someone other than God. This was the life of “*the woman at the well.*”

Remember, all of God’s commands are designed to tell you how to meet your needs in a safe and satisfying way. For example, God created sex and He invented marriage as the safe and satisfying place to experience it. But people ignore God’s commands and become less happy (and even less human) every time they pursue sex in sinful ways.

Again, God created your “heart” to desire happiness, and created you to find that happiness in your relationship with Him. The Bible puts it this way: “*Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more*” (Ps 16:4 NIV). However “*Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart*” (Ps 37:4). God personally invites you to a joyful life in serving Him, rather than false gods. Because: “*Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them*” (Jonah 2:8). If you seek what you need from anything or anyone other than God, you will increase the pain in your life.

The many kinds of false gods

In the OT and in many countries today people worship idols or statues thinking they give them favor with the gods. But the most popular idols today are more spiritual in nature and much more disguised. For example, Jesus warned about the idol of money when He taught:

Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be. . . . No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money (Matt 6:21, 24).

Jesus said your “god” is “*your treasure*” and “*the desires of your heart.*” A false god is anything or anyone that competes with God for your love and trust. A good example of a false god is “*money.*” If you believe it will make you feel happy, secure, and valuable, then you will “*serve*” money as your “*master*” and it will be your god. As a result, you will not “*love*” or “*be*

devoted” to God. This is because there is only room for one god in your “heart” and life.

How much does the world worship and love money and depend on it for their security and significance? Money is one of the most popular, powerful, and idolatrous religions in the world and even invades Christianity. Job asked a question you should ask yourself: “*Have I put my trust in money or felt secure because of my gold?*” (Job 31:24).

How do you know if money or something else is an idol? You feel fear when your idol is threatened, or emptiness even after prolonged devotion. You fear losing money, a job, a person, or your reputation because these are idols and you trust them for your security, significance, and satisfaction.

This is true of money. If your supply is threatened, and you are loving and depending on it more than God, then you will be afraid. Likewise, if you are afraid of giving your money generously, it is probably because it is an idol in your life. The Bible warns: “*The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil*” (1 Tim 6:9-10). Notice that it is not money itself that is evil. It is “*the love of money*” and your dependence on it to meet your needs that leads to all kinds of evil in your life. This is true of many idols. Enjoying the things of this world is not evil until you love them more than God, and depend on them to meet your H.A.P.P.I.E.R. needs.

How can you protect yourself from the great threat of money to ruin your life and relationship with God? GIVE IT AWAY! The Bible says:

Teach those who are rich in this world [which is virtually everyone who lives in America] not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. (1 Tim 6:17)

When you give generously, then God can safely give you more because He knows you do not depend on it for your security and significance (cf. 2 Cor 9:6-11; Mal 3:8-12).

Another result of depending on idols is emptiness. Despite all the hope of security, significance, or satisfaction that a possession, position, or person has promised, you still feel empty and desperate.

Unfortunately, even very good things can be corrupted by idolatry. Parents can make an idol out of their children because they depend on them for their sense of security and significance. Pastors can even make an idol out of their ministry for the same reason. Spiritual gifts can be perverted and even falsely claimed because people are seeking significance in them. People claiming God is revealing things to them through supposed gifts of prophecy, knowledge, discernment, etc. are especially susceptible to this.

Other common false gods are education and occupations. This can happen because money is your god. But it can also be because you depend on degrees or the prestige of your job to feel significant. This may be why

you work so hard at school or work. You want to increase the respect you receive from people and feel important. But God said to even slaves:

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)

Do you see that God wants you to find the true purpose and value of your schooling and working in pleasing Him? Be excellent in all of these things for Him, but not because you need more security or significance from them.

Other powerful false gods are things that make you feel special and better than others. These are things the world greatly values. They include physical looks, intelligence, and athletic ability. Other things the world greatly values but that can be an idol in the search of pleasure is food and entertainment. Notice the warning of Jesus Christ: *“What people value highly is detestable in God’s sight”* (Luke 16:15 NIV). Again, being athletic, pretty, smart, or having food or entertainment can all be gifts from God. But when they are used to meet your needs for security, significance, and satisfaction then you make them an idol. God hates the things the world loves, and makes into idols, because worshipping them instead of Him hurts people.

This is especially true of sexual immorality and pornography. This is a very powerful false god in the world which promises pain-free pleasure. But the guilt and sense of being worthless that they cause are very painful. The only cure for the false gods of sexual immorality and pornography is to decide that for the rest of your life you will love God more than the pleasure they offer. Do you love God more than the pleasure the Devil offers you in sinful sex? Your actions in this matter clearly answer that question for you and God.

The danger of false gods

Idols and false gods of the World trick you into thinking they can make you happy. You pursue and love things and people believing they can meet your deepest needs. But they never can, and they always leave you thirsting for more. This is why Jonah called them *“worthless idols.”* This is why God asks, *“How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?”* (Ps 4:2).

There are many sad things about having false gods. First, Jonah says, *“Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them.”* Your love for idols hurts God! Listen to what He said through the Prophet Jeremiah: *“My people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols! The heavens are shocked at such a thing and shrink back in horror and dismay”* (Jer 2:11-12).

Because of the love relationship God has with you, you are rejecting Him when you love someone or something else more than Him. God even calls it adultery when He said: *“They will recognize how hurt I am by their unfaithful hearts and lustful eyes that long for their idols”* (Ezek 6:9; cf. Jas 4:4). Will you recognize this?

Likewise, notice the danger of idols. The Devil wants you to depend on them for your H.A.P.P.I.E.R. needs. Then when you lose that idol, or God even takes it away from you because it is hurting your life, what will you feel? Pain. A lot of pain. And in your pain of losing your false god, the Devil will tempt you to hate God and separate yourself from Him.

It is your love and dependence on idols that make your trials and difficulties much harder than they need to be. For example, if you love and depend on money, how much harder is it to have less of it? If you depend on a job, or ability, or person to make you feel secure and significant it will be very painful if you lose them. Do you see how idols set you up for pain?

Therefore, your love for false gods not only hurts God, but hurts you also. Jonah warned us: *“Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them”* (Jonah 2:8). If you depend on something or someone else to meet your deepest needs, you miss experiencing God’s fulfilling love for you. You settle for the false security and significance another person or thing can give you. You forfeit the blessing of God. But when you have His blessing, you have everything you need and more!

Why is God reluctant to bless you if you love false gods? Because 1) They really will not make you happy, and 2) You will love God’s blessing more than Him. Imagine a child who only loves their dad because of what he gives to them. The child is not interested in a relationship with their dad, but only loves the things they can get from him. The more a dad gives to a child like that, the more they love the gifts rather than their dad. Such gifts actually come between them instead of drawing them closer.

This is one great danger of the “Prosperity Preachers.” They deceive people to believe that happiness is finding your security and significance in the things of the world like money, worldly success, health, and popularity. People who believe them seek and crave those things and experience great disappointment and pain. The “Prosperity Preachers” promote idolatry among the people of God. But now you know better.

“Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God’s love for them” (Jonah 2:8). If you seek what you need from anything or anyone other than God, you will increase the pain in your life.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite Psalm 70:5 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Jonah 2:8 in the translation above or another one.
- ▶ Read the next chapter this week to prepare for your Barnabas Group.

Chapter 2.13

Cursed Are Those Who Worship People*People are the Most Powerful and Painful Idol in the World*

Jeremiah 17:5

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:
 - Why do we claim that people are the most tempting idol in your life?
 - What is the difference between loving people and worshipping them?
 - How do you know when a person has become an idol in your life?
 - How do you overcome a person who is an idol in your life?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?

In the previous chapter you were reminded of “the woman at the well” who Jesus told: “*you have had five husbands, and you aren't even married to the man you're living with now*” (John 4:18). What a miserable life! What was the woman looking for? Like so many people, she was seeking her need for love in another human being. And because depending on people can be a disappointing and painful idol in your life, God warns:

Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans (Jer 17:5).

Worshipping people is the most powerful and painful idol in the world.

The greatest false god

What is by far the greatest false god in the world? The answer may surprise you. The one thing that competes for your devotion to the real God more than anything else is people. Parents, spouses, children, boyfriends, girlfriends, and Pastors can all become idols that you depend on for your security, significance, and satisfaction more than God.

Think carefully about the following warning from God:

This is what the LORD says: Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans, who rely on human strength and turn their hearts away from the LORD.

They are like stunted shrubs in the desert, with no hope for the future. They will live in the barren wilderness. . . .

But blessed are those who trust in the LORD and have made the LORD their hope and confidence. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. (Jer 17:5-8)

God is offering you two different lives. A “*cursed*” life where your needs are not fulfilled like those who “*live in the barren wilderness.*” Or a “*blessed*” life where your needs are satisfied “*like trees planted along a riverbank.*” What is the difference? Whether you “*trust,*” “*rely,*” “*hope*” or have “*confidence*” “*in mere humans,*” or God, to meet your needs.

You know the pain of being disappointed and hurt by humans you depended on for acceptance and significance. You were looking for love in the wrong place like the woman at the well. Again, you were created to only be safe and satisfied with God’s perfect love. If you turn from it and seek your security and significance in another person, God warns “*Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans*” (Jer 17:5). Worshipping people is the most powerful and painful idol in the world.

This is why Scripture says elsewhere: “*It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in people*” (Ps 118:8). Why would you make a god out of another person? People are so messed up! Relationships with people do more to expose your need for God, than actually meet your deepest needs.

Of course you are to love people. But when you depend on them to satisfy your deepest needs, you are worshipping them and replacing God with them. Unfortunately, you can become so desperate to have your needs met by a person that you will accept all kinds of abuse from them.

Another common and very painful form of people worship is making an idol of yourself. This happens when you believe you can meet the deepest needs of other people including your children, spouse, friends, and parents. Of course there is a God-designed stage in the life of babies when they are very dependent on their parents. But even by the time they become young boys and girls, they begin needing a relationship with God to fully meet their needs for security and significance.

Likewise, many husbands and wives believe they have the responsibility to satisfy their spouse’s deepest emotional needs for security, significance, and satisfaction. On the contrary, marriage results in a greater awareness of how much you need God! Of course the love you experience in marriage is a blessing. But only God can satisfy your spouse’s deepest needs.

God created you to need relationships. Even He lives in a Trinity. And even when Adam had a very personal relationship with God, the Creator said, “*It is not good for the man to be alone*” (Gen 2:18) and He created a companion for him. God wants you to have human companions. But God never intended any mere human to fully satisfy your emotional needs.

Not even Christian wives are to put their hope in their husbands to meet their deepest needs. The Bible says:

This is how the holy women of old made themselves beautiful. They trusted God and accepted the authority of their husbands. For instance, Sarah obeyed her husband, Abraham, and called him her

master. You are her daughters when you do what is right without fear of what your husbands might do. (1 Pet 3:4-6)

“Sarah obeyed her husband” as God desired (cf. 1 Pet 3:1; Eph 5:22; Col 3:18). But she “trusted God” for her security and significance, not her husband. And that was a good thing considering the danger Abraham put her in twice! (cf. Gen 12:10-20; 20:1-17). But God in Heaven protected Sarah even when her husband did not. Sarah treated her husband as her lord, and even loved him, but she did not put him in the place of God in her life. Sisters, as a daughter of Almighty God you already have a perfect man in your life. But He is not your earthly husband.

Likewise, Jesus only needed His Dad. Did it disappoint Him when His closest friends abandoned Him at His darkest hour? It seems so. But His Dad’s love carried Him through His trial even when humanly speaking He was all alone. And the same is true for you. This does not mean you should not have friends. But like Jesus, God needs to be your Best Friend and the One who always makes you feel secure and significant.

Why are you so tempted to depend on people more than God? Because we hate living by faith and having our closest friendship with Someone we cannot see, touch, or hear. So we seek our love, security, acceptance, significance, and happiness from flesh and blood people. But God expects us to live by faith. 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). This is because your faith in the love of a God you cannot see meets all your needs.

People idolatry hurts because it feels like a person is really meeting your needs for a while. A new friend, girlfriend, boyfriend, spouse, or baby makes you feel really good. . . Until they fail to meet a need in your life. And unfortunately, because you have allowed them to take the place of God in your life as the ultimate source of meeting your needs, you may end up even hating them because of how much they hurt and disappoint you.

The false god of a girlfriend or boyfriend is especially tempting for young people. The ultimate reason this happens for Christians is because they are not finding the love they need in God. What are possible signs of this? 1) A young person becomes obsessed and attached to someone of the opposite sex, and 2) is not spiritually or financially ready to be married, or 3) does not intend to marry them. God did not intend for His children to be in a relationship where the emotional attachment gets far ahead of the real commitment because real hurt will be the result.

You can even make a false god out of your family. This is one of the most innocent looking idols because the Bible commands you to love your family. But you are not to worship them as the source of your security and significance. When you spend so much time and money on your family that you have none to give to God, then they may be an idol in your life. Jesus

warned: “If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine” (Matt 10:37).

It would seem loving his wife more than God was why Adam sinned. When he saw her eat the forbidden fruit, he knew she was disobeying God. And he had a choice to make. Join his wife in her sin or remain faithful to God. He chose the love of his wife over the love of his God. You can make an idol out of any person. But God expects you to always choose to love and please Him more than any other person.

How do you know when you are worshipping a person instead of loving them? The answer is: How do you FEEL when they do not love you? How do you FEEL when they say or do something that communicates rejection or criticism? Does someone or something make you AFRAID or ANGRY?

How many women think a person or circumstance made them worry. This is a lie. No one and nothing makes you commit the sin of worry. You worry because you are not trusting God to meet all your needs. Until you take responsibility for your anxiety, instead of blaming it on other people or things, you will always find a multitude of wrong reasons to live in fear.

The most common reason you get angry at someone is that you have committed the sin of idolatry first. You are expecting something from someone that you should only be expecting from God. And when you do not get it, it hurts you, making you mad.

How many husbands have told their wives: “You make me angry.” This is a lie. No one makes you commit the sin of anger. Usually a husband gets angry with his wife because he expected her to meet a need in his life and she did not do so. If that husband never recognizes this he will always live in bondage to what other people do.

In many cases the person who is making you mad is doing their best to please you. Your parents, friends, spouse and children usually want you to be happy. But the reason even their best is not good enough for you, is that only God can be good enough for you. That is how He created you.

Freedom from such idolatry is demonstrated in Christ as He hung on the cross and said of those who crucified Him: “*Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing*” (Luke 23:34). When God is your god instead of people, you can do the same no matter what people do to you.

The reason you cannot forgive someone is that they are an idol in your life. You depended on them for something they did not give to you or they took something from you. And because you continue to depend on them for it, you cannot let go of them and what they did to you. Forgiveness is trusting God to give you what someone's sin has cost you. And you can only do that when that person ceases to be an idol in your life.

Idolatry may occur if a man is afraid of his employer because his security is in his job. If a mom is angry at her child because of poor

academic performance, it may be because she is depending on this for her significance. If you feel angry, afraid, or worthless when people do not love you, then you are worshipping them. The reason you are feeling these things is that you are depending too much on them for the security, significance, and satisfaction you can only get from God's perfect love.

Another indication that a person is an idol in your life is that you are very afraid to displease them. Their opinion of you is more important than God's opinion. You might even pretend to be someone you are not because you think a person will like you more.

Please read the following carefully: If you live to please God, then you will please the people you are supposed to please, and you will displease the people you are supposed to displease. There are people you are supposed to displease! There are times they are expecting more than God would, and you need to say "no." But you do not because they are an idol in your life. You depend on them more than God for your acceptance, security, and significance. But God wants the pleasure you experience from pleasing Him to be so great that you do not care about pleasing people!

This is why the Apostle Paul wrote: "*Our purpose is to please God, not people*" (1 Thess 2:4; cf. Gal 1:10). Solomon wrote: "*Fearing people is a dangerous trap*" (Prov 29:25). Never let it be said of you: "*They loved human praise more than the praise of God*" (John 12:43). Do you see how your fear of displeasing people can keep you from obeying Christ? If you live to please God, then you will please the people you are supposed to please, and you will displease the people you are supposed to displease.

Of course it is a great blessing if people love you like God wants them to. But what if they do not? Unfortunately, many Christians make the love and acceptance of people the foundation of their life and identity. Then when people fail them they might turn to God as a backup. But the reality of your life should be this: God is your all-sufficient Protector, Provider, Friend, and Father. God's love for you is the foundation and "rock" of your life. If and when people love you, then it is an extra blessing to be grateful for. But if people do not love you, God still does!

David proclaimed: "*Even if my father and mother abandon me, the LORD will hold me close*" (Ps 27:10). God is willing and able to replace even the love of an earthly mother or father. God is there for an abandoned child, unloved wife, disrespected husband, rejected teenager, or a neglected church member. When parents, spouses, friends, and Pastors fail you, God is still there. In fact, He was always there even while you were wrongly depending on others for love.

Determine to make God's love the emotional "rock" of your life and Who you always depend on. He wants you to love people like He does. But God does not want you to depend on people loving you. He wants to be your first love. If you put a human being in His place, you will be committing the

sin of idolatry and causing more pain in your life. God said, “*Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans* (Jer 17:5). People are your greatest temptation to sin in idolatry. Worshipping people is the most powerful and painful idol in the world.

Overcoming the false god of people

Christian, are you still questioning your value? Do you still feel small and insignificant at times? Then you are believing lies. Christian, do not let anyone define your value except God. Why? Because no one God will accurately recognize and adequately appreciate your true value. Only God always sees you as the chosen, purchased, forgiven son or daughter of the Most High God that you are! And anybody who thinks of you or treats you as anything less is not seeing you like God does.

Only God really knows your true significance. No one will see you like God sees you. And only God’s view of you is accurate. God (the most powerful and important Person in the Universe) chose you before the creation of the world to belong to Him. He sent His first Son to die for your sins and purchase you. God is creating a Paradise for you to live in with Him forever. So why let any mere human define your value? The only opinion that matters and is accurate is God’s.

Paul told his critics in the Corinthian church: “*It matters very little how I might be evaluated by you or by any human authority*” (1 Cor 4:3). He was willing to admit faults and submit to God’s evaluation. But his conscience was clear and people’s opinion of him did not affect him.

David said, “*My salvation and my honor depend on God*” (Ps 62:7 NIV). Christians understand they must trust God for their salvation. But do you know you can trust Him with your reputation also?

Jesus said to “*the Jewish leaders*” who “*began harassing*” Him: “*Your approval means nothing to me, because I know you don't have God's love within you*” (John 5:16, 41-42). Jesus did not need the approval or praise of people because He knew He had the love of His Dad. And He did not listen to people who did not have His Dad’s love in them.

What are you going to think, feel, and do when people want to make you feel dumb, ugly, unwanted, and afraid? It is understandable to be sad about such people. God is sad about them too. But are you going to let them define who you are and make them an idol in your life? God warns you, “*Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans*” (Jer 17:5). Worshipping people is the most powerful and painful idol in the world.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite Jonah 2:8 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Jeremiah 17:5 in the translation above or another.

Chapter 2.14

You Are Filled through Christ*God Gives You Everything You Need to be Happy*

Colossians 2:10

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 does Colossians 2:10 mean to you?
 - Why do we say that some Christians are living to get what they already have?
 - How can faith give you joy in any circumstance?
 - What was especially meaningful to you in this chapter? Why?

There was some weird teaching going on in Colossa. It claimed that Christ was not all you needed to please God and grow spiritually. These false teachers said in order to please God, Christians needed to follow “*human traditions*” (v. 8), abstain from certain foods, and practice certain ceremonies (v. 16). They claimed the Christians needed “*strong devotion*” to extra-biblical spiritual disciplines, “*pious self-denial and severe bodily discipline*” (v. 23). And in order to sound really spiritual, these false teachers claimed to have seen visions from God (v. 18).

The Apostle Paul wrote in answer to these errors: “*In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness*” (Col 2:9-10 NIV). Just as full as Jesus was of deity, the Christian is full of all they need to be complete in their own life. For all those Christians who are still living to get what they already have God says:

You also are complete through your union with Christ.

(Colossians 2:10)

God gives you everything you need to be happy.

You cannot be filled through people or the world

There are few experiences in humanity more universal and constant than feeling empty, dissatisfied, and disappointed. You are always hungering for more. As stated in a previous chapter, you were created to be essentially a bundle of needs. And because of this you are constantly seeking ways to be filled. You are always seeking to be happy which is simply having your needs satisfied.

Unfortunately, Christians constantly seek the wrong sources to have their emotional needs fulfilled. They think other humans have the ability to satisfy their God-given H.A.P.P.I.E.R. needs of **H**ope, **A**pproval, **P**rotection, **P**ower, **I**mportance, **E**njoyment, and **R**elationship. But as stated in a previous chapter, one of the most difficult but vital convictions of a mature Christian is this: None of my God-given needs for love can be fully satisfied by people, but my deepest needs can only be satisfied by faith in the promises and experience of God.

Some people feel odd that people and possessions cannot fulfill them. They look around them and it seems like these things make others happy. What is wrong with them? Why doesn't even a loving spouse and beautiful children, and a nice house satisfy us?

Because God created you to need perfect and pure love. Anything less than perfect love will not satisfy you and will disappoint you. God did not create you to be satisfied with all of the things the World offers to fill you and make you happy. He did not even create you to have your needs satisfied by other mere humans. And those people who seem fulfilled by possessions and people really are not. And deep inside they know this.

Why did God create you this way? Because He is a jealous God and He wants to be enough for you. He wants your security, significance, and satisfaction to come from Him. God created you to need and crave love because He wants you to need and crave Him. Your desire for the ideal person to love you was created in you so you would seek God. Anything and anybody other than God will be too small to satisfy your heart because it was created to only be filled by Him.

Only God's love will fill you

This is why our text is so wonderful: *"You also are complete through your union with Christ"* (Col 2:10). In the previous verse the Apostle wrote: *"in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body"* (v. 9). In the same measure that Jesus is completely full of God, you are fully complete in Christ. The Apostle did not just say that everything you need could come from Christ. He said **YOU ALREADY HAVE EVERYTHING YOU NEED**. *"You also are complete through your union with Christ"* (Col 2:10) if you will simply believe in what He has given you and who Christ made you.

Your deepest and greatest emotional needs are **H**ope, **A**pproval, **P**rotection, **P**ower, **I**mportance, **E**njoyment, and **R**elationship. These are what make us H.A.P.P.I.E.R. And God intended all of them to be fully satisfied in your relationship with Christ. Having your identity in Christ means experiencing your security, significance, and satisfaction in your relationship with Christ. Because all these things are always available to you through the love of Christ, you can always have the unconditional joy of having these needs satisfied no matter what else is going on in your life.

Your faith in the promises of Christ will give you all of the Hope you need to have joy. Your faith in the love of Christ will give you all the Approval, Importance, and Relationship you need to have joy. Christ's love promises you all the Protection you need to have joy. Christ's Spirit in you provides all the Power you need to have joy. And serving Christ and being used by Him to bless others will give you more truly satisfying Enjoyment than anything this World has to offer.

All the hope, love, forgiveness, security, ability, strength, significance, respect, pleasure, companionship, truth, wisdom, knowledge, satisfaction and fulfillment you crave, seek, and need can be experienced through your faith in Christ. *"You also are complete through your union with Christ"* (Col 2:10) if you will believe it. God gives you everything you need to be happy. If you will believe it. To have Christ is to have everything you need. To not have Christ is to have nothing that you need because these needs will never be fully satisfied by anything or anyone else in this World.

The Apostle Paul believed: *"My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus"* (Phil 4:19 NIV). The immediate context of his statement was finances (cf. vs. 12, 15-18). But he clarified what *"all your needs"* means when he added, *"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. . . . I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation"* (vs. 11-12 NIV). And, *"I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength"* (v. 13).

Paul believed that it was ultimately Christ who provided his physical needs. But he also believed *"God will meet all your needs,"* including your spiritual and emotional needs. ¹ It was because Paul had experienced this that he had *"learned the secret of being content in any and every situation."*

How did Paul experience having God meet all his emotional needs and Christ strengthening him in all his circumstances? By believing and trusting in God's promises and obeying His commands. Paul's deep sense of security and significance came from God's promises to love Him in this life. His deepest satisfaction came from living to obey and glorify Christ. These promises are discussed more thoroughly in the next study *FAITH*. Christ's commands are discussed in study #4: *FRUIT*. *Philippians 4:19* is one more clear statement in Scripture that God gives you everything you need to be happy. If you will believe and obey Him.

Christians make Christ only a part of their life because they think He can only fulfill part of their life. They leave Him out of their relationships, work, recreation, and even ministry because they think these things will make them happy apart from Christ. But *"your real life is with Christ"* because only His presence in all of these things will truly satisfy you.

Notice why Paul prayed the following for Christians:

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)

According to Scripture, how can you “*be filled up to all the fullness of God*”? By believing more in God's love. In fact, it is only and always your lack of faith in your Father's love that makes you feel anything but H.A.P.P.I.E.R., no matter what is happening to you. Your belief in God's love can fill you with all of these things all the time. “*You also are complete through your union with Christ*” (Col 2:10) and God gives you everything you need to be happy.

The tragedy of desperate Christians

When Christ died on the cross He said, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30). He was not only referring to completing His work on Earth. He also meant that everything necessary to give you all the **Hope, Approval, Protection, Power, Importance, Enjoyment, and Relationship** you need, has already been accomplished by Christ. He opened the way for you to be adopted by His Dad and be loved by Him. Which is everything you need. You have a deep need and desire to be known and understood and appreciated. But “*now that you know God . . . God knows you*” (Gal 4:9). Who else do you need? “*You also are complete through your union with Christ*” (Col 2:10) and God gives you everything you need to be happy.

The Apostle wrote to some other Christians who thought they needed more than Christ: “*I fear that somehow your pure and undivided devotion to Christ will be corrupted, just as Eve was deceived by the cunning ways of the serpent*” (2 Cor 11:3). Remember how “*Eve was deceived by the cunning ways of the serpent*”? The devil convinced her that she needed something (“*the knowledge of good and evil,*” Gen 2:17). Something that God had not yet given her. So she turned her back on God and sought the fulfillment of her needs and desires apart from Him, which was the first sin.

And the devil does the same trick in many Christians' lives because it works so well. This World that Satan controls convinces you that you must seek and strive for your H.A.P.P.I.E.R. needs in the people and things of this Earth. And in the process “*your pure and undivided devotion to Christ will be corrupted, just as Eve was deceived by the cunning ways of the serpent*” (2 Cor 11:3) and you will be just as disappointed as Eve was.

In spite of all the **Hope, Approval, Protection, Power, Importance, Enjoyment, and Relationship** available from your God, many Christians live desperate lives. They are still seeking Hope and Approval from something or someone else. They still feel afraid and powerless. They still

think a person or promotion can make them feel Important. They still think a thing can fulfill their desire for Enjoyment. They still think they can find the pure love they were created for in another imperfect human being. And they live desperate and disappointing lives.

Far too many Christians ARE LIVING TO GET WHAT THEY ALREADY HAVE! Fighting a fight for their significance and security that has already been won. Most Christians understand that they no longer need to earn their forgiveness. But they keep trying to earn their sense of being safe and valuable. They seek significance in the love of another human when their God has already made them as significant and important as they could possibly be.

Your fulfillment and joy does not come from what you do, as much as believing who you already are. And this is good news because no one can change who you are no matter what they say or do. Not even you can change who you are to God.

The Devil's World teaches us that we have to earn love, acceptance, and significance. You have to perform. You do not become important or happy in the World until you accomplish or accumulate things. This is not true in the Kingdom of God which you belong to. Everyone there begins infinitely valuable and can be unconditionally joyful because of what they already have in God.

One of the hardest things to do in life is find your value in God's love instead of your accomplishments or performance. Real sacrificial joy-filled Christianity comes from knowing you do not need to earn your significance, but it has already been given to you. A lack of this identity in Christ causes dishonesty and exaggeration when you portray yourself to others. It also leads to self-promotion and self-preoccupation, a focus on yourself rather than others. But "*You also are complete through your union with Christ*" (Col 2:10).

Still, Christians seek security in money when God Almighty Himself has promised to take care of them. Christians can have all of their emotional needs for security, significance, acceptance, purpose, peace, and even pleasure fulfilled in their friendship with God. But because of their lack of belief and trust in Him, they seek all these things from the world just like unbelievers.

But when everything and everyone apart from Christ disappoints you, you are closer to understanding that God alone will truly meet your needs. And He promises to meet all of your needs so you can be complete in Him instead of relying on things and people.

Why would it be foolish for a billionaire to work at a place that paid him very little? Because he does not need too! He would be wasting his time and energy to get something he already has plenty of, and not enjoying what he has. Christian, God has already given you something much more valuable

than a billion dollars. He has given you His unconditional and never ending love. If you believed that all the time, you would be happy all the time. But again, we seek other people and things for love.

We are like a man with a billion dollars in the bank, but who lives in poverty because he does not believe the money is there. God's love enables you to avoid the tragedy of seeking your needs from the world instead of enjoying the fullness of God. All of the love, security, and significance you need are in God if you will only believe: *"You also are complete through your union with Christ"* (Col 2:10) Notice this fullness is something you already have. You do not need to work for it. But you need to believe: God gives you everything you need to be happy.

The power of faith to meet your needs and give you joy

It is vital to understand this: Beliefs, not circumstances, dictate joy. Lacking joy is never a result of your circumstances, but a lack of believing and remembering God's love for you. This is why believing in the promises and gifts of God, no matter what is happening in your life, can cause and protect your happiness. For example, 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! [Because you believe] a great reward awaits you in heaven. (Matt 5:11-12)

Your Lord expects you to experience joy even when you are being persecuted. And you can do so because of what you believe. If you believe in God's promise to reward you for suffering for Him you will be happy even in painful circumstances.

Therefore, faith in your heart can work to accomplish the goal of your heart (happiness) even if you cannot immediately obtain it from your current situation. This is what joy is: unconditional happiness based on believing in God's love, not your circumstances. If you believe what the Scriptures say about God's love for you, the power of your joy will be greater than anything the Devil or this world can do for you or to you. This is because: *"You also are complete through your union with Christ"* (Col 2:10) and God gives you everything you need to be happy.

- ▶ Return to the beginning and answer the questions there.
- ▶ Recite Jeremiah 17:5 from memory.
- ▶ Memorize Colossians 2:10 in the translation above or another.
- ▶ Schedule 1 hour with God this week. During this time complete and talk to God about Project 2H: "Facing My Idols" on the next page. In addition, spend some extra time for a God Time with the P.O.W.E.R. Plan.

Project 2H

Facing My Idols

In chapters 2.11-2.14 we discussed the vital issues of having your identity in Christ and recognizing idols in your life. These two things are obviously related. Not having your needs met by God results in seeking to meet them apart from God. A lack of identity in Christ results in idolatry. Which is why the following questions regarding idols is also a test of your identity.

Therefore, it is important to recognize any false gods in your life. These can be painful to admit. Remember, God has already forgiven you for any idol in your life. But it hurts Him that you love them more than Him. And He is very concerned about how they are hurting your life.

Spend some time with God and honestly consider the “Probable Signs of Idolatry.” We say “probable” because a few of them may not be in certain situations. If you feel one applies to your life right now, mark it.

For any possible idol you have marked, memorize and begin to believe or obey the suggested verse of Scripture provided under “God’s Desires and Promises.” Or you can find other Scriptures that you prefer.

In addition, consider fasting for a period of time from something that has become an idol in your life. Whether it is a person, thing, or activity, doing without it for a while will help you assess the strength of its hold on you. Fasting will also help you experience God without the false god.

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)

√	Probable Signs of Idolatry	God’s Desires or Promises
Possessions		
	I often worry about money	Matt 6:32-33
	I depend on my spiritual gifts or ministry to feel significant	1 Cor 4:7
	I am jealous of the possessions other people have	Ps 23:6
	I have a lot of debt for things I do not need	Heb 13:5
	I do not give 10% of my income to my local church	Mal 3:10
	I believe that worldly possessions are an important sign of success and God’s love	Job 2:3
	I am really afraid of losing my job	Col 3:23-24
	I feel very bad if I do not do well in a test, or get a bad grade in school school	Col 3:23-24

	I feel diminished when others are publicly praised for things I think I am good at	Rom 12:3-8
	I love animals or nature more than people	1 Tim 1:15
	I constantly obsess over saving money	2 Cor 9:6-11
	I often spend money I do not have	Heb 13:5
People		
	I feel condemned by someone	1 Cor 4:3
	I feel afraid of someone	Prov 29:25
	I feel great pressure from someone to perform or succeed	Gal 1:10
	I am obsessed with someone	Matt 10:37
	Someone really frustrates me	Col 3:13
	Someone is making me feel like I am not valuable	Eph 1:3-8
	I feel alone	Heb 13:5
	I am very afraid of losing someone	Heb 13:5
	I really hate displeasing people. It is very hard for me to tell them “no”	1 Thess 2:4
	I am very angry/bitter toward someone	Phmn 1:17-18
	I really hate conflict with people	1 Cor 4:3-4
	I am very concerned about what people think of me	Gal 1:10
	I feel like my happiness or success is being blocked and hindered by someone	Phil 4:11
	I am very tempted to be sexually immoral	1 Cor 6:18
	I am very concerned about my physical looks	1 Sam 16:6-7
	I crave the praise of people	John 5:41
	I have a boyfriend or girlfriend but am not spiritually or financially ready to be married, or do not intend to marry them.	Song 8:4
	I keep seeking my sense of security and significance in other people	Jer 17:5
	I am afraid to correct someone when they need it	Gal 6:1
	I feel responsible for meeting needs in someone’s life that only God can satisfy.	Matt 11:29-30
Pleasure		
	I look at pornography	Job 31:1
	I often eat more than I should, especially when I am feeling sad, afraid, angry, or insignificant	1 Cor 10:31
	I often feel bored	John 15:11
	I spend a lot of time being entertained by television, games, books, sports, a hobby, etc.	Matt 22:37-38

¹ NT scholar Peter O’Brien gives ample reasons to interpret Phil 4:19 as a promise, not just a prayer, and one that, “is comprehensive in its range, including the readers’ physical needs . . . and their spiritual concerns.” (*The Epistle to the Philippians*, Eerdmans, 1991, 547). Ralph P. Martin agrees in the *Tyndale New Testament Commentary* (Intervarsity, 1999, 185).

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 Project will be, and when you will complete it. One of the 8 weeks of the *FOUNDATIONS* study is to be dedicated to this. During that week you will not have reading assignments or a Barnabas Group meeting. While the Table of Contents lists the Barnabas Group Project as a week 8 assignment, you can complete your project at any time within this 8 week study.

Here are some suggestions:

- Devote at least one Saturday to this 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.

When you have decided what your Barnabas Group Project will be and have scheduled it, record this in the Table of Contents under week 8. Then check it off when the Project is completed. Happy serving!

Appendix D

Memory Verses for *FOUNDATIONS* Study

All verses are in *New Living Translation* (NLT) unless otherwise noted.

Reference	Verse
1 Pet 1:22	<i>Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation. (NASB)</i>
Col 3:16	<i>Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives.</i>
John 10:10	<i>My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.</i>
Gal 5:16	<i>Live by the Holy Spirit's power. Then you will not do what your sinful nature wants you to do. (NIRV)</i>
Rom 12:2	<i>Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.</i>
2 Cor 5:14	<i>Christ's love compels us. (NIV)</i>
1 John 4:12	<i>No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.</i>
2 Cor 3:18	<i>We all, who . . . contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory. (NIV)</i>
John 15:15	<i>Now you are my friends.</i>
2 Cor 5:17	<i>Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!</i>
Psalms 70:5	<i>But as for me I am poor and needy.</i>
Jonah 2:8	<i>Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them. (NIV)</i>
Jer 17:5	<i>Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans.</i>
Col 2:10	<i>You also are complete through your union with Christ.</i>

Appendix E

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
	Depressed	Joyful for Christ	
	Bored	Serving Christ	
	Numb/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

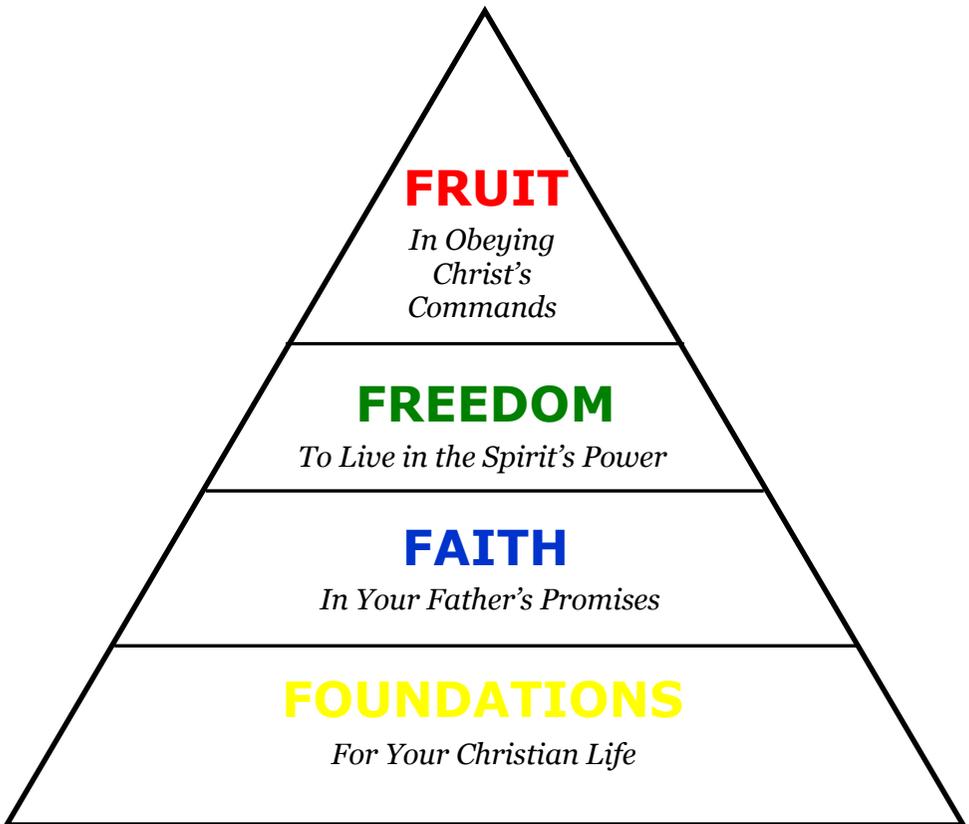
Appendix F
The Christian Essentials
 “Train Yourself to be Godly” (1 Tim 4:7)

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	15 Weeks
Grasping 12 Promises about Your Security, Significance & Satisfaction		
Your Dad’s Parenting	Your Dad’s Provision	Your Dad’s Purpose
Your Dad’s Pardon	Your Dad’s Precepts	Your Dad’s Power
Your Dad’s Presence	Your Dad’s Permission	Your Dad’s Pleasure
Your Dad’s Protection	Your Dad’s Personality	Your Dad’s Paradise
Study #4	FREEDOM To Live in the Spirit’s Power	12 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	Generous Giving	Reaching Others
Loving People	Wise Living	Teaching Others
Gifted Serving		
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 G

The Nine Powers of God, the Spirit, and the Spirit-Controlled Christian

Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Meekness, & Self-control

Galatians 5:22-23

In Galatians chapter 5 the Apostle Paul described the moral powers and attributes of God the Spirit. By this he also described the character of God and the powers available to the Christian. He wrote:

The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Gal 5:22-23).

Understanding these attributes is essential to understanding Christianity. Again, they are first and foremost the character of God and how He loves you. And they are a central theme of the *Christian Essential* studies. Accordingly, you must have your *FOUNDATIONS* and *FAITH* in these nine attributes of God in order to understand His love for you. Secondly, your experience of these powers of the Holy Spirit are the best measure of your Christian maturity and *FREEDOM* from the power of sin. Thirdly, these powers of the Holy Spirit are the essence of what Christ commands and the *FRUIT* we seek in serving God. Finally, exercising these powers is the most important thing for having godly and happy *FAMILIES*.

Unfortunately, because these powers and virtues are so absent in our world, and even the lives of Christians, many do not understand what they are. We attempt here to define them in a helpful way.

Love

“*Love*” is the unconditional power to be kind and patient with people. “*Kindness*” is the initiating part of love that serves the needs of others. “*Patience*” is the reactive part of love that responds with compassion to those who do not love you. Understand that love begins when liking ends. It is easy to love those who are attractive and nice to you. But how do you treat people who do not love you? Real love begins when liking ends. And this is a power that God has given you.

Love’s opposites are selfishness and anger. Selfishness is a focus on your own needs and wants instead of trusting God with these things as you love others. Anger is the selfish response to someone not fulfilling your needs or desires. Selfishness is as pervasive in humanity as the law of

gravity. But God's Spirit can miraculously enable you to defy the spiritual and emotional gravity of sin and "fly" above it all no matter what happens.

In the time and place that Christianity began, Greek was the language of the people. The Greek language had four nouns for love: *erōs*, *philia*, *storgē*, and *agapē*. *Erōs* is romantic, sexual love between a man and woman based on physical attraction. *Philia* is a warm, brotherly love between friends, based on mutual interests. *Storgē* is a natural love, especially between parents and children. *Agapē* is unconditional love, based on a decision made by the lover, and having nothing to do with the attributes of the one loved, even to the point of loving those who are otherwise repulsive.

It is clear that neither sexual, parental, nor friendship love is the kind of love that is the essence of Christianity. While these are by far the most common ideas of love in both the ancient and modern world, it is unconditional *agapē* that the early Christians virtually invented in order to describe a love that is different than all other loves.

Because of the supernatural and divine nature of *agapē*, it should not surprise us that the noun *agapē* was *never* used in *any* classical Greek literature that we know of before the NT. ¹ NT scholar Leon Morris wrote:

Why should the Christians use what was for all intents and purposes a new word for love? Because they had a new idea about the essential meaning of love. . . The older words were not suitable vehicles for conveying the new meaning. ²

The idea of unconditional and unwavering love was never invented by humans, but only became known through divine revelation. Therefore, its ultimate source is "God" who "*is love [agapē]*" (1 John 4:8). *Agapē* is exclusively a Christian word because it is an exclusive attribute of the Christian God and those He indwells. Accordingly, while friendship love (*philia* and *phileō*) is used about 30 times in the NT, forms of *agapē* are used over 250 times by NT writers.

Agapē love is different from all the others because it is unconditional, and therefore, unfailing love (cf. 1 Cor 13:7). *Erōs*, *philia*, and *storgē* all require a natural attraction based on the attributes of the person being loved. And because these things can change, these loves are fickle and unreliable. *Agapē* is sacrificial, undeserved, and unwavering love because it is unconditional love. Paul describes it well when he writes:

When we were utterly helpless, Christ came and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. (Rom 5:6-8)

God gave you His most when you deserved it the least. That is *agapē*.

Imagine the most *disgusting* and *dangerous* thing imaginable, and then imagine what it would take for you to hug it, kiss it, or eat it, and you are just beginning to imagine what *agapē* is. Disgusting and dangerous is precisely and naturally what sinners are to God. His natural disgust for them is demonstrated by His current wrath upon them (cf. Ps 5:4-5; 11:5; Eph 2:3), and His future eternal punishment of them in Hell. And sinners were dangerous to God the Son, some of whom personally killed Him, and all of whom ultimately put Him on the cross. *Agapē* overcomes disgust and danger, setting aside likes and even one's life.

Perhaps an illustration of *agapē*, no matter how inadequate, will help. It is natural for the positive and negative poles of a magnet to bond together. Likewise, when a person finds in another person what they want, whether it be the body of a lover, the companionship of a friend, the security of a parent, or the sense of significance that comes from having a child, certain kinds of love occur. But what if the negative poles of two magnets are directed toward one another? Or a person is no longer attractive or nice to another? They naturally and even rather violently repel each other. And the only thing that will bring them together is a force more powerful than the natural resistance occurring.

Agapē is such a force. It is not a natural love, but a supernatural one, overcoming the natural forces that pull two people apart. Whereas all other loves are founded on and limited to liking someone, *agapē* love *does not even begin until liking ends*. Love is easier if you like someone, but liking someone is not a necessary ingredient in the unconditional love of *agapē*.

This is why *agapē* is the only kind of love that you can have for your enemies. You will not like your enemies and those who hate you. But God commands you to love them. *Agapē* is the first kind of love that God had to have for you to even initiate a relationship with you. Relatively weak, ignorant, selfish, sinful, and yet proud humans, are not naturally attractive to an almighty, all-knowing, perfect God. It is only because of the force of God's *agapē* that you can be brought together with Him at all.

Joy (Gr. *chara*)

"*Joy*" is the unconditional power to be cheerful in every circumstance. It is the ability to "*rejoice always*" (1 Thess 5:16 NIV). Joy has the amazing ability to be present even in the midst of sadness or grief. So even in the death of a loved one you need not "*grieve like the rest of mankind who have no hope*" (1 Thess 4:13 NIV), because that hope gives us joy.

It is helpful to distinguish joy from happiness. Joy is unconditional based on the unchanging promises and love of God. Happiness is conditional based on your current circumstances. Accordingly, God does not expect you to be happy at a friend's funeral, or anything else that should make you sad. But He does expect you to always have joy no matter what.

Joy's opposites are complaining, discouragement, and even depression. Because through the Spirit you have the power of joy, God says: "*Do everything without complaining*" (Phil 2:14). That is power! The lack of joy in your life reveals the lack of the Spirit's control in your life perhaps more than anything else. How often do you complain and feel "down"? Notice that if the Holy Spirit is controlling you, you will be smiling!

Joy is not only a power of the Christian controlled by the Holy Spirit, but it is an attribute of God. Of course He is sad and even mad about all kinds of things on Earth. But He does not allow those things to steal His joy. God has constant joy about your life. He is grieved about sinful actions because they hurt your life (cf. Eph 4:30). But He never forgets all the ways you have loved and obeyed Him and that you will be perfect and with Him for all eternity. What God said to His OT people He would say to you: "*The Lord your God is living among you. . . He will take delight in you with gladness. . . He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.*" (Zeph 3:17).

Peace (Gr. *eirēnē*)

"Peace" is the unconditional power to be calm in every circumstance. The Holy Spirit enables you to have "*the peace that comes from Christ rule in your heart*" (Col 3:15) no matter what is happening to you, or around you. That is a lot of power!

The opposite of "*peace*" is worry. This is the most common sin in Christians' lives. It is a rejection of God's most repeated command in Scripture: "*Do not be afraid.*" You can "*be angry yet do not sin*" (Eph 4:26). You can lust and not sin (cf. Song of Solomon). But God commands you: "*Do not worry about anything . . . experience God's peace*" (Phil 4:6-7).

God always has peace, which is why He is repeatedly called "*the God of peace*" in the NT. But this was not always true. In the OT God experienced a great deal of anguish over the sins of His people. But now, "*since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Rom 5:1). Christ's death on the cross not only gave you peace with God, but gave God peace about you.

In addition, God has peace about your life because He is never worried about anything in your life including: you losing your job, getting sick, suffering, and even dying. And He certainly isn't worried about all the small stuff that seems so big to us.

Why is God never worried about anything in your life? Because He will never allow anything to happen in your life that He cannot "*work together for the good*" (Rom 8:28). Everything that happens in your life can make you more like Christ, teach you about God's love, or bring you great reward for all eternity if you trust and obey God. This why you can always experience the unconditional power of peace through the Spirit of God.

Patience (Gr. *makrothymia*)

“*Patience*” is the unconditional power to endure the sins of others with compassion. It is the responding part of love toward those who are not loving you. Sin against you costs you something and brings suffering into your life. Patience is enduring the cost and suffering of the sins of others. Which is why the best one-word definition for patience is “*long-suffering*.”

But the suffering of patience is done with compassion. An understanding that the person sinning against you is usually doing the best they can and are in some kind of emotional pain themselves. “Hurting people hurt people.” And that is true of the people who hurt you.

The only way you can be patient is to immediately forgive someone. Forgiveness is: trusting God to give you what someone has cost you. If you trust God to give you all the respect, protection, and love you need, then you will not need them from others. Nor will you hold it against them when they do not give them. Only by trusting God for these things can you patiently endure the cost and suffering that comes with the sins of others. And how do you know you have fully forgiven someone? You have the compassion of patience for them.

Because patience is being “long-tempered,” its opposite is being “short tempered” and angry. Angry about the respect, comfort, goal, hope, peace, or pleasure that someone cost you because of their selfishness or sin. But no one can make you angry. You let people make you angry because you do not forgive them by trusting God to give you what someone has cost you.

Patience is of course a primary and wonderful power of God. He endures the suffering you cause in the lives of others because of your sin. Paul said Christ displayed His “*immense patience*” toward him as the worst of sinners (1 Tim 1:16). The Greek words used here literally mean “*total patience*.” God has “*total patience*” for you too. And He does this with compassion because He has completely forgiven you and knows you really hate sin and are doing the best you can.

Kindness (Gr. *chrēstotēs*) & **Goodness** (Gr. *agathōsynē*)

These two virtues are practically the same. Kindness is the unconditional desire and power to bless others. In fact, the Greek word *chrēstotēs* literally means to “be useful.” *Agathōsynē* simply means a desire to do good to others. Kindness is the initiating part of love that seeks to find and serve needs in the lives of others regardless of who they are or what they have done. Jesus spoke of the supernatural nature of kindness and its unconditional desire to bless others when He said:

“Love your enemies! . . . In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust

alike. . . If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matt 5:43-48).

“*What is desirable in a man is his kindness*” (Prov 19:22 NASB). Kindness is living to bless and serve the needs of others. And this is why kind people have a lot of friends.

The absence of kindness is apathy. A lack of concern for the needs of others. An unkind person is not being useful, or a blessing to anyone. Which is why they have few if any friends.

God of course is kind and good. It was His kindness that concerned Him about your need, prompted Him to meet that need by sending His Son, and initiated a friendship with you. And He continues to be constantly seeking how He can bless you and be good to you. It is God’s unconditional kindness, goodness, and blessing that leads us to constant gratitude.

Faithfulness (Gr. *pistis*)

Faithfulness is unconditional commitment to a person or task. It is that part of “*Love [that] never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance*” (1 Cor 13:7). The sin of people tempts you to give up on them. The difficulties of goals tempts you to give up on them. The power of faithfulness enables you to “stick with” people or tasks no matter what else happens. Loyal, dependable people are faithful.

The opposite of being a faithful person is giving up on people and goals. Of course there are times to end or pull back on a relationship. There are goals that turn out to be unwise. But there are people and tasks that God wants you to be unconditionally committed to, and faithfulness is the supernatural power from the Holy Spirit to do that.

Obviously, “*God is faithful*” (1 Cor 1:9). When He promises something, He always does it. He never gives up on anyone He loves and never gives up on anything He decides to do. He never breaks promises. 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). The answer is “never.”

Meekness (Gr. *prautēs*)

Meekness is the unconditional gentleness that comes from humility. Both *prautēs* in the Greek and meekness in English are difficult to define. *Vine’s Greek Dictionary* states regarding *prautēs*:

The meaning of *prautēs* is not readily expressed in English, for the terms meekness and mildness commonly used, suggest weakness, whereas *prautēs* does nothing of the kind. Nevertheless, it is difficult to find a rendering less open to objection than “meekness.”

“Gentleness” has been suggested, but *prautēs* describes a condition of mind. As “gentleness” is appropriate rather to actions, this word is no better.

It must be clearly understood that the meekness manifested by the Lord and commended to the believer is the fruit of power. The assumption is that when a man is meek it is because he cannot help himself. But the Lord was “meek” because he had the infinite resources of God at his command.³

Meekness is the unconditional gentleness that comes from humility. Humility is an essential part of *prautēs*. Christian humility is knowing you are great because of God. Humility comes from having a firm identity in Christ, which is knowing who you are, and what you have, through being a child of God. Therefore, Christian humility is not having a low view of yourself. God is completely humble but be assured He thinks very highly of Himself. Humility is having an accurate view of yourself in relation to God. This results in actually having a very high view of yourself. Therefore, Christian humility is knowing you are great because of God. It is proud people that think they are great apart from God.

Meek people have nothing to prove to anyone. They do not feel the need to overpower other people or force them to do things. Meekness may be best understood by its opposites of being arrogant, harsh, and pushy.

It is amazing that God is meek. Jesus said, “*I am humble [praus] and gentle [tapeinos] at heart*” (Matt 11:29). And my goodness, if God can be humble and meek, then so can you.

Self-control (Gr. *enkrateia*)

Self-control is the unconditional power to choose your feelings and actions. This power enables all the other virtues of the Spirit, no matter what is happening. The self-control of the Spirit makes the other powers of the Spirit automatic and effortless.

Before having the Spirit of God, you were a slave to sin (cf. Rom 6:6). But when God came to live inside of you He gave you a power you never had before. The power to choose not to sin. You are not a slave to sin anymore. You have a choice. Through the Spirit you have self-control, the unconditional power to choose your feelings and actions.

The opposite of self-control is sin-control. It is losing control and giving up the power over sin that the Spirit gives you. A lack of the Spirit’s self-control will lead to bondage and addiction to things that the real you hates. This is spiritual defeat.

A lack of self-control results in another level of spirituality that falls short of the spiritual freedom and power the Spirit will give you. This is spiritual fighting. It is experiencing the constant and exhausting struggle to

overcome temptation, be committed to spiritual disciplines, and love and serve people and God. It is feeling like you have to force yourself to do these things and you end up doing them in the power of the flesh instead of the Spirit. You do them out of a sense of duty, guilt, or fear rather than joy.

But Scripture says: “*The Spirit God gave us . . . gives us power, love and self-discipline*” (2 Tim 1:7 NIV). When the Holy Spirit controls you, His powers are automatic and effortless. There is no need to force yourself to have “*love*” and “*self-discipline*.” You just have them and they are a joy.

Self-control is power, and God is, of course, powerful. Because of His own self-control He says: “*My decisions will stand. I will do whatever pleases Me*” (Isa 46:10). And that is the power that self-control gives you. The power to do what really pleases you which is never sin.

These are the virtues of God and the powers of the Spirit. This is why they are all unconditional and unstoppable by any force, difficulty, or circumstance on Earth. It is because God is these things that He loves you. It because the Spirit lives in you, that they can be your powers when He controls you.

Table of the Character & Powers of God, the Spirit, & the Spirit-controlled Christian

Power	Definition	Opposites
Love	The unconditional power to be kind and patient with people.	Selfishness
Joy	The unconditional power to be cheerful in every circumstance.	Complaining Depression
Peace	The unconditional power to be calm in every circumstance.	Worry
Patience	The unconditional power to endure the sins of others with compassion.	Anger
Kindness Goodness	The unconditional desire and power to bless others.	Apathy
Faithfulness	Unconditional commitment to a person or task.	Giving up
Meekness	The unconditional gentleness that comes from humility.	Harshness Pride
Self-control	The unconditional power to choose your feelings and actions.	Spiritual defeat & fighting

¹ *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT)*.

² Leon Morris, *Testaments of Love* (Eerdmans, 1981), 125.

³ *Vines' Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*; Nelson, 2006.

Appendix H

The Seven Types of Faith in Scripture

The complexity of faith

The topic of faith is obviously a very important one in Christian theology. In the NT alone, the words “faith” and “believe” occur almost 500 times. However, the concept of faith is somewhat more complicated than is often assumed. This appendix is excerpted from a book that covers this topic in more detail.¹

Christian theologian C. S. Evans remarks, “There is probably no word in the English language that is more complex and is used in more different senses than the word ‘faith’.”² This is also true in the Bible. NT scholar Anthony Thiselton writes: “It would be a mistake to define faith [in the Bible], apart from a given context in which this term functions.”³

The concept of “faith” seems to be one that is often misunderstood today, even in the Church, which is, “*the household of faith*” (Gal 6:10 KJV). John Stott is right when he says, “One wonders if there is any Christian quality more misunderstood than faith.”⁴ However, this is nothing new. Over four hundred years ago John Calvin (1509-1564), while addressing a particular false teaching in his day, wrote:

But the whole error of these men lies in that, although the meanings of “faith” are diverse they do not observe the diversity of the thing signified therein, but dispute as if the meaning of the word were everywhere the same [in the Scriptures]. . . . We must understand that the meaning of the word “faith” is ambiguous.⁵

Accordingly, Calvin wrote fifty pages in his *Institutes* specifically aimed at distinguishing between different uses of faith in the Scriptures.

A general definition of faith: *Beliefs based on indirect knowledge*

It may be helpful first to grasp a general definition of faith. At its most basic level, faith is belief, conviction, and/or trust. This is demonstrated in even the biblical definition of faith found in Hebrews 11:1 which reads: “*Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.*” Therefore, faith is not just a Christian thing, but every human has a certain amount of faith or conviction about virtually everything in their life. So in general, faith is the same as belief or trust.

What sets faith apart from other beliefs is the way in which we obtain it. For example, some beliefs (like touching a hot stove) come to us directly.

But most others are obtained indirectly through information provided by someone else.

The absence of direct knowledge in faith is expressed in such biblical statements as “*we live by believing and not by seeing*” (2 Cor 5:7) and “*Faith . . . gives us assurance about things we cannot see*” (Heb 11:1). This is why all belief in God is faith because “*No one has ever seen God*” (John 1:18). Therefore, faith is a trusting acceptance based on indirect knowledge. It is a belief based on evidence just like any other, but the evidence does not come from our physical senses or personal experience, but rather, through the written, or otherwise communicated word of another person. C. S. Lewis wrote:

All of our historical beliefs, most of our geographical beliefs, many of our beliefs about matters that concern us in daily life, are accepted on the authority of other human beings, whether we are Christians, Atheists, Scientists, or Men-in-the-Street. ⁶

Faith in general then is a trust in something based on the testimony of others or indirect knowledge. And it is a regular part of all humans’ lives.

A general definition of biblical faith

“Biblical faith” is a commitment to a divine revelation based on divine evidence. We note here the two fundamental ingredients in “biblical faith”: revelation and evidence.

“Biblical faith” is first of all based on a divine revelation. This is what distinguishes it from the everyday faith described above. The object of “biblical faith” is a divine revelation from God. On the other hand, “practical faith” merely depends on our best human knowledge. In other words, our belief that there is a Great Wall in China is not a “biblical faith” because God did not tell us so, but rather, through human knowledge we gained information by which we base such a belief on. But our faith in anything in Scripture is “biblical faith.”

Not only does “biblical faith” depend on a divine revelation, but on a truthful understanding of that revelation. Otherwise it is an erroneous faith in something that God never intended for us to have faith in. For example, many people have a faith in false doctrines, based on misinterpretations of Scripture. This is not “biblical faith”, nor does it please God. “Biblical faith” is a commitment to a correct understanding of a divine revelation.

Secondly, “biblical faith” (like all real faith) is based on evidence. The strength of our faith in anything or anyone will depend on the evidence for our faith. This argues against the popular view that faith and reason or proof are opposed to one another. In fact, the Bible demonstrates that all God-pleasing faith is based on evidence and reason.

God has never, and never will, expect anyone to believe anything without adequate evidence. The first divine revelation in Scripture is: “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*” (Gen 1:1). Has God provided abundant proof for the logical, reasoning powers of our mind to believe this? Of course. This is how He created us. He did not create us to truly believe or trust anything or anyone without evidence.

Therefore, God Himself will always provide the needed evidence for whatever He wants us to have faith in. God-pleasing faith is not a foolish “leap of faith” based on a feeling, but rather is grounded on facts. Accordingly, our faith will never be stronger than the facts we believe support it. Therefore, “biblical faith” is a commitment of reason to a correct understanding of a divine revelation, based on divine evidence.”

The different uses and types of faith in Scripture

The table at the end of this chapter provides an overview of the seven different types of faith in Scripture. We will demonstrate that Ephesians alone uses “faith” in three different ways. In general, the seven types of faith in Scripture can be divided into two categories: 1) Faiths that are the responsibility, gift, and work of God, and 2) Faiths that are the ability, responsibility, and work of humans.

Doctrinal faith

Often, the Scriptures use the phrase “*the faith*” to generally refer to the set of Christian beliefs and doctrines which we are to believe and be united around. “Doctrinal faith” is what other “biblical faiths” are based on, because they are based on a divine revelation.

Paul refers to “doctrinal faith” in Ephesians when he writes: “*There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father*” (Eph 4:5-6). Most commentators agree that the Apostle is using “*faith*” here to, “refer to the substance of one’s faith, their common body of belief.”⁷ The Apostle would seem to repeat this use in Ephesians 4:13 when he says that gifted men in the church are to build up the people of God, “*until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.*”

This use of “*the faith*” in Scripture may refer more generally to the Gospel or Christianity. It is referred elsewhere as, “*the truths of the faith*” (1 Tim 4:6 NIV) or “*the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people*” (Jude 1:3).

Saving faith

“Saving faith” is the faith that saves. Paul wrote in Ephesians: “*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast*”

(Eph 2:8-9 NIV). It is used in Romans 3:22 where Paul wrote, “*We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ.*” “Saving faith” saves.

Because salvation is by God’s grace instead of any virtuous act or work of humans, “saving faith” is a kind of faith that is the responsibility, gift, and work of God. The respected Bible teacher John MacArthur comments on Ephesians 2:8-9:

Our response in salvation is faith, but even that is not of ourselves [but is] the gift of God. [Saving] Faith is nothing that we do in our own power or by our own resources. Otherwise salvation would be in part by our own works, and we would have some ground to boast in ourselves. Paul intends to emphasize that even faith is not from us apart from God’s giving it.⁸

Another reason “saving faith” must be the responsibility, gift, and work of God is that humans are not capable of it. The Bible says, “*Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don’t believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News*” (2 Cor 4:4). And this demonic blinding is not something that humans can overcome themselves. They must be born again by the Spirit of God. “*The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit*” (1 Cor 2:14 NIV). This includes the Gospel. This is why Jesus said twice: “*I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them*” (John 6:65 NIV; cf. 6:44).

While “saving faith” is not a human work, good works after receiving this faith are proof that “saving faith” has been given to a person. The necessary beliefs of “saving faith” are discussed in *Christian Essentials* study #1: *FORGIVENESS*, with a chapter on how we can know for certain we have “saving faith.”

False faith

“False faith” is fake “saving faith.” It is illustrated in Simon the Magician who, “*believed and was baptized*” when he heard the good news about forgiveness forever through Jesus Christ (Acts 8:12-13). But the Apostle Peter exposed his “false faith” by pointing out Simon’s thirst for power and popularity, dependence on money, and his bondage to bitterness and sin (cf. Acts 8:20-23). If someone claims to be a Christian but later abandons “the faith,” then they never possessed “saving faith,” but only “false faith.” We devoted a chapter to the topic of “false faith” in *Christian Essentials* study #1: *FORGIVENESS*, chapter 1.6.

Miracle faith

“Miracle faith” is given by God to command or receive a miracle. Regarding miraculous spiritual gifts Paul wrote:

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit . . . faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers.” (1 Cor 12:7-10)

In this list, the Apostle mentions the gift of miracle “*faith*” that accompanied the “*gifts of healing*” and “*miraculous powers.*” NT scholar Gordon Fee explains:

[W]hat is in mind here is the special gift of super natural faith that can “move mountains,” mentioned again in [1 Cor] 13:2. It probably refers to a supernatural conviction that God will reveal his power in a special [miraculous] way in a specific instance.

Although it is listed separately, as given “to another,” there is a sense in which this and the following two items [gifts of healing and miraculous powers] belong together—and indeed, they would at times seem not quite possible to differentiate. Faith that “moved a mountain” could also rightly be called the working of a miracle. ⁹

“Miracle faith” is the supernatural certainty that a miracle will occur. It is provided when God grants a miraculous revelation that He is going to do a miracle. This is why the biblical “*gifts of healing*” and “*miraculous powers*” enabled a person to command a miracle, not merely ask for one.

Jesus illustrated and described “miracle faith” when He commanded a fig tree: “*May you never bear fruit again!*” Matthew goes on to tell us:

And immediately the fig tree withered up. The disciples were amazed when they saw this and asked, “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” Then Jesus told them, “I tell you the truth, if you have faith and don’t doubt, you can do things like this and much more. You can even say to this mountain, ‘May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and it will happen. You can pray for anything, and if you have faith, you will receive it.” (Matt 21:19-22)

Jesus illustrates and describes several attributes of “miracle faith” here. First, it never fails. Jesus said with this kind of faith, “*You can even say to this mountain, ‘May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and it will happen*” (v. 21). Some think Jesus was not speaking literally. But on the contrary, when God gives someone “miracle faith” Jesus said in the next verse, “*You can pray for anything, and if you have [miracle] faith, you will receive it*” (Matt 21:22).

It was “miracle faith” that enabled Jesus and the Apostles to command miracles and healings without fail. This is how the biblical “*gifts of healing*” and “*miraculous powers*” (1 Cor 12:10) worked. As demonstrated by Jesus

and the Apostles, when someone had these gifts, they never attempted a miracle and failed. This is because the gift of “miracle *faith*” (1 Cor 12:10) enables the “*gifts of healing*” and “*miraculous powers*.”

Elsewhere Jesus said of “miracle faith” “*Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.*” (Matt 17:20). This is why Paul refers to the gift of “miracle faith” elsewhere as “*a faith that can move mountains*” (1 Cor 13:2). The same kind of faith is described in James when we read: “*The prayer offered in [“miracle”] faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up*” (5:15). It is a miraculous faith that enables a person to command or get things in prayer that never fail.

It is important to notice that “miracle faith,” like “saving faith” is the gift and work of God. It is not something humans are able to produce themselves or responsible to do so. Jesus says it is a faith without “*doubt*” that enables you to “*even say to this mountain . . . ‘be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and it will happen.*” No human could honestly command a mountain to move without any doubt it is going to happen, without God miraculously revealing to them that it will happen. “Miracle faith” is just as miraculous as the miracles it commands or receives.

Many Christians believe they can produce this kind of faith to command and receive miracles. They cannot. Many Christians believe that all faith referred to in Scripture is an ability, responsibility, and work of humans, including “saving faith.” But the biblical description of “miracle faith” clearly shows that some types of faith in Scripture are the responsibility, gift, and work of God. Therefore, Christians need not feel guilty that they do not have this kind of faith. Nor should “healing ministries” blame people for a lack of “miracle faith” when they are not healed. Especially because most of the healings in Scripture occurred because the healer possessed “miracle faith,” not the healed.

“Miracle faith” needs to be distinguished from the “fantasy faith” taught and promoted in the “Faith Movement.” This is a teaching in primarily “Charismatic” or “Pentecostal” churches. It claims we can simply decide what miracle we want God to do, choose to believe in it enough, and God will do it. Their motto is “name it and claim it.” The idea is that humans have the power to create like God because we have the power in ourselves to have the “miracle faith” of Scripture. This is not true. God sovereignly decides when and to whom to give such faith to because He wants them to perform or receive a miracle. Humans do not decide such things.

“Miracle faith” and the question of whether or not such miracle-working powers exist in the Church today, is discussed further in *Christian Essentials* study #3: *FAITH*, in an appendix entitled, “The Scripture and Sign Gifts.”

Empowering Faith

“Empowering faith” is the Christian’s trust in the doctrines, commands, and promises of Scripture. In Ephesians we have seen a reference to “doctrinal faith” (4:5-6) and “saving faith” (2:8-9). In Ephesians 6:16, Paul referred to “empowering faith” when he wrote: “*Hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil*” (Eph 6:16). Such “*faith*” would be to trust in the doctrines, commands, and promises of God to defeat the lies “*of the devil*.” In Ephesians 6:16 Paul is not talking about “saving faith” as he was in Ephesians 2:8-9, but an “empowering faith” to enable us to live the Christian life.

Likewise, Paul wrote the Thessalonians: “*We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God’s service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your [empowering] faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials*” (1 Thess 3:2-3). Timothy was to “*encourage*” these Christians in their faith in the doctrines, commands, and promises of God “*so that no one would be unsettled by these trials*.”

In 2 Thessalonians he wrote: “*Dear brothers and sisters, we can’t help but thank God for you, because your [empowering] faith is flourishing and your love for one another is growing*” (1:3). There was a connection between the “*growing*” love and Christian maturity of the Thessalonians, and their “*flourishing*” “empowering faith” in God’s promises, commands, and doctrines.

There are several reasons then to distinguish between “saving faith” and “empowering faith.” First, we believe that “once saved always saved” reflects Scripture and the Gospel of grace. Therefore, “saving faith” cannot be lost. The Holy Spirit that eternally seals us for salvation (Eph 1:13-14), is the same Spirit that gave us “saving faith” in regeneration (Tit 3:5-6).

However, a regenerated Christian with “saving faith” can renounce their “empowering faith” and choose not to obey or trust God at any given time. The “father of faith” Abraham, did this very thing. While he possessed a “saving faith” in God and enjoyed an irrevocable covenant relationship with Him, twice Abraham abandoned a practical trust in God, fearing men instead, and put His wife in danger (cf. Gen 12:10-20; 20:1-2). “Saving faith” is not something you can lose, and therefore lose your salvation. But “empowering faith” is absent every time a Christian sins.

Another reason to distinguish “saving faith” and “empowering faith” is to protect the Gospel of grace from being perverted into salvation by good works. Some people believe that “saving faith” is the ability and work of humans because they do not distinguish it from how “empowering faith” is used in Scripture. “Empowering faith” is a faith that regenerated Christians have the ability to exercise, is a “good” meritorious work, and will be rewarded by God. What if we viewed “saving faith” in the same way? Then we would make “saving faith” a good work like “empowering faith.”

If it is not God who is giving us “saving faith,” then we are ultimately saved because of a good work we can do. And if we accept this, then we pervert the doctrine of salvation by God’s grace and works alone. Which is why “saving faith,” like “miracle faith,” is described in Scripture as a gift of God, not a human work (cf. Eph 2:8-9; Phil 1:29; Rom. 4:16; John 6:44; Acts 3:16; 16:14; 18:27; 1 Pet 1:21; Heb 12:2). Along these lines, Martin Luther wrote:

God has surely promised His grace to the humbled . . . But a man cannot be thoroughly humbled till he realizes that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers, counsel, will and is the work of Another—God alone. As long as he is persuaded that he can make even the smallest contribution to his salvation, he remains self-confident and does not utterly despair of himself, and so is not humbled before God . . .

So these truths are published for sake of the [unsaved] elect, that they may be humbled and brought down to nothing, and so saved. The rest of men resist this humiliation; indeed, they condemn the teaching of self-despair; they want a little something left that they can do for themselves.¹⁰

“They want a little something left that they can do for themselves.” That unfortunately describes how many Christians view the salvation process. They believe they and others are ultimately saved because of something they did, or a faith they had the ability to have. But if we are going to agree with Scripture that salvation is only by God’s good grace instead of our good works, then we must maintain the distinction between how “saving faith” and “empowering faith” are used in Scripture. Again, your salvation is by faith instead of your good works (Eph 2:8-9). The reason that “saving faith” is contrasted in Scripture with your good works is because “saving faith” is a work and gift of God.

“Saving faith” starts your Christian life and enables you to believe in the Gospel. It is the responsibility, gift, and work of God. “Empowering faith” gives you the power to live your Christian life, and enables you to believe the doctrines, commands, and promises of God. It is the responsibility, ability, choice, and work of the Christian and is based on our experience.

This is why Christians will be eternally rewarded for their “empowering faith.” But “saving faith” is never spoken of as a reward for something we do. God gets all the credit for “saving faith” because it is completely His work and a gift to us. “Saving faith” is automatic for any supernaturally regenerated person and therefore, not something we can take the credit for. However, salvation only gives us the potential of choosing to exercise “empowering faith” in God, and therefore it is a meritorious human work. Hebrews 11 speaks of those who, “*were all commended for their faith*”

(Heb 11:39; cf. v. 2). Accordingly, the author is speaking of “empowering faith,” not “saving faith,” throughout the passage.

Another way of distinguishing “saving faith” from “empowering faith” is to suggest that the former concerns our salvation, and the latter our sanctification. As our salvation is the foundation from which our sanctification grows, so is our “saving faith” the foundation from which our “empowering faith” grows. Unlike “saving faith,” “empowering faith” can be weak or strong, which is why Scripture speaks of it being strengthened and growing (see verses above).

As noted above under “miracle faith” it would be a great mistake to confuse how “empowering faith” and “miracle faith” are used in Scripture. “Miracle faith” is purely the responsibility, gift, and work of God. Therefore, the common view that it is like “empowering faith” and something humans are able and responsible to do, has caused a great deal of damage to Christians and their understanding of faith.

“Empowering faith” is the primary topic of most of the *Christian Essentials* studies, including chapter 2.6 of the *FOUNDATIONS* study.

Gift faith

“Gift faith” is given to us so that we may faithfully and effectively exercise the spiritual gifts we have been given. The Apostle Paul wrote:

For through the grace [gift of apostleship] given to me I say to everyone among you [with faith, and divine authority] not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith [and corresponding spiritual gift]. . . Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace [and corresponding faith] given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith. (Rom 12:3, 6 NASB)

Several things can be said about this passage. First, like “saving faith” and “miracle faith,” the Apostle wrote of another kind of faith that is given to us by God rather than worked or chosen by ourselves. He said “*God has allotted to each a measure of [this] faith*” (v. 3). Therefore, it is another kind of faith that we cannot take credit for.

Secondly, we should notice that Paul is using “*grace*” and “*faith*” somewhat interchangeably as gifts from God, just as he has throughout Romans.¹¹ Both grace and a corresponding faith are needed for spiritual gifts to operate, and God gives them both.

Thirdly, the faith that Paul speaks of here is specifically attached to the use of our spiritual gifts. This becomes particularly clear in v. 6 where Paul says that if someone has the spiritual gift of “*prophecy*,” they should use it *according to the proportion of his faith*.” A faith given to them to use the gift of prophecy. Therefore, because a certain faith is needed and provided

with spiritual gifts, we see another unique application of the biblical concept of faith that we refer to as “gift faith.” While “empowering faith” enables us to trust the doctrines, promises, and commands of God, “gift faith” empowers us to use the spiritual gifts we have been given.

This is precisely what Paul is alluding to when he introduces this passage by saying, “*For through the grace [gift of apostleship] given to me I say to everyone among you [with faith, and divine authority] not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think*” (v. 3). It not only required the gift [“grace”] of apostleship to command “everyone” in the Roman church with God-like authority, but it required a certain kind of faith that accompanied Paul’s gift, enabling him to recognize and exercise his gift.

Along with the grace that God gives to exercise such gifts, God also grants the necessary faith for the operation of these gifts. For example, it is doubtful that a person who had been given the gift of Apostle, Prophet, Leader, or Teacher is going to use it very confidently or consistently if they do not have much faith that they possess the gift.

Along these lines, NT scholar F. F. Bruce commented on this passage of Scripture: “Faith here denotes the spiritual power given to each Christian for the discharge of his or her special responsibility.”¹² Likewise, John MacArthur shares regarding Romans 12:3: “Paul is not here referring to saving faith, which believers already have exercised. He is speaking of . . . the kind and quantity of faith required to exercise our own particular gift.”¹³ Therefore, “gift faith” is given to us so that we may faithfully and effectively exercise the spiritual gifts we have been given.

The topic of “gift faith” and spiritual gifts is discussed in Christian Essentials study #3: *FAITH* under “Your Dad’s Personality.”

Decision-making faith

“Decision-making faith” is pursuing human plans to obey God’s commands. The Apostle Paul wrote: “*May he give you the power to accomplish all the good things your faith prompts you to do*” (2 Thess 1:11). Paul is not talking about an “empowering faith” that is confined to the promises, doctrines, and commands of Scripture. We also need a certain faith “to accomplish all the good things” we might do for God that are not specifically in Scripture.

Often, obeying God’s commands in our specific circumstances requires many steps of faith for which we have no specific divine revelation for. We are therefore left with considering different options and making a decision based on human reason rather than divine revelation. Like all “biblical faith,” we have a written revelation of the general parameters for all the decisions we make, but the specifics are not revealed.

For example, consider Christ’s command of the Great Commission to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19). Beyond this basic instruction,

we have no more specific divine revelation about where, when, how, and with whom are we to plant churches and make disciples. A missionary knows that we are to “*go and make disciples of all nations*” but which nation is he or she to go to and will they succeed in producing converts and disciples? God usually does not say.

Likewise, we are to pursue God’s command to “*make disciples*” of our children and fellow church members. But how? God does not tell us with very much detail. It will look different in every family and church as they pursue human plans to accomplish God’s commands for discipleship. And will all of these plans and efforts succeed? God does not tell us that either.

Accordingly, in many areas of fulfilling God’s general commands, we need to do research, get counsel, make a decision, commit resources, and exercise “decision-making faith” to pursue human plans to fulfill God’s commands, without a divine revelation of specifically how to do so.

Church-planting, evangelism, and disciple-making endeavors for God are perhaps the best examples of the objects of “decision-making faith.” But other specific steps we take to obey God in other areas of our life demand “decision-making faith” as well. God commands a man to provide for his family (cf. 1 Tim 5:8). But God does not tell him how. And a man will have to exercise some “decision-making faith” in his life as he pursues human plans to obey God’s commands to provide for his family.

“Decision-making faith” tries things without having any revelation or assurances from God that it will succeed. We do not know if our attempts will “work,” bear fruit, or accomplish what we hope for, but we make the decision, commit the resources, take the risks, and try to “*accomplish all the good things [our] faith prompts [us] to do*” (2 Thess 1:11).

It is important to distinguish “decision-making faith” from “empowering faith.” The latter is based on the certain promises of God revealed in Scripture. These things will never fail. But imagine if you thought your human plans to pursue God’s commands were a divine revelation, or carried the same certainty as Scripture. You would be very disappointed in God and disillusioned in your Christian faith. God promises to fulfill everything in Scripture. He does not promise to make all your plans succeed, even good and moral ones. This is why Paul was praying for the Thessalonians, “*May he give you the power to accomplish all the good things your faith prompts you to do*” (2 Thess 1:11).

The objects of “empowering faith” (biblical commands, doctrines, and promises) never fail. The objects of “decision-making faith” (our plans to pursue God’s commands) often do. And God Himself is pleased with this. It is not the fruit of your “decision-making faith” that you will be rewarded for because you are often not in control of that. You will be rewarded for your “decision-making faith” and what you tried as you pursued human plans to fulfill God’s commands. This is because every decision we make is

to somehow fulfill the biblical command: “*So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God*” (1 Cor 10:31). And your simple desire to glorify God in all your decisions and plans pleases God regardless of the results of your decisions, plans, and work.

It is important to recognize the important place “decision-making faith” plays in our lives. Even the most critical decisions are made with it because we do not have specific divine revelation from God giving us an absolute certainty like we can have in “empowering faith.” Such decisions include who to marry, what church to join, what job to choose, where to live, whether a man is guilty of a crime deserving the death penalty, and what God is saying in a particular verse of Scripture. God does not normally grant specific divine revelation for any of these. We must gather as many facts as possible and make the best decision we can with our reason in “decision-making faith” with adequate certainty.

The common mistake today is to assume, like Mysticism does, that God is granting specific divine revelation for many of our decisions through “signs,” impulses, or impressions. This view implies that such decisions are a matter of “empowering” or “miracle” faith, and they demean the God-ordained place of “decision-making faith” in our lives and the use of the reasoning abilities God gave us.¹⁴

“Decision-making faith,” mysticism, and decision making in general is discussed in *Christian Essentials* study #3: *FAITH* in the chapters entitled “Your Dad’s Precepts.”¹⁵

The table on the following page summarizes the seven uses of faith in Scripture.

The Seven Types & Uses of Faith in Scripture

	Object	Result	Source & Duration	Unique Qualities	Scriptures
Doctrinal	The doctrine of Scripture	Provides doctrines that we are to have <i>saving</i> & <i>empowering</i> faith in.	Purely God Eternal	Referred to as "the faith" in Scripture.	Matt 24:10; Acts 6:7; Gal 1:23; Eph 4:5; Col 2:7; 1 Tim 2:7; 3:9; 4:1, 6; 2 Tim 2:2
Saving	The Gospel of Christ as Savior & Lord	Salvation & supernatural virtue	Purely God Persevering by the power of God	Supernatural through regeneration & demonstrated by supernatural deeds.	Gal 3:22-26; Rom 3:22, 25; 5:1-2; 9:30-32; Eph 2:8; 3:12; Phil 1:29
False	Lies	Deception, damnation, and false virtue.	Satan An apparent saving faith that does not last	Not saving because it does not sincerely trust Christ, produce virtue, or last.	Matt 7:15-27; 13:20-22; Acts 8:13, 21-23; Heb 6:4-11
Miracle	Divine promise or revelation that God will do a miracle	Receiving or a miracle	Purely God Intermittent based on God's choice to grant it.	Supernatural divine gift, absolutely doubt-free, and against evidence & human nature.	Matt 17:20; 1 Cor 12:12-9; 13:2
Empowering	The commands, doctrines, & promises of God in Scripture	Spiritual growth & rewards	The Christian based on convictions & choices Intermittent	The natural ability of all regenerated humans but still their choice and therefore it will be rewarded.	Matt 6:30-31; Gal 2:20; Eph 6:16; 1 Thess 3:2; 5:8; 2 Thess 1:3; 1 Tim 4:12; 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22; 3:10;
Gift	Spiritual gifts	Enabling spiritual gifts	God Intermittent	Tied to the operation of spiritual gifts.	Rom 12:3-8; 2 Tim 1:6; 1 Tim 4:14
Decision-making	Specific desires based on biblical commands	Human plans to pursue God's commands	Personal passions & plans to serve God Intermittent	Object goes beyond specific statements of Scripture but designed to fulfill them.	2 Thess 1:11-12; Nehemiah

¹ For more on biblical faith and the seven types of faith used in Scripture see Pastor Kurt's book, *Biblical Faith*, online at <http://trainingtimothys.org/books/book-6-biblical-believing/>. This appendix is brief excerpts from this book.

² C. S. Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason* (Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 1.

³ Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians (NIGTC)* (Eerdmans, 2000), 223.

-
- ⁴ John Stott, *Your Mind Matters* (InterVarsity, 1973), 33.
- ⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, online at www.ccel.org, III.ii.9, 13.
- ⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Joyful Christian* (Touchstone, 1977, 1996), 133.
- ⁷ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Eerdmans, 1999), 283.
- ⁸ John MacArthur, *Commentary on Ephesians*.
- ⁹ Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* (Hendrickson, 1994), 168.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 100-101.
- ¹¹ Douglas Moo refers to this as, "the intimate relation in Paul's thought between faith and grace" throughout Romans (*The Epistle to the Romans, NICNT* [Eerdmans, 1996], 278).
- ¹² F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans TNTC* [Eerdmans, 1985, repr. 1999], 215.
- ¹³ MacArthur, *Commentary*, *loc. cit.*
- ¹⁴ For more on mysticism, decision making, and the completeness of Scripture to know God's will see the chapters entitled "Your Dad's Precepts" in Christian Essentials study #3: *FAITH*. For a more in-depth study on the issue of how God "speaks" to us and guides us see Pastor Kurt's book, *Mega Mysticism*, online at <http://trainingtimothys.org/books/book-14-the-myth-of-mega-mysticism/>.
- ¹⁵ For an in-depth study of "decision-making faith, see Pastor Kurt's book, *Visionary Faith* online at <http://trainingtims.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Visionary-Faith.pdf>.

Appendix I
The Seven Emotional Needs of Humans

As noted, God’s promises to meet these needs will be covered in more detail in the next *Christian Essentials* study #3: *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 Depressed Worried	Hopeless Want to die	Paradise 3-27
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		Trapped Inadequate Enslaved	Power 3-24-3.25
Importance Being valuable and useful		Worthless Insignificant	Personality 3.16-3.19 Purpose 3.20-3.23
Enjoyment Experiencing pleasure		Pain Boredom Depression	Pleasure 3.26
Relationship Being with another person		Lonely Separated	Presence 3-12

Appendix J

Recommended Resources for Further Study

In order of their mention in FOUNDATIONS

FORGIVENESS, Study #1 in the *Christian Essentials* explains how to become a Christian and how to know you are a Christian. Available online at www.newlifecr.com/ChristianEssentials/Forgiveness. Or in book form in the New Life Resource Center in the front foyer of the church.

God's Passion for His Glory, John Piper, (Crossway, 1998). Further study on the theology of God's glory.

Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist, John Piper (Multnomah, 2003). A classic and popular theological and practical study on the place of happiness in the Christian life.

The Dangerous Duty of Delight, John Piper (Multnomah, 2001). A small pocket-sized book and shorter and simpler version of the essence of *Desiring God*.

Biblical Faith, Pastor Kurt Jurgensmeier. An in-depth study of the complex topic of faith in Scripture. Available online at: <http://trainingtimothy.org/books/book-6-biblical-believing/>.

More Than Meets the Eye, Richard Swenson (NavPress, 2000). An excellent and easy to read description of the glory of God in Creation. Especially good for high school age kids interested in science.

Knowing God, J.I. Packer (Intervarsity, 1993). A classic, readable, practical and very popular book from a great theologian on the character and ways of God.

Pleasures Evermore, Sam Storms (NavPress, 2000). An excellent and practical study on the topic of chapter 2.8 "God's Glory Purifies Us."

The 5 Love Languages, Gary Chapman (Northfield, 2015). This is a good explanation of an important topic for healthy relationships written by the guy who essentially invented the concept. A weakness of the book is that it is written for a secular audience. Therefore, it only speaks of love as requiring discipline, a hard decision, and hard work, rather than an automatic and joyous power of the Holy Spirit controlling you.

We encourage you to continue to the next study with your Barnabas group.

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	15 Weeks
Grasping 12 Promises about Your Security, Significance & Satisfaction		
Your Dad’s Parenting	Your Dad’s Provision	Your Dad’s Purpose
Your Dad’s Pardon	Your Dad’s Precepts	Your Dad’s Power
Your Dad’s Presence	Your Dad’s Permission	Your Dad’s Pleasure
Your Dad’s Protection	Your Dad’s Personality	Your Dad’s Paradise
Study #4	FREEDOM To Live in the Spirit’s Power	12 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	Generous Giving	Reaching Others
Loving People	Wise Living	Teaching Others
Gifted Serving		
Study #6	FAMILIES Living for Christ	10 Weeks
Gaining Christian Perspectives on Marriage & Parenting		